

# Youth for Democracy

## Estonian National Youth Council

action group final paper

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Estonian youth policy is regulated mostly by the **Ministry of Research and Education**, more precisely by the Youth Department in the ministry. The second biggest player is the Estonian Youth work Centre, which is a national center for youth work under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Education and Research and its main objective is to develop and organise youth work in the framework of the national youth policy.

### Strengths of the youth policy area in governmental level

- There is a Youth Work Act (renewed in 2010) which determines the “youth”, “youth work”, “youth organisation” etc. That helps advocacy groups to define and explain their activities, for example in Poland, there is no such act, therefore it is even more difficult for PROM to become visible for decision-makers.
- In Estonian Ministry of Education and Research there is a youth department with five competent full time officials working on youth affairs. Under the ministry there is an executive body the Estonian Youth Work Center which main objective is to develop and organise youth work in the framework of the national youth policy. Fixed structures indicate the general interest and importance of youth policy by the government.
- The Professional Council for Education has agreed on the professional standard and the requirements of application of a youth worker.

### Weaknesses of youth policy area in governmental level

- Lack of dialogue between central government and local government representatives in the youth field.
- Lack of youth involvement in policy making processes.
- National Youth Work Strategy (2006-2013) is concentrated very much on the youth work and youth policy in general is set aside.
- The primary partner at the national level to the government is the Advisory Council on Youth Policy, which has year after year lost its importance and which has no decision-making role on the field.
- Due to the high requirements very few youth organisations are supported directly from the government's budget (in 2012 there were only 14 youth organisations supported). For example, in order to apply for the administration grant the organisation has to have at least 500 members and must be operating in at least five counties.

- There are no distinctions made between the ordinary youth NGOs and youth umbrella organisations in the application process for the state grant, therefore unions like ENL are in constant competition with its own members.
- Lack of awareness about youth policy among various stakeholders.
- The competence of making decisions in terms of youth policy is too much centered on the Ministry of Education, there is lack of cooperation between different ministries.

Regarding the above mentioned strengths and weaknesses, the first and foremost proposal from action group is to link national youth strategy more strongly to other different national strategies, so that youth policy would be part of each ministry action reinforcing cross-dimensional youth policy principles in practise. Also, in order to ensure well-functioning financing, biggest youth roof-organisations should be financed separately from other youth organisations.

The main level of organizing youth work is **local government**, which often delegates its youth work duties to the third sector by outsourcing certain services, if possible. Budgets of local governments appear amongst main sources to finance youth work. Pursuant to the Youth Work Act and the Local Governments Organisation Act, a local government is responsible for the organisation of youth work in its administrative territory. Many problems, which occur on the local level, in youth policy are the consequences of Estonian administrative system, where there are many small and hence weak municipalities.

### **Strengths of youth policy area in local level**

- Youth councils are about to develop and find their place. There are existing 15 regional youth councils and more than 60 local youth councils now in Estonia. The ministry has allocated financial resources in order to develop local youth councils and hence the youth participation in local level.

### **Weaknesses of youth policy area in local level**

- core problem: Lack of cooperation between different local stakeholders like municipality, schools, youth centres, youth organisations etc.
- Young people are not aware of the participation opportunities in their hometown or around.
- Little interest in youth issues and the lack of qualified youth workers. Very often there is an officer from different field put partly in charge of youth affairs. This evokes overwhelmed youth workers or insufficient quality of youth work.
- Youth services (counseling, youth centres etc.) offered on the municipal level are not equally accessible for all young people, this is mainly because of the poorly functioning public transport.
- Normally there are no youth strategies implemented on local level (Though there are some exceptions like Tallinn and Narva)
- One of the most popular youth work activity in Estonia is going to youth centres. However, there are no quality standards for youth centre workers implemented yet.

- Youth centres should also work like youth incubators for starting organisations. Similar incubators can be found in Latvia and Lithuania. Youth incubators could offer young people facilities and know-how to start or develop their project.
- Local youth councils are yet not well developed and considered by the decision-makers. A good example about well structured local youth councils comes from Lithuania.

Action group sees that in order to raise awareness on youth issues on local level there should be established full-time youth worker post in every local government reaching over 1000 young people. Also, in order to develop local conditions for young people, there should be implemented youth strategies.

**Estonian National Youth Council** (ENL) is an umbrella organisation established in 2002 and unites 64 youth organisations in Estonia. ENL promotes cooperation between youth associations and active participation of young people in society. ENL is working for recognition and participation of young people

### **Strengths**

- Widely recognized umbrella organisations in different youth policy fields for youth organisations and decision-makers (For example: In 2012 ENL gained the biggest national grant among other youth organisations).
- ENL has proposed different amendments for law drafts and several of them have been also accepted.
- There is an existing cooperation between ENL and two other biggest Student organisations.

### **Weaknesses**

- Activities are not very well outsourced and therefore the awareness of the organisation in general is low. Good example is LIJOT which is well known in almost all age groups in society.
- Work planning is very often rather reactive then proactive, which is not allowing good strategic planning for the organisation.

ENL should plan its activities constantly according to the implemented strategy, which would let it to take leading position in youth policy area.

*Put together by Teele Tõnismann, youth policy officer in ENL  
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