

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



EUROPEAN UNION



COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# YOUTH POLICY

-

“the essentials”



# 1. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

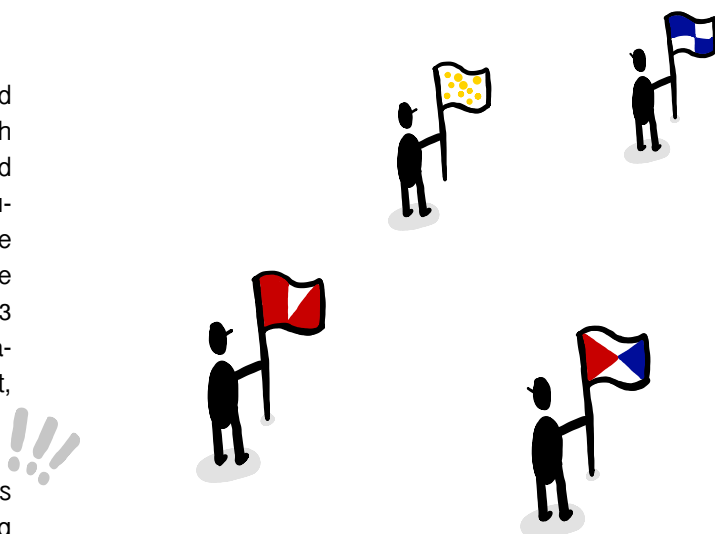
In order to define youth policy it is important to understand what youth is. There is no European consensus on that. Youth is not a fixed biological category, but is socially constructed and refers to the period of intense transitions leading to autonomy. There exist formal definitions of youth based on age limits and they vary across countries and institutions. For the European Union young people are those aged between 13 and 30, for the Council of Europe European's Youth Foundation – 15-30. This age specification often defines the target, direction, and core priority areas of youth policy.

At the European level, national youth policy is defined as a government's commitment and practice towards ensuring good living conditions and opportunities for the young population of a country (Denstad 2009).

“The purpose of youth policy is to create conditions for learning, opportunity and experience, which ensure and enable young people to develop the knowledge, skills and competences. This is in order to allow young people to be actors of democracy; integrate into society; and, in particular, enable them to play an active role in both civil society and the labour market. The key measures of youth policies are to promote citizenship learning and the integrated policy approach”. (Glossary on Youth, EU-CoE youth partnership)

The policies can be defined in one single specific legal act or a set of interlinked documents within one legal framework (law, pact, resolution, state concept, etc.). The forms can be different and are very much country specific. However, they should reflect the current challenges and obstacles young people are facing. They should be based on their needs and aspirations, and on defined, agreed political objectives and priorities. As the challenges that young people face touch various and multiple aspects of their lives, there is a need for the core of the policies to be based on cross-sectoral co-operation/coordination with all other relevant sectors and on an integrated approach in order to be able to address issues holistically and develop relevant and appropriate responses.

The structures responsible for youth policy at the national level may include a ministry responsible for youth (alone or together with sectors such as culture, education, sport, family and children, social affairs, media, justice, public health, etc.), a state agency, a state secretary on youth, a youth department or youth policy division. Authorities at local and regional level may include youth offices/officers, spokespersons, youth committees etc. The responsibilities at the different levels vary from country to country.



- What is the main approach of the youth policy in your country?
- What legal basis governs youth policy?
- Which youth policy structures exist in your country?
- What are main questions that need to be addressed to actors responsible for youth policy development in the country?

## 2. PRINCIPLES AND CORE ELEMENTS

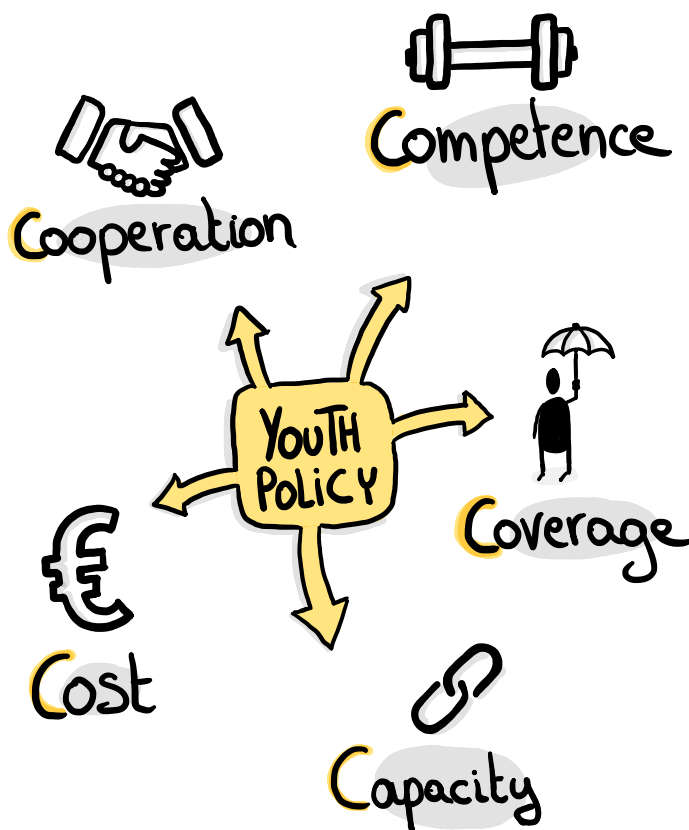
In order for youth policy to be efficient, targeted, accepted, recognised and impactful, there are a number of core principles and elements that should underpin it. These key ingredients, principles and values include young people's access to human and social rights, equality, inclusion and social cohesion, democracy, citizenship and participation, safety, health and well-being.

Research and practice of the youth policy suggest that there are five components to exploring, developing, quality-assuring and evaluating youth policy. These are "the five Cs", outlined by Howard Williamson, which convey a sense of the strength (or weakness) of policy in the youth field. These are Coverage (geographical area and social groups that are covered, plus policy domains); Capacity (the role and relationship of government and youth NGOs); Competence (the question of training and qualifications); Co-operation, co-ordination and coherence (hierarchically and horizontally); Cost (the financial and human resources required).

Other key aspects of youth policy include:

1. A clearly defined government authority on youth – a body that can lead, direct, coordinate and consolidate the work done in the youth field
2. A clearly defined intended beneficiary group – a definition of age limits, definition of groups of intended intervention
3. A concrete and transparent strategy – policy is to be defined in a strategy, action plan, has mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation, keeps policy maker accountable
4. A knowledge base – so that policy is based on real needs, facts and research of the field
5. Considering young people as a resource, not a problem – policy sees youth as a group to be empowered: to develop their full potential and to positively contribute to society
6. Promoting youth participation – policy is developed and implemented with meaningful and full participation of young people and promotes their active involvement in youth organisations and community life
7. A cross-sectoral, integrated approach to youth policy – coordinated and interconnected policy involving all actors that deal with issues of concern for young people, from within and beyond the youth field
8. A separate budget – policy is backed by sustainable, dedicated, adequate resources for implementation
9. Established links between local, regional and national levels - national youth policy recognises the competencies and responsibilities of local and regional authorities, and proposes ways of implementing policy in co-operation, co-ordination and partnership with them
10. Consistency with international practice – taking into account the international dimensions, experiences, standards and recommendations

(Denstad 2009)



- Who is the main target of the youth policy in the country (a specific group, specific life situation, all youth, etc.)?
- Is there a dedicated budget for youth? What is it mainly used for? (education, sport, youth work, youth services, youth NGOs and their programmes, etc),
- What is the main perception of youth in the country? Which 5 words youth is usually described in?

### 3. OBJECTIVES, PRIORITIES & KEY ISSUES

What defines the approaches, priorities, focus, direction, aims of national youth policy? Policy making approaches and methodologies range from regulation to emancipation, from prevention to intervention, from proactive to reactive, from problem focused to opportunity focused. They may be integrated or fragmented, coordinated or isolated, target group specific or mainstream, in harmony or in conflict with other policies.

When it comes to priorities, in some of the countries the youth policy is part of the state development agendas, in others its aims are based on reactive responses to emerging problems, are based on theoretical methodological frames of youth development stages, or made in correspondence with wider European goals. The European Youth Forum, for example, outlines that three core objectives should be present in youth policy - enabling young people to participate actively in society and develop as active citizens, ensuring the autonomy and the wellbeing of young people, and supporting young people to find their place in society, as individuals and as professionals.

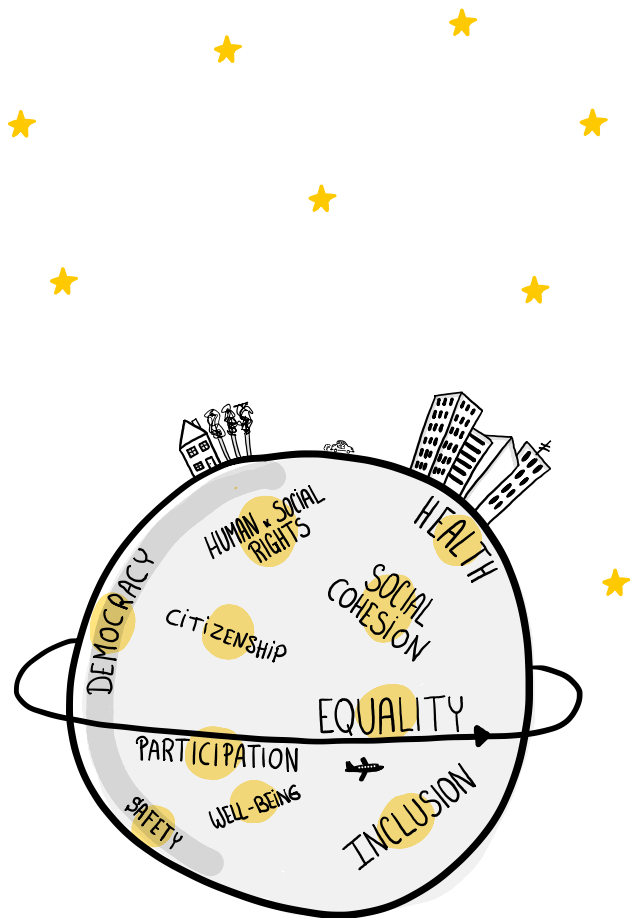
There is a certain rough division in Europe of countries with similar socio-political regimes, which also results in commonalities and differences of youth policies on national level. In some regions there is more focus and priority on youth employment, others on quality leisure time and promotion of sports, other concentrate on spiritual and patriotic education, another group focuses on civic competence building.

A report of the Council of Europe (Williamson 2008) outlines domains and life spheres relevant to youth, which are embraced in policy frameworks. These are education, employment, health, housing, welfare, criminal justice, etc. When it comes to main focus and objectives of policies, there are also a number of cross-cutting issues present in the countries, these include:

- opportunities for participation and citizenship;
- safety and protection;
- combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion;
- the provision and use of information (including new information technologies);
- mobility and internationalism;
- multiculturalism;
- equalities;
- radicalisation/reaction of segments of the youth population versus conformity
- local versus global pressures
- centre – periphery
- urban – rural polarisation;
- elites and outsiders
- environmental issues
- the role of the diaspora



Reflection on the list may suggest that one can outline a set of general objectives that youth policies tend to tackle across Europe, in relation to which successful practices can be shared and disseminated to support efficient policy making, through common guidelines, recommendations and support schemes.



- What main challenges for youth policy do you see in your country?
- What are the aims and key areas of youth policy in your country?
- Do the challenges and aims match? How much do you as individual identify with the policy aims defined?

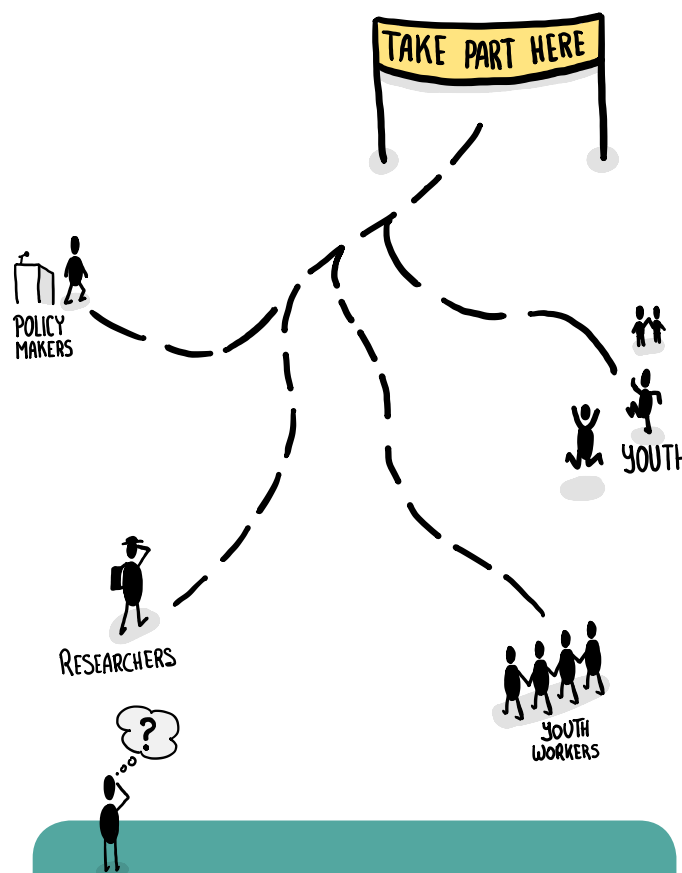
## 4. ACTORS, PARTICIPATION & REPRESENTATION

- who can and should be considered key actors and partners when it comes to youth policy development at national level, who defines them,
- how should the representation of different groups be guaranteed,
- how should it be ensured that all the relevant actors have an equal say and influence on policy development,
- what is the role of youth NGOs working at different levels in the country in policy making,
- how should young people participate in youth policy development and what are the prerequisite for that,
- what is the role of national, regional or local youth councils in the policy development process,
- what are mechanisms for meaningful and impactful participation and contribution of all relevant stakeholders in the policy development at all its stages?

It is one thing defining the actors, it is another to open space for their contribution to the process. In different discourses related to youth policy, it is advocated currently that youth participation and the involvement of NGOs as partners in youth policy should be promoted by public actors: it is important for those who are targeted by a policy to have a say in all matters that concern them. Involving young people can ensure that youth policy is target-specific and that it is based on their real needs and not on perceived ideas. Participation in decision making increases the ownership of the decisions made and thus improves the chances of successful implementation of the decisions and policies.

If there are tailored, diversified, and user-friendly mechanisms of participation for various levels (grass-root, national, international), this can lead to the involvement of a large spectrum of actors in decision making. New forms, such as digital participation, offer increased and more flexible possibilities, but the traditional formats such as dialogue with youth councils and youth NGOs, fora, direct consultations with other relevant actors (youth and social workers, researchers, teachers, doctors, employers etc.), are still valuable and effective.

Throughout Europe, there are many models that endeavour to strengthen dialogue and decision making between governmental officials and youth representatives and, sometimes, also youth researchers. One example of participation in the youth field is the system of co-management in policy development established by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. It brings together representatives of member states' governments and of youth organisations and they take the decisions regarding the Council of Europe's programme on youth. Another one is the Structured Dialogue with young people in the EU, where views of young people are collected, discussed and often considered in policy making on national and EU level.



- What are the main youth policy actors on local, regional and national levels in the country?
- How is it ensured that youth policy reaches all young people?
- What are systems for youth participation in policy development, implementation and evaluation?
- Is there a National Youth Council, as defined by the European Youth Forum?
- Is there any cross-governmental or cross-sectoral body that monitors the development of youth policy in your country?
- Are young people involved in decision-making about the use of 'youth policy' resources?

## 5. YOUTH POLICY ON EUROPEAN LEVEL

The Council of Europe and the European Union have become strong advocates for the development of national policies aimed at improving the situation of young people. Over time, mechanisms for supporting the development and implementation of national youth policy have been established. Moreover, youth policy constructed and conducted at European level by both institutions often serves as a quality standard, reference point and good practice guide that can be explored and adopted in the member states.

On the EU level, a framework for EU cooperation in the youth field has been developed to give impetus and direction to work on both national and European levels. The main objective of what is commonly known as the 'EU Youth Strategy' entitled Investing and Empowering is to improve the efficiency of the cooperation and actions already put in place and provide increased benefits to young people in the EU by creating more opportunities for them, improving access and full participation of young people in society, fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people.

The EU Youth Strategy proposes initiatives in eight areas: employment and entrepreneurship; social inclusion; participation; education & training; health & well-being; voluntary activities; youth & the world; creativity & culture.

It also highlights the role of youth work, stresses the importance of the cross-sectoral approach, evidence base, dialogue with young people and peer learning among the member states. The so called Open Method of Coordination provides a framework for cooperation between the member states whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives. Under this method, the member states are evaluated by one another, with the European Commission's role limited to coordination and monitoring. In this way, European guidelines can be integrated into national and regional policies.

The youth policy of the Council of Europe is currently defined in Agenda 2020, a strategic document approved by the youth ministers of almost 50 European countries in 2008. It sets down the three overarching themes that should inform European youth policy until 2020: human rights and democracy; living together in diverse societies; and social inclusion of young people.

The Council of Europe has direct, bilateral, multilateral support measures put in place for encouraging their member states to develop youth policies based on internationally recognised principles and standards. The support encompasses sharing competence, expertise, legitimacy, quality assurance, and review. These measures involve seminars and capacity building through non-formal educational activities in the countries and international activities, international reviews of national youth policies, secondments, rapid response to specific questions of a member state by other member states and other forms of peer-learning, independent expertise or assessment, study visits and advisory missions.

The European Commission and the Council of Europe work together in the youth field and seek synergies through their EU-CoE youth partnership. The EU-CoE youth partnership is meant to create synergies between the commitments and activities of the two partner institutions in the youth field in situations and on issues that justify a common European approach. It has a role in collecting and producing knowledge on youth as a basis for enhancing youth policy and youth work. It is provided in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY).



- How is youth policy at European levels connected to youth policy at national level work in your country?
- How are connections made between European, national and local levels of 'youth policy'?



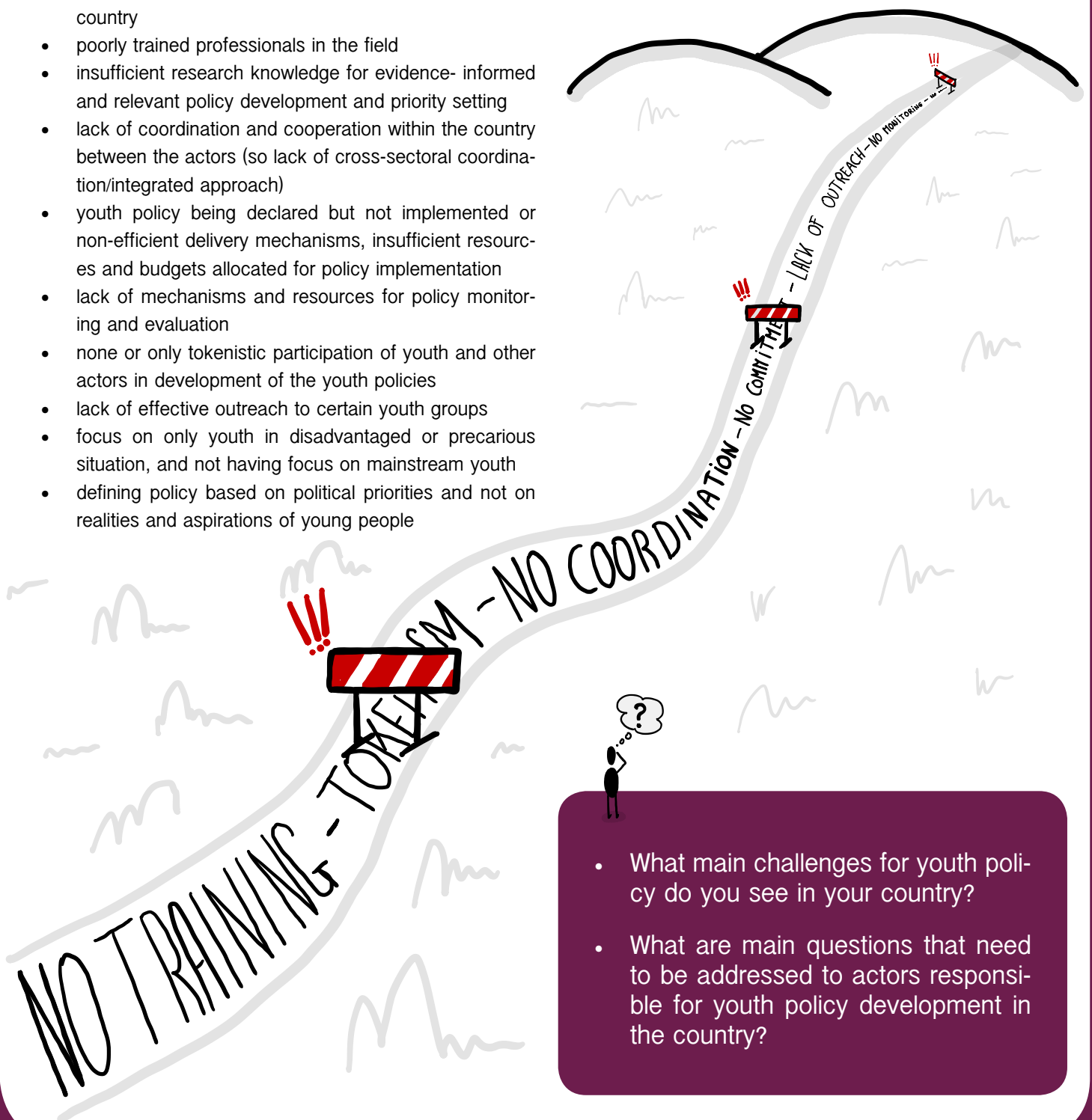
## 6. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS

*“All countries do in fact have a youth policy – by intent, default or neglect. After all, doing nothing still affects young people’s lives”*

*(Howard Williamson)*

Some of the challenges are:

- weak or non-existing commitment to youth policy in a country
- poorly trained professionals in the field
- insufficient research knowledge for evidence- informed and relevant policy development and priority setting
- lack of coordination and cooperation within the country between the actors (so lack of cross-sectoral coordination/integrated approach)
- youth policy being declared but not implemented or non-efficient delivery mechanisms, insufficient resources and budgets allocated for policy implementation
- lack of mechanisms and resources for policy monitoring and evaluation
- none or only tokenistic participation of youth and other actors in development of the youth policies
- lack of effective outreach to certain youth groups
- focus on only youth in disadvantaged or precarious situation, and not having focus on mainstream youth
- defining policy based on political priorities and not on realities and aspirations of young people



- What main challenges for youth policy do you see in your country?
- What are main questions that need to be addressed to actors responsible for youth policy development in the country?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Denstad F. Y. (2009), Youth Policy Manual: How to develop a national youth strategy, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg

Williamson H. (2008), Supporting Young People (Volume 2), Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg

Understanding some of the essentials of youth policy is an important step in looking at how youth policy can tackle challenges young people face today. The initiative for this document is associated to the symposium on “Youth policy responses to contemporary challenges young people face”, organized by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, 12 – 14 June 2017, Prague, in the framework of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. This document offers all those interested in youth policy an overview of its main concepts, principles, and challenges.



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