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**Youth policies from  
around the world:**  
International practices  
and country examples

Youth Policy Working Paper  
March 2016

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## Abstract

While no global framework or standards on youth policy exists, there is a growing international consensus on principles for youth policy-making. This working paper examines these principles, rooted in the 1998 Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, and most recently re-iterated at the First Global Forum in Youth Policies held in October 2014, alongside some country examples of the principles used in implementation. While not an exhaustive list, this working paper explores the notion that all effective national youth policies should aim to be:

- » Democratic and participatory;
- » Cross-sectional and transversal;
- » Coherent and coordinated;
- » Researched and evidence-based;
- » Fairly budgeted and financed;
- » Competent and professional;
- » Monitored and evaluated;
- » Open and freely accessible.

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Overview of international practices</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Democratic and participatory</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Cross-sectoral and transversal</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Coherent and coordinated</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Researched and evidence-based</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Fairly budgeted and financed</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Competent and professional</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Monitored and evaluated</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Open and freely accessible</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>Authors</b>	<b>8</b>



## 1 Introduction

According to the State of Youth Policy 2014<sup>1</sup>, of 198 countries, 122 countries have a national youth policy – a 50% increase compared to 2013. A further 37 states are either developing a new or revising their current youth policy, and 31 countries have no national youth policy at the moment. These numbers show that national governments are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that adequate legislation and policies are needed to respond to young peoples' concerns, aspirations and demands. The content of such policies can in turn inform national, regional and global youth initiatives, programs and projects of development partners that focus on youth issues.

No single, unified framework exists that guides the design, implementation and evaluation of youth policies and the youth sector. However, there is a growing international consensus on a number of leading principles, reconfirmed by the First Global Forum on Youth Policies held in October 2014<sup>2</sup>. This chapter will explore these and provide examples from countries around the world where useful lessons can be drawn.

## 2 Overview of international practices

At global level, modern youth policy practices are rooted in the 1998 Lisbon Declaration<sup>3</sup> on Youth Policies and Programmes<sup>4</sup>, agreed at the World

Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Ministers signed up to a range of commitments, including the need to match a policy with implementation processes and resources, mainstream youth issues beyond a singular policy document, consider the needs and priorities of young people themselves, develop measureable goals and indicators for accountability, collect data, commit research and make findings public.

The World Programme of Action for Youth<sup>5</sup> (WPAY) by the United Nations, originally adopted in 1996 and amended in 2007, has long been drawn upon to identify the minimum key policy areas in which young people should be specifically considered, of which it names 15. These include employment, poverty, leisure, participation, HIV/AIDS, girls and young women, and armed conflict. In addition to the WPAY, various UN agencies have, over time, produced structural and thematic frameworks at a global level.

At a European level, a region where many international best practices have been developed, most modern youth policy can be traced back to the eight indicators of a national youth policy outlined by Peter Lauritzen, a leading personality in the development of Europe's youth sector.<sup>6</sup> These included the presence of legislation covering young people, financial resources, non-governmental infrastructure, voluntary and professional training structures, independent research, advisory bodies, multi-level communication, and opportunities for innovation and development. These have been expanded through the Council of Europe's extensive youth policy reviews and have been synthesised in "Supporting young people in Europe – Vol 1 & Vol 2."<sup>7</sup>

1 <http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2014/05/state-of-youth-policy-2014/>

2 <http://youthpolicyforum.org/documents/commitment.pdf>

3 Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/lisbon.pdf>

4 The 1998 declaration is, however, not the first time the United Nations approached the question of national youth policies comprehensively. The 24th session of the Economic and Social Council dealt with "long-term policies and programmes for youth in national development" in 1969.

5 World Programme of Action for Youth, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/nyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

6 Lauritzen, Peter (1993): Youth Policy structures in Europe, including 8 indicators for a national youth policy. In: Ohana, Y. & Rothmund, A. (2008): Eggs in a Pan. Online available at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Peter\\_Lauritzen\\_book\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Peter_Lauritzen_book_en.pdf)

7 Supporting young people in Europe, Volume 1 and 2 by Howard Williamson. Both available online at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG\\_Coop/YP\\_Supporting\\_young\\_people\\_Vol\\_I\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG_Coop/YP_Supporting_young_people_Vol_I_en.pdf) and [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG\\_Coop/YP\\_Supporting\\_young\\_people\\_Vol\\_II\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG_Coop/YP_Supporting_young_people_Vol_II_en.pdf)

These frameworks, and the processes of international political cooperation that underpin their emergence, have led to a growing consensus around a set of principles that should guide the development of youth policies and ultimately the evaluation / assessment of their performance. These can be expressed in the following eight pairs:

1. Democratic and participatory
2. Cross-sectorial and transversal
3. Coherent and coordinated
4. Researched and evidence-based
5. Fairly budgeted and fairly financed
6. Competent and professional
7. Monitored and evaluated
8. Open and freely accessible<sup>8</sup>

In the sections below, each pair of international practice is described with country examples to highlight the translation from theory into practice and implementation. The examples are not necessarily “best practice” but are included because of interesting lessons or insights. Similarly, the principles are not exhaustive, and in absence of clear globally agreed frameworks, interpretations of the theory and the practice may vary.

### 3 Democratic and participatory

Effective national youth policies are most often seen when legitimised through the democratically elected Parliament, and with the inclusion and full participation of actors such as youth professionals, civil society, youth organisations and movements as well as young people. Participation in the design but not in the implementation of policies is an often-seen limitation, and a participatory model must address the genuine sharing of power between decision-makers and young people. Crucially, the delivery of youth policies, programmes and services needs to be inclusive of the range of entities that can support young people from the state, private and non-profit sectors.

**Sweden** enshrines the principles of democracy and participation in its 2014 Youth Bill<sup>9</sup> and mandates that civil society organisations (particularly youth organisations) should be invited to participate in the implementation and monitoring of policies. The Bill identifies these organisations as being central to discussion on youth issues, and in facilitating dialogue and consultation with youth. The Youth Bill also enshrines a more strategic role for the Youth Policy Council. This body was established in 2008 and consists of representatives from youth organisations and networks, members of the research community and government officials, who meet regularly to discuss Sweden’s youth policy and provide proposals. The Bill also mandates a study on youth democratic participation and empowerment (to be completed by 2015), which would assess young people’s opportunity to participate in formal decision-making processes and propose measures to strengthen young people’s influence and participation in all spheres of public policy.

<sup>8</sup> The Baku Commitment to Youth Policies summarises the 8 principles of youth policy very similarly as rights-based, inclusive, participatory, gender-responsive, comprehensive, knowledge-based and evidence-informed, fully resourced, and accountable: <http://youthpolicyforum.org/documents/commitment.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/Sweden\\_2014\\_Proposed\\_Youth\\_Bill\\_swe.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/Sweden_2014_Proposed_Youth_Bill_swe.pdf)

## 4 Cross-sectoral and transversal

In order to address the full range and depth of issues that affect the lives of young people, youth must cut across all policy domains, and go beyond typical “youth” issues such as education, employment or leisure. A truly cross-sectoral policy must include all ‘adult’ policy fields whenever relevant, and adopt a holistic approach to the development of young people, seeing all issues as often inter-linked and interdependent. In order to achieve this, policymakers should recognise the diversity of backgrounds, experiences, needs and aspirations within the “youth” demographic, through the participation and empowerment of young people – especially those from minority background – throughout the policy process.

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture<sup>10</sup> in **Botswana** has outlined 12 strategic areas in its national youth policy, with actions, indicators and named lead agencies. Within government, youth policy is directed by a special agency and through the Multi-Sectoral Committees on Youth Programming, youth policies and plans are coordinated across individual ministries. While the youth policy does focus on traditional “youth” areas, the presence of inter-ministerial structures and cooperation demonstrates a willingness to consider youth beyond a narrow remit, across all areas of government.

**Denmark** is a unique example and has no specific youth policy document. According to a youth policy article<sup>11</sup> (2008), the government has instead adopted a fully integrated approach throughout government and across multi-level agencies and state bodies to ensure that, “every sector has its own field of responsibility regarding measures and policy for young people.” Though some activities and programmes for young people are defined, the mainstreamed approach is complex to map. In terms of accountability, the presence of a strong

national youth council, with a large membership and annual budget, could be one reason why the integrated model has been successful, alongside an entrenched and active democratic culture. Such a model is hard to replicate without many other elements, such as strong policy, public participation and transparent government.

## 5 Coherent and coordinated

Youth policies are often aspirational in terms of the future for youth; however, policies should not become a “wish list” of those writing them. Policies that do not consider what is viable in the current political context stand are unlikely to be implemented effectively - particularly when a cross-sectoral nature requires many policy domains to collaborate. A clear framework, based on rights, needs and well-being is useful to ensure consistency from central government to city council, from civil servants to youth professionals, and from youth laws to youth clubs. The coordination of policy needs to be inclusive, multi-level and multi-stakeholder.

**Ecuador** has a youth law<sup>12</sup> (2011), a youth policy<sup>13</sup> (2012) and has guaranteed young people’s rights as part of its Constitution<sup>14</sup> (2008). The strong legislative protections and provisions provide a foundation on which thematic youth policies can be built, and offer a clear articulation of the place and role of young people in Ecuador. The lead Ministry is president of an inter-ministerial and inter-agency body that is designed to ensure the fulfillment of youth rights as outlined in the constitution. Government structures don’t guarantee a coherent approach to youth policy, but they attempt to achieve a long-

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.mysc.gov.bw/?q=dept\\_youth](http://www.mysc.gov.bw/?q=dept_youth)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Denmark\\_2008\\_Youth\\_Policy\\_Article.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Denmark_2008_Youth_Policy_Article.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ecuador\\_2011\\_National\\_Youth\\_Law.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ecuador_2011_National_Youth_Law.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ecuador\\_2012\\_Youth\\_Equality\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ecuador_2012_Youth_Equality_Policy.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2008\\_Ecuador\\_Constitution.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2008_Ecuador_Constitution.pdf)

term mandate for youth provision — particularly in difficult and changeable political environments.

According to the Youth Policy Review<sup>15</sup> (2012), over the past decade **Kyrgyzstan** has developed a number of youth policies, laws, regulations and conceptual documents, but few have been able to genuinely improve young people’s access to information, rights, and opportunities. Many young people were involved in popular uprisings that resulted in the overthrowing of two presidents, and youth policies have been designed have been viewed as reactive to those events, rather than based on the a strategic vision and the needs of young people. The Youth Policy Review notes that the absence of effective mechanisms to implement programmes has resulted in little action on the ground, with policies remaining mostly lip service.

## 6 Researched and evidence-based

The lives and realities of young people are fluid and changeable, and as a result on-going, consistent, independent youth research is required to ensure policies reflect the needs, challenges and ambitions of young people. The research community requires long-term documenting of developments and changes, skilled researchers and a body of national knowledge on youth sociology. Policymakers need to work with the findings of youth research and ensure that programmes and services are respondent to the evidence, rather than perceptions, ideology or historical precedence. Research needs to be an integrated aspect of youth policies, not seen as simply evaluation, and should include objective and subjective measures to ensure a richer level of understanding.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/pdfs/Youth\\_Public\\_Policy\\_Kyrgyzstan\\_En.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/pdfs/Youth_Public_Policy_Kyrgyzstan_En.pdf)

**Uruguay** enshrines the important role of research on youth within its 2011 National Youth Policy<sup>16</sup>. The National Youth Institute (INJU)<sup>17</sup> contains within it a Unit for Analysis and Study of Youth, which coordinates with the Social Indicators and Monitoring Program<sup>18</sup>, also within the Ministry of Social Development. Together they cooperate on initiatives such as the Youth Social Indicators Monitoring Program, which collects and generates information on the status of youth in Uruguay, and measures the impact of youth policies in terms of social welfare. The two units also cooperated to produce the 2008 Survey of Adolescents and Youth (ENAJ)<sup>19</sup>, results of which were contained in a situational analysis within the 2011 Youth Policy. While informing the design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of youth policies, this research is also freely available to the public, acting as a tool of transparency in the youth sector.

## 7 Fairly budgeted and financed

The UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi’s quote on budgets and youth policies is a succinct underscoring of this principle,

*“A youth policy without a budget isn’t a youth policy; it’s a mental exercise.”*

Budgets are required for each dimension of youth policy and should be accessible to the entire youth sector – free from political manipulation. The independence of youth and youth focused organisations is required to ensure that they can disagree with the government or the policy without fear of financial retribution. The allocated resources need to

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Uruguay\\_2011\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Uruguay_2011_National_Youth_Policy.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.inju.gub.uy/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://observatoriosocial.mides.gub.uy/>

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.inju.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/9798/1/enaj\\_segundo\\_informe\\_cap1y2.pdf](http://www.inju.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/9798/1/enaj_segundo_informe_cap1y2.pdf)



match the objectives of the policy and the demands of young people. Additionally, youth sector professionals should expect to be remunerated in return for a high quality standard of work.

Many countries allocate large budgets, but there are few examples where budgets and financing meet all of the aspects indicated for this standard. The government of **Ireland** has an allocated budget of EUR 449.0 million (USD 617.7 million) for the ministry responsible for youth and youth policy, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This includes €414 million for on-going expenditure and €35 million in capital expenditure. However, the National Youth Council of Ireland<sup>20</sup> (NYCI) has been very critical of the government's response to the financial crisis<sup>21</sup>, noting that youth services have received "a disproportionate cut since the onset of the crisis and within the funding allocation in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs." Despite public criticism, according to the website of the NYCI, the organisation still receives government funding.

## 8 Competent and professional

Globally, there is no comparative overview of youth sector education and training schemes, and such professional development opportunities are often unrecognised, disparate and lacking structure<sup>22</sup>. In many countries, the recognition of youth work as a profession is limited or even non-existent. Directly working with young people requires an extensive list of competencies and skills, and frequently professional development is essential through initial educational programmes and on-the-job training for staff and volunteers. Quality standards for youth work and youth sector professionals exist, notably

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.youth.ie/>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2013\\_NYC\\_Ireland\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2013_NYC_Ireland_Eng.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2013/12/professionalising-the-youth-sector/>

through the European Union and Council of Europe, and should exist at a national level to provide the architecture for investment and resources for a strong youth sector.

In the field of youth work, **Estonia** – a country with an eventful recent history, ageing population and significant Russian speaking minority – has developed quality standards, indicators and assessment mechanisms that measure the structures and quality of youth work provision, capacity and professionalism of the youth sector, and specific indicators for working with special groups. According to the Estonian Youth Work Strategy<sup>23</sup> (2006), the Estonian Youth Work Centre<sup>24</sup> is the national government agency for youth work, and promotes "the acquisition and development of the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for quality youth work and for its successful performance." Though mostly focused on youth work – only one aspect of a wider youth policy – the provisions in terms of youth work training, professional development and accountability mechanisms provide the basis for a competent workforce.

## 9 Monitored and evaluated

The on-going measurement of policy performance is required to provide accountability, learning and development of staff, managers, policymakers and politicians. Monitoring mechanisms need to ensure developments in the lives of young people are responded to and that services and programmes have the ability to react and change accordingly. The incorporation of youth-led research is as vital as the organisational and institutional feedback and learning processes. National and local indicators can exist to measure the success of policies, and the inclusion of external, independent evaluators may offer alternative and insightful perspectives. Moni-

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Estonia\\_2006\\_Youth\\_Work\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Estonia_2006_Youth_Work_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.entk.ee/eng/estonian-youth-work-centre>

toring and evaluation processes are only effective if the conclusions instigate changes, and are not seen as simply a validation mechanisms or punitive tool through which to punish people.

**Nauru** lays out a comprehensive framework of reporting, monitoring and evaluation in its 2008-2015 National Youth Policy<sup>25</sup>. First, the policy is structured such that for each of its five policy objectives, there is an outcome, several strategies relating to that outcome, a number of performance indicators for each strategy, as well as which governmental ministry or body is responsible for its implementation. This clear structure allows for easier monitoring of progress and evaluation. However, it should be noted that most of the performance indicators are process-related (e.g. number of health awareness programmes and condom outlets) as opposed to outcome-related (e.g. decrease in STD, pregnancy rates among youth).

Second, the policy mandates a regular reporting schedule. All stakeholders are to produce a report upon completion of any activity using a set template submitted to the Directorate of Youth Affairs (DYA). The DYA is responsible for quarterly reports to the Minister of Youth Affairs. Yearly reports are to be published by the DYA, which describes all youth policy activities throughout the year, as well as financial statements. Every two years, an independent impact assessment is to be conducted by external evaluators. The DYA is responsible for commissioning and facilitating this review, as well as obtaining the required financial and technical resources.

## 10 Open and freely accessible

Youth policies are subject to frequent changes, revisions in strategies and plans for the short, medium and long-term. Decision-making processes, particularly the renewal of policies, should be announced in advance, with decision-makers available for questions and discussions. The participation of young people, experts and stakeholders is needed, and they should be able to realistically influence decisions and processes fairly. Transparency is needed, with all decisions, budgets and evaluations publicly held and available, meetings and decisions well documented and beneficiaries – particularly those of funds - publicly traceable. Both are crucial in the development of trust between young people, the youth sector and the relevant authorities on youth policy.

When **Mexico's** National Youth Programme 2008-2012<sup>26</sup> expired, Mexico's youth agency, the Mexican Institute of Youth (IMJUVE), underwent a nation-wide public consultation in preparation of a new youth policy. Taking place from September to December 2013, young people as well as those that work with youth were invited to participate in the National Youth Consultation<sup>27</sup> through six mechanisms: public forums held in each state; an online survey; mobile consultation units, which travelled across the country to disseminate the survey in print; a video submission contest where young people could express where they see themselves in five years; roundtable discussions with stakeholders (civil society, government, academia, international NGOs); online discussion boards. It was the first time that the federal government conducted a youth consultation of this scale. The research went on to inform the development of the National Youth Programme 2014-2018<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Nauru\\_2008\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Nauru_2008_National_Youth_Policy.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Mexico\\_2009\\_National\\_Youth\\_Programme.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Mexico_2009_National_Youth_Programme.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.projuventud.mx/>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/Mexico\\_2014\\_National\\_Youth\\_Programme.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/Mexico_2014_National_Youth_Programme.pdf)

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## 11 Conclusion

Youth policies around the world are different and vary in terms of structure, thematic area, implementation and evaluation. National variation is to be expected as policies potentially react to local demands, needs and aspirations, but there is a lack of clear guidance at an international level. Through regional political processes, the research community, practitioners and international agreements, a range of principles, components and themes exist. These act as the foundation for further discussion in the Global Forum on Youth Policies<sup>29</sup> process. It is the absence of commonly agreed denominators for youth policies and coherent cross-sectoral frameworks that has instigated this Forum, held in the autumn of 2014. It has brought together a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors to discuss the challenges of youth policy and build a common understanding of future guiding principles, which are expected to shape regional and national youth policy frameworks from 2015 onwards.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.youthpolicyforum.org/>

## Authors

### Cristina Bacalso



is the Policy Lead for Youth Policy Labs. She has a wide background in policy, with experience in government and non-governmental sectors, both in Canada and internationally. She has an MA Development Studies and MA Public Policy as part of the Erasmus Mundus Masters Program. For nearly ten years, Cristina has worked with youth in various civil society organisations, primarily as a volunteer. She is the co-founder of the Hague Interns Association, an advocacy group that seeks to improve intern welfare and promote intern rights at the UN and international organisations.

### Alex Farrow



is the Consultancy Lead for Youth Policy Labs. He works at the intersection of research, policy and journalism, attempting to improve the lives of young people through knowledge, training and expression. At Youth Policy Labs, Alex leads on consultancy projects, supporting national governments and UN agencies to design, implement and evaluate national youth policies through research, training and events. He is a contributing writer and editor for the site, as well as researcher into youth and public policies. Alex received his MSc in Organizational Behaviour from Birkbeck College, University of London, with a research project that explores the career expectations and narratives of the millennial generation in today's workforce.



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Youth Policy Press, Scharnhorststraße 28/29, D-10115 Berlin  
Tel +49 30 3087 8451-0, [hello@youthpolicypress.com](mailto:hello@youthpolicypress.com)