



EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TRAINING

A policy on European level-training for
the promotion of sustainable and
inclusive youth organisations

*Adopted by the Council of Members,
25-26 April 2003 - Brussels (Belgium)*

*'You cannot teach a man anything,
you can only help him to discover it for himself'*

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

*'The European Youth Forum aims to **empower young people to actively participate in the shaping of Europe and the society in which they live.**' Through our member organisations and our representative role we want to improve the living conditions of young people as European citizens in today's world.*

The European Youth Forum works for the interests of all young people in Europe. As a platform, we are the representative body of our members towards the institutions and partners in the youth field'

European Youth Forum mission statement

The empowerment of young people and their active participation in society are a primary focus of the European Youth Forum. In order to help achieve this goal, the European Youth Forum has committed itself to the provision and promotion of training and the acquisition of new skills. To actively participate in today's changing world, young people need many skills, including the ability to be adaptable, flexible and capable of critical thinking. The European Youth Forum strives to help young people develop these skills and uses training as a way to enhance young people's personal, social and work lives. In particular, the European Youth Forum recognises the need to enable young women and socially disadvantaged youth to participate more actively in youth organisations and society. The European Youth Forum believes that training empowers young people, both those that participate directly and those that benefit from a 'multiplier effect' when the skills learnt through training are passed on to other young people in the Youth Forum's member organisations. European Youth Training thus provides a tool for reaching out to the many young people we represent and encouraging and providing them with the skills to become active citizens in Europe, in turn promoting the inclusive nature of youth organisations.

European Youth Training can have a multitude of faces depending upon on the environment in which it takes place, the values of the organisation running the event and the experience one encounters. Due to all these factors the definition of European Youth Training is ever open to interpretation. However perhaps we can see European Youth Training as a catalyst for change. It is a supported process for the development of individual or organisational competencies and a place to explore new ideas. This process being fuelled by the transfer and sharing of skills and experiences. It is a means of empowering and building confidence for the development of more sustainable and inclusive youth organisations. Finally European Youth Training takes place in an intercultural dimension which serves to promote increased intercultural understanding.

As a catalyst for change operating in an intercultural environment, European Youth Training can be an explosive arena especially since as human beings, trainers and participants bring with them into this arena their own political,

educational, cultural and ethical values. However, above all, European Youth Training should ever strive to embrace diversity, inclusion and empowerment, mutual respect, participation and democracy and be run in a sensitive manner in a supportive environment.

The European Youth Forum recognises that young people live in constantly and rapidly changing environments and that this has an important impact on the ways in which young people act in their reality and on how organisations function. To help young people acquire the necessary competencies to respond successfully to change, to increase the possibilities to play an active role in shaping the society, the European Youth Forum gives European Youth Training high priority, thus also promoting lifelong learning and development of sustainable youth organisations.

The European Youth Forum believes that training is much more than purely the acquisition of new skills. Like in the case of Galileo, who dedicated a lifetime to exploring nature through the then innovative tool of experimentation, training in youth organisations also gives young people the chance to experiment and discover new ideas. It creates a safe space conducive for the development of critical thinking and for intellectual discourse. It provides a place where young people can seek answers and raise questions on a whole range of aspects. This is of great value to young people because it promotes individual growth and development through self-evaluation and critique, reflection and critical analysis and helps enhance and build upon the skills needed for personal, social and work life. However it is crucial that young people have access to such opportunities and be empowered to use the opportunities creatively, actively, responsibly, confidently and freely. The conclusions from the WAGGGS 29th World Conference on Young Women and Decision-making provide an illustration of this point. The participants concluded that *'A young woman cannot have the skills necessary to be an effective decision maker if she has not been exposed to opportunities to develop such skills.'*

In addition to the benefit to the individual young man or woman, the involvement in and the provision of transnational youth training, facilitates understanding between different peoples and cultures crucial for the pan European nature of the European Youth Forum. It also promotes democracy, tolerance and supports the underlying principles of the European Convention on Human Rights. International non-governmental youth organisations play a particularly important, yet often undervalued role in contributing to the latter. Notably, International non- governmental youth organisations assist in building up capacity in countries that have a shorter history of youth work in civil society.

On another level, youth training also increases the capacity of youth organisations to work in the interest of all young people in its contacts with decision-makers in Europe. As a result, young people are further recognised as a representative and as an important part of society. Bearing this in

mind, the European Youth Forum and its member organisations work in valued partnership with the European institutions and other youth organisations and platforms. Their common aim is to bridge the gap between policy and reality and to try and reach the many young people distant from European decision making. In this sense, the investment made by the European Youth Forum and its member organisations in European Youth Training represents its unfailing political commitment to the young people it wishes to continue to represent in Europe.

With all that can be achieved through training, it is the European Youth Forum's strong conviction that training will empower young people to confidently act upon what they believe and encourage them to become active citizens in the shaping of Europe and a more inclusive society.

Guiding principles for training within the European Youth Forum

Training: an effective and fundamental transversal tool

The European Youth Forum believes that through the implementation of an effective training policy it can improve, support and sustain all areas of its work.

In order to function effectively as an organisation, the European Youth Forum depends upon the informed decision making and the participation of its members. In order to participate actively and effectively it is important that young people can participate in training activities which empower them.

Within youth work, training is a key medium to ensure the promotion of **active citizenship**. In regard to the field of European Citizenship, our policy objectives¹ note that citizenship is not only about young people understanding their status in society but about acting out or moulding a role in society. Young people are asked to take positions, to argue and articulate their views. In order to act, young people must learn how to access and collect information, how to understand and judge it, how to form an opinion and how to have the effective communication skills in order to make their message understood.

The European Youth Forum continues to strive to attain recognition of the importance and contribution of training as a form of **non-formal education** in society. Consequently youth organisations within the European Youth

¹ European Youth Forum Position Paper on Life-wide Learning for Active Citizenship adopted at the Council of Members, Brussels (Belgium) 26-27 April 2002, p.6

Forum support the continued development and access to quality training within our own structure and in partnership with others.

The European Youth Forum believes that support should be given to training in all aspects of youth work, with a particular emphasis on active citizenship and training as a form of non-formal education, in order to promote its objectives.

Training: a means for helping young people respond to a continually changing environment

Recognising that young people live in a continually changing environment and that this can have an important impact on the way in which organisations and people function, the Youth Forum regards regular analyses of changing needs as fundamental in supporting young people in their journey **of lifelong and life-wide learning**.

It is also our responsibility to the young people we represent **to monitor and evaluate**. In putting monitoring and evaluation in place, we can determine whether our training interventions are successful or not. It is our responsibility to learn from both our successes and mistakes through evaluation and to then further strengthen or adapt our approach. By setting a regular cycle of reflection and action through training, we can become more capable in reaching our mission.

Our policies on the situation of young women, and disadvantaged young people recognise that young people may become **socially excluded and suffer discrimination**. However the provision of and access to quality training can be a means of combating such eventualities for young people, being one measure in trying to ensure their full and equal position in society.

'If people find they do not have the necessary skills to cope with something they leave and if they find something doesn't meet their needs they also leave'.

Hope and Timmel, Training for Transformation (1984).

Increased **global and intercultural understanding** to promote tolerance, justice and solidarity is nurtured through the safe space created in training, in which understanding between different peoples and cultures is facilitated. The creation of an environment conducive to learning helps to strengthen solidarity between young people in Europe and other parts of the world.

The Support of Training

The European Youth Forum and its member organisations have a long history of involvement with both the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the development of **European Youth Training**. This has allowed us to continue to encourage our partners to both widely make available and promote training opportunities relevant to young people in Europe.

The conceptual development of the training programmes of **the Council of Europe and the European Commission** and their Partnership on European Youth Training is influenced by the Youth Forum member organisations combined training expertise. The Youth Forum Pool of Trainers is just one example of such expertise, integral in the running of many European level training courses, which reach out to hundreds of young people every year. The pool of trainers is also a place that serves to facilitate the constant exchange of methodologies and good practice in training to contribute to the sustainability of youth organisations.

Playing a role throughout Europe and beyond, notably through the Assistance Programme of the Council of Europe which works in Central Eastern and South East Europe, the European Youth Forum member organisations and the Pool of Trainers contribute in a very real sense in the capacity building of youth organisations. They also serve as an eye on the ground, being able to realistically assess the national needs for the European Youth Forum's focus on youth work development. The Pool of Trainers helps to ensure that the policies we endorse translate to reality.

'The role of an animator is to set up a situation in which genuine dialogue can take place in a real learning community, where each one shares their experience, listens to and learns from the others.'
Hope and Timmel, Training for Transformation (1984).

Consistent with their firm commitment to empowerment through training, the member organisations and the European Youth Forum recognise the need and use the skills of the Pool of trainers in their own events, to encourage and support the active participation of all. In order to continue to ensure our valued and crucial partnership with the institutions, with the expert support and input of the trainers themselves and in recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, the European Youth Forum also supports the trainers in the Pool through the organisation of annual meetings for skill development and critical analysis.

Innovation through training

It is by virtue of the European Youth Forum member organisation's grass-root experience and their ability to evolve with each new generation of young people, that the Youth Forum is invited to support and co-operate

with the Council of Europe and the European Commission on issues pertinent to European Youth Training. The European Youth Forum member organisations and the Pool of trainers are at the forefront of the new conceptual development of the training programmes of the institutions.

Aware of our constantly changing environment, the European Youth Forum is ready to meet the changing needs and new challenges for and with its member organisations. We are a driving force behind innovation and translate this into reality through the provision of training for our member organisations in complement with the institutional training offers on a European level. We aim to cover identified deficits and to reach into new horizons. This is ever more pertinent in an environment of increased decentralisation, in which lobbying skills have to be constantly updated and transferred. To maintain its force in the European arena, the European Youth Forum is committed to offering the skills training needed to maintain its own strength and that of its member organisations.

Conclusion

It has never been so important that young people are informed and have the skills and the knowledge to cope with the changing world and to avoid that others get left behind. The European Youth Forum commits itself to support and implement training in the fields in which it is active. Training is crucial for effective youth participation. Training is a unique means to empower young people and to multiply skills from one young person to the next. The European Youth Forum feels that supporting training as a tool of improvement of youth participation brings the Youth Forum closer in its ambitious aim to work for all young people in Europe.