



PROMOTION OF YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES

Survey: IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF YOUTH (INFORMATION) WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

Youth work, youth information and counselling services provide high quality guidance to young people and help them make decisions to lead their lives constructively. These services also have a remarkable preventive function that constitutes a great added value to society. Despite the importance of these services in supporting young people to achieve their full potential, it is still difficult for many youth work, youth information and counselling providers to effectively promote and reach the vast majority of young people that do not take advantage of these services.

In order to respond to this need and to ensure that youth work and youth information providers have access to the tools and skills needed to succeed in reaching as many young people as possible, and especially those that need it the most, EYCA, ERYICA and EURODESK ran an online survey on identifying the exact needs of youth workers and youth information workers in terms of communication. By 15 March 2017, **157** participants had responded to the survey.

The survey is part of the project **'Reach more young people! Promotion of Youth Work and Youth Information Centres'**. The project aims to broaden the understanding of practices and policies in youth work and youth information internationally and to enhance the modernisation and effectiveness of youth work and youth information services.

IDENTIFY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The online quantitative survey aimed to identify the needs of youth workers on how they reach young people and what kind of challenges they come across while using online and offline tools.

The definition of the link between youth work and youth information work: The delivery of youth information is a central function of youth work and shares its key values: it aims to be open to all young people and to act in their interest by covering issues that matters for them and by providing a large spectrum of activities (informing, counselling, advising, supporting, coaching and training, networking, and referral to specialised services). These activities may be delivered by youth information centres, through youth information services, Youth information workers and other



structures, through peers, using face-to-face and/or through digital environments with the development of digital services.¹

The target group was mainly youth (information) workers from European countries. The number of participants was 157 and they were from 28 different European countries. The majority of the participants were from Spain, Andorra, UK (mainly Wales), and Poland.

The respondents work at different levels and can have different posts, but the vast majority were youth workers (62.8%) working mainly at local level (68%). The majority belong to European networks, 33% belonging to ERYICA, 40% Eurodesk, 16% EYCA. Others also belong to organisations such as Europe Direct and European Students Union. Some respondents, particularly from Spain and Wales, did not know if they belonged to a European network. As a matter of fact some respondents may also belong to more than one network.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS IN NUMBERS

The survey provides fruitful and valuable information about the current difficulties that predominantly youth (information) workers face when reaching out to young people. It illustrates numbers, but also youth workers' personal experiences about dealing with new online tools and methods for reaching out to young people.

The age groups that typically make the most use of the services were young people aged between 15-18 (46% of respondents marked this group as the most frequent users) and 18-21 (50% of respondents marked this group as the most frequent users). In order to identify the needs of youth workers, first it is important to understand which age groups are using their services and what kind of tools are the most effective in communicating with them.

The first question addressed offline methods used most frequently, which were face to face meetings and workshops. Less frequent were info stands and campaigns, although these methods are still used. Offline tools are hugely important when attempting to reach out to those with fewer opportunities, as those who find information online tend to be the most engaged. The challenge for youth (information) workers is finding an effective way of combining online and conventional offline methods to reach their target group.

The second question illustrated that the 3 most frequently used online tools in communicating with young people are Facebook (93.6%) email (87%) and website (78%), the least used tools

¹ Taken from "Engage. Inform. Empower" - Position Paper, Recommendations from the main European Youth Information and Mobility networks on the new EU youth strategy:
http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/position_paper_en.pdf



are Viber (4.49%), Snapchat (7.7%), and forums (7%). It was also notable that respondents did not use social media that is typically associated with young people, such as Twitter (around 43% said they did not use), Instagram (44.7% said they did not use), Snapchat (76% said they did not use) and WhatsApp (61% said they did not use). However, the tools that young people use change continuously, so it is important that youth information workers develop skills to learn competences to keep themselves up to date regarding the use of social media by young people.

Some other online daily tools that are used by the youth workers are YouTube (28%), WhatsApp (20%) and Skype (12%). About 52% of the youth workers use some or all of the above mentioned online tools daily, and they keep partial records of the number of young people they reach through online tools (41%).

Another interesting and surprising factor is that 66.6% of the respondents do not outsource communication activities to an external service provider. At the same time, most of the youth workers replied that they do not have a specific PR or communication strategy to attract young people to their services. This may have a big impact on the promotion of their work online and on promoting and communicating their offline projects to young people.

DISCUSSION OF THE CHALLENGES

The respondents noted that they face the following challenges in reaching out to even more young people and improving their services: Funding and resources; recruiting, encouraging and motivating young people - particularly those with fewer opportunities and those that do not already make use of services, as well as those in rural areas; knowing how to navigate the huge variety of communication channels available; young people's free time and priorities. In some countries, it was noted that young people do not have enough time to make use of these services, and focus more on formal education. This was particularly noticeable in Poland, in France, Czech Republic and Croatia.

Other challenges the respondents came across were: the age range and variety of young people, meaning that the target groups are not homogeneous and as a result there are different priorities and different methods for communicating with each group. There is also big competition for their attention, which makes it hard to let them know that youth workers exist and are at their disposal for providing reliable sources and giving them advice.

Another notable challenge was the difficulty in encouraging multi-sectoral communication, particularly between formal and non-formal education. In certain countries, formal education does not encourage non-formal education, which makes it difficult to go to schools and



universities where the young people are (particularly in Hungary, although it was mentioned also in Greece and Germany). This does not make reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities an easy challenge.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The respondents were asked how they manage to overcome these challenges within their organisations. The sample was very vague, since the participants were sharing very specific and different points due to their geographical diversity. Some suggested tailor-made solutions to each case, others innovative and new methods and tools. Special emphasis was given to the promotion of partnerships and cooperation within networks.

Respondents were also asked if they involve young people in the promotion and creation of their services. The vast majority said that they have involved young people at least once, during projects such as online campaigns, peer-to-peer promotion of services, etc. Something which should be examined further could be how they 'recruit' young people, which criteria they use, how big the role of the young person is, and to what extent they participate in the implementation of a project/campaign.

Moreover, the participants were asked what is missing regarding their connection with young people and what could help them to improve. Below some of the most representative responses on what is missing in the way the youth (information) workers communicate with young people are quoted. The need for professional advice and training on online tools, including social media, is most frequently mentioned.

'Maybe some specific knowledge and experiences in using new ICT tools or gadgets for different purposes - actually how to use it in the most appropriate way and for the most appropriate purpose.'

'More knowledge about communication strategy that we need to develop and ways to get young people more motivated to use our services.'

'More effective cooperation between the institutions that work with young people.'

'Youth-friendly visuals, language and everyday contact with and most importantly relevant feedback from the target group.'

'We don't know how to use new social media'



These quotes underline the need for long-term support to youth (information) workers. More specifically, they emphasise the need for professional advice on online tools, including social media; a concrete communication/marketing strategy; more effective cooperation between the institutions that work with young people; feedback from the target group; the youth services being more accessible; and the ability to create more attractive graphics, language and daily contact to motivate young people to use services.

The online survey led to the following recommendations for stakeholders in supporting youth workers and the youth sector. Firstly, they can be supported within the networks by: exchanging and sharing professional advice on online tools, including social media; assisting in the development of a communication/marketing strategy; having more effective cooperation between the institutions that work with youth; receiving strategies on how to receive feedback from the target group; providing and sharing within the networks more attractive graphics, language and daily contact.

Some suggestions from the survey on how the youth workers can be supported are: having access and training on new tools; networking; professional development; building partnerships; communication. Many respondents noted that they do not have a specific person in their organisation who deals with communication or new tools, so these new skills should be transferred to all youth workers to help them in their daily work.

Secondly, efforts should be taken by stakeholders to support the sector. Some suggestions on how to support are: sharing of knowledge/good practices; networking; training; investing in youth (information) work; funding.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study indicate that there is a need not only for new tools and methodologies on how to reach young people, but also for formal and non-formal support. This support can be provided by official institutions, networks and stakeholders through knowledge sharing, online and offline trainings, networking and better communication within the networks, efficient peer-to-peer activities, as well as access to funds in order to develop new projects and methods. Combining online and offline methods in promoting youth work and reaching more young people could also provide effective solutions.

Youth work and youth information and counselling exist to help guide young people in all aspects of their lives and in their autonomous decision-making. It builds on the fact that it is not possible to make a sound decision without knowing one's options and alternatives. In order to provide this, better cooperation between organisations and support on new tools is necessary. Another important point to underline is the adjacent need of involving more young people in the promotion of the services available for them. Peer-to-peer activities can take different forms and have the potential of both bringing innovative dynamics and filling in some of the knowledge gaps existing regarding new online tools and channels. Together, these can help youth (information) work to develop and respond better to the needs of young people and to communicate with them in more effective ways.

If youth workers and youth information workers are better supported to improve their communication, there will be huge long-term benefits, both for the sector and, most importantly, for young people. Youth workers will be able to connect more frequently and easily with young people; they will have the capacity to use up to date communication tools; they will be part of a strong network; and young people from all backgrounds will have more opportunities.