

**Report of the Expert Meeting “Mapping of barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations”, organised by the Council of Europe in co operation with the European Commission and held on the 30st of September to the 2nd of October at the European Youth Centre in Strassbourg.**

**Present members of EAPN were:**

**Anamaria Kovacs, HAPN**

**Basil Golikov, EAPN Estonia**

**Jo Bothmer, EAPN Netherlands.**

*“Social inclusion, specifically of young people in vulnerable situations, is a challenging topic throughout Europe and its neighbouring regions, ever more so in the aftermath of the recent economic crisis. In line with the youth agendas of both, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, the EU-CoE youth partnetship has the topic of social inclusion of young people as one of its key priorities for 2014-2016. Based on the evidence brought by recent youth partnership aims at systematising and broadening the knowlegde base about existing obstacles for young people in situations of disadvantage around Europe and to support policy with concrete examples of practice showing how obstacles have been overcome in specific contexts.*

*For thus purpose an expert team has been commissioned with the task to map existing obstacles to social exclusion for young people in vulnerable situations and to identify good examples of policy and practice of supporting vulnerable young people to overcome the barriers.”*

For this Expert Meeting a report was written in which the following objectives were mentioned:

1. Employment and social exclusion
2. Education and social exclusion
3. Housing and social exclusion
4. Health and social exclusion
5. Citizenship and social exclusion
6. Culture and social exclusion.

In the general discussion I proposed to add a 7th objective:

7. Social security and social exclusion.

This because I see in several countries, as the Netherlands, the access to social security or to the statutory minimum wage is increasing, as the conditions to access are changed and not in favour of the youngsters. The proposal is taken into account and will find its place in the final report.

The meeting started with a welcome from the Council of Europe and from the European Commission. The representative of the CE/DGII informed the participants that within the EU a network is active that is an expert on social inclusion strategies: the European Anti Poverty Network. At that moment she did not know that the three of us were present. When we met, she was clearly happy to have EAPN members at the meeting. During the meeting I was asked to try to built a bridge between the CoE-EC Youth Programm and EAPN (see recommandations).

What I felt as a miscalculation is the fact that we received the EAPN position paper on Youth Poverty and Social Exclusion after this important meeting. It could have been of great use for the three EAPN participants.

**The aim of the proces is to seek for a two way approach:  
On the one hand offer structural solutions, ideas to institutions and so on.  
On the other offer young people chances to experiment, explore and face their future.**

The topic is huge and it fills in:

- youth work
- youth care
- migrant youth
- children
- employment/unemployment
- exclusion

It is surching for new ways to include young people. To make young people being heard and to give them a voice in the discussion.

Employment is a new domain as a priority for the CoE. It has become a part of the access to rights for young people. And looking to social inclusion, what also meant is:

- non formal education
- access to the political level
- including minorities.

Fact is that we are able to reach the “organized young people” , but we do not have a way to that part that is not organized or does not know which way to go.

Another fact is that a lot of policies, regulations, actions, projects are looking from an individual perspective and is not aimed on groups. Because policy makers want everything fit into boxes.

Fact however is that a substantial part does not fit in those or other boxes. We need to “Get closer and listen to them” instead of taken the easy way “and patronize”. We also have to be aware of the fact that the environment in which young people live, determines whether they will get chances or not.

- What does withhold the young persons to participate?
- Which barriers do they see/feel?
- Are there possibilities to pass by those barriers?

The European Union has a 2020 Strategy that includes young people. There are specific measurements for this target group. Now there is also a Youth Guarantee Plan, the new EU workplan for youth for the period 2014-2015, were member states have access to. There are policies to avoid early school leaving and to support the idea of a high as possible education.

*Dr. Theo Gavrielidis* from the IARS project talked about the problem of inequality. He feels that the basis has to be: the talents and possibilities of youngsters. He also speaks about evidence based youth policy.

*Anna Ludwinek*, Eurofund: the attitude of the adults is not always positiv concerning activ participation of young people. Look at the politics or at the daily care. What we need is a new attitude: motivate and challenging the young people.

*Dr. Daniel Briggs*, *criminologist* showed as that 20% of all young people is lost. We do not reach them. They lost hope and future. It is much more easier to get out of the 80% and slip into the 20% -drugs, criminal facts, etc- than to get out of the 20% into the 80!

Everythin is focussing on being happy NOW. They do not have any idea about their future.

Daniel is very clear:

- What kind of democracy are we living in?
- What we need is a very good evaluation. This is crucial for the future.

Our EAPN group discussed what Daniel said and we added: they also took away their DREAMS!

No FUTURE, No HOPE, No DREAMS!

*Karina Chupina, independent expert* points out that handicapped young people have more need of self advocacy. She also refers to the new evidence based policy.

*Veronique Bertholle, Youth Express Network*, give us a view how L'Etage works. This is a homeless shelter for young people. They help them to have an address, so they can apply for help. They make it possible for them to find a place to live and use cultural events to involve them. To make them understand that facilities are meant for all, them as well. She states very clear how important self experience is to get access.

*Leo Kaserer, Rückenwind* had a very impressive video of an early school leaver. They asked the girl what she would like to do and the outcome was that she wanted to become a fishermen. During a month she worked as a fishermen. Next to her the youth worker did the same job, being as unexperienced as she was and making the same mistakes. At the end of the project she knew that she was able to use her talents. 80% of the youngsters involved in these project finish their education. They help young people to create something. Something concrete. It has to be created in a given time and has to be something which is used within society. This way the participants get the feeling to do something usefull, to contribute and they learn to work together with others. The participants make up their own plan. The project helps them to bring this into practice, takes care of their safety and supports them afterwards to find a new start.

*Prof. Howard Williamson*, the rapporteur, brings together what came out of our discussions.

## **Steps**

### 1. Trust.

This offers a basis to start working on solutions.

Be aware of the fact that young people are speechless. They do not have any goals to go for or to talk about. This means they do not have a Voice either.

### 2. Time.

These processes are time consuming.

Training courses to build social skills. Start learning that one can trust people.

Very often high level policy is focussing on the easy steps. But the real first step is the neighbourhood. Where institutions work against each other, young people need to learn how to participate on their own level.

**If I do not know who I am, if I am not allowed to be myself, how can I accept others?**

To achieve these goals it will take a lot of time, work, investment and money. Problem is that finance mechanisms do not fit.

### 3. Low threshold.

Give young people the chance to be involved, to participate. Create an open structure.

#### 4. Network.

We are ordered to link everything continually. But reality is that the daily survival, relations, meetings are crucial for success.

#### 5. Life-work orientation.

Show young people how work looks like, what circumstances it offers and what it brings.

Give them the chance to have a try out. Make them aware of the daily work life.

It is important to draw different pictures than those they get from the world of advertisement and their environment.

#### 6. Representation.

Give young people the possibility to represent themselves on all levels. Create extra space for minority groups. We need the possibility to build and support this process.

Now professionals talk about issues of young people, without the target group being involved.

### **Problems**

#### 1. Changes

Due to the constant changes of policy and finances our discussion and content keep on changing. It creates time and again new groups (migrants, asylumseekers, Roma, etc.), although they all our youngsters.

#### 2. Funding

Funding, and very specifically co-funding, is a huge problem for small projects.

We are most of the time concerned about labelling groups. Basis has to be the problems of the young people as such.

#### 3. Barriers

How are they raised?

How can we prevent them?

How can we break them down?

Empowerment!

Trust

Time

Together.

### **The outcomes of the working group discussions**

#### **Employment**

- How can we prevent young people from the 80% organized group to slide away into the 20% group of outcasted? How can we join hands to build bridges? These questions were asked in a film made by the Austrian group called Rückenwind.
- The labor market is constantly changing and is getting worse for an increasing part of the population, especially for young people. It is offering no decent solution.
- The outcasted group will never be or become entrepreneur. Maybe, if they are lucky they will occasionally achieve a temporary job for a short while. The rest of their time they will seek a job at the gray and black market.
- There is a process of Celebritisation amongst young people. Boys will be football player, girls singer in a band. They do not have any idea what real work means or feels like. This is also because of the fact that the hard, dirty and tough work is mainly done by migrants.

- One needs to be flexible to survive.
- Fewer persons have to do more work
- We should be aware of the fact that the social service systems are step by step excluding young people
- We need more development of talents and skills
- The system fails the young people (that is their feeling)
- Invest in young people to improve their chances
- A co operation between schools and local business can be usefull to help young people to see their opportunities
- Equal treatment
- Again: qualitative good, understandable and usable information
- Young people very often have to accept flex jobs and end up in a series of flex jobs, without any chance to get a real contract
- Open days, workshops to find out how to use the Job Agency and the Department of Social Security (and Health)
- The EC representative asks all to use the new Youth Action Programm!
- Affordable childcare, especially for young – and teen mothers.

### **Housing**

- Affordibility/accessiblity
- Ownership or rental?
- Quality & adequaty
- Overcrowding
- Interdependence.

We see how young people stay as long as possible at their parents home since they cannot find a decent and affordable room or living space. Or, the opposite that they leave home living as squaters or being homeless.

- There is too little attention to the growing homelessness amongst young people
- Help politicians to make different choises: houses for youngster instead of a new football stadium or a new highway
- Care and shelter for young people should be holistic. More than just a bed. Most of the time a shelter is too expensive, has a limited time you are allowed to stay and does not forsee in the fact that a homeless youngster very often has a companion, a dog! (which is mostly not allowed to come in)
- Preparation to independent living is needed (cook, clean, party, having a low budget, pay bills in time).

### **Education**

- Education is broader than just schools
- Non formal education is important as well (e.g. sport, music, art, etc)
- Empower young people
- Tests determine, on a young age, the future of children instead of their talents
- Everybody has to have an education! Do they? What if persons do not want to join?
- There is a constant lack of funding for quality research
- Access to education as getting more difficult

- How can social (youth) workers and education find a more co operative way of working?
- Transition education to the labour market: job guidance, on job guidance. How can we organize this?
- Councelling is not just coaching. It should be empowerment. Looking also at the workload of young people, at the rights they have on the labour market and within social security
- Community services and community based services, not just schools, can help to provide non-formal education
- Peer learning should be elaborated
- A lot of projects look familiar. Whether they will be a succes or not depends on:
  - the way they are executed
  - who is executing
  - who is involved
  - the way young people participate.

### **Citizenship**

- Citizenship and participation are seperated nowadays
- Engagement, attachment gives a sence of belonging to something. Be at least part of your local community
- We should be aware of the fact that citizenship and political participation are two different items. The letter is, being very important, just a part of citizenship
- You will not find easily deprived young people in the media. We need to offer them support to represent themselves
- Participation should be taken serious
- School life should be more democratic
- Access to info is no problem these days. The problem is how to make all this information understandable and usable.

### **Culture**

- Access to culture and cultural activities is not that normal is it seems
- Expressing its own culture = expressing its own identity. It might create barriers as well, e.g. gangs etc.
- Youth cultures/ sub-cultures
- Language as a barrier
- Sport is a way to learn about rules and respect
- Definition of culture. There is a difference between culture and cultural
- Young people need to create something
- Language should engage young people. Use their language, do understand it at least
- Invite young people to contribute, also in thinking ahead
- It is important to realize that barriers may be connected to others, e.g. cultural, sub-cultural.

### **Health**

- Assistance. There is not always help for young people above the age of 18
- Residential institutions may cause troubles
- There are not much decent data about the use or non use of care by young people
- How does the use of drugs on a (very) early age influence the life of young people?

- Young people tend to ignore small health problems – because they cannot pay the contribution- which can cause huge problems when they grow older
- Teenage pregnancy and their effects
- How can we help young people to use the existing services and possibilities?

## **Conclusions**

### **Awareness**

Information and informal choices.

### **Access**

Understanding services and what they offer.

Insuring that young people have the resourcefulness to get access.

Guiding hands.

### **Accreditation**

Recognize.

Give young people credit.

Positive engagements.

Remove one barrier and a new and less visible barrier is built.

### **Advancement**

Stepping stones.

What is the next step? What is necessary for support?

Look for the common grounds. Joint action.

### **Implementation**

Who/what do the programmes need?

What do they offer?

Be aware that you might end up hitting the target and missing the point.

Finding a place in modern Europe:

- to live
- on the labour market
- within the community
- a good health

is difficult.

### **Challenges**

1. To gather knowledge and qualitative data

2. Can we reach to the young people?

3. To fight for improvement may be the opposite what we are considered to do within our job.

4. Within youth organizations themselves: those who are strong are taken the lead and tell what direction to go. This also may mean the direction of exclusion.

's Hertogenbosch, 24th of October 2014

Jo Bothmer

**My recommendations**

1. Our participation showed how important the co operation between both organizations is. We both can prosper from it and might be able to have joined agreements, proposals, actions in which the young people are fully involved to a change for the better: to social inclusion.
2. Use the websites of both organizations to provide information.
3. Discuss how common actions can be arranged to involve the Council of Europe and the European Parliament in the discussions concerning the future of Europe.
4. Seek for a possibility to organize a common youth forum, at least once a year, in which at least 50% of the participants are young people themselves.

It was a real pleasure to attend the Expert meeting and I am very pleased to inform you that I am invited to the Malta conference at the end of November “Conference on the role of youth work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations”.