

# THE NATIONAL REPORT OF FINLAND CONCERNING THE PRIORITY OF INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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**1 National situation at the moment of the adoption of the common objectives of the priority**

In 2003 there were 26 youth information and counselling centres<sup>1</sup>, which in their operation follow the guidelines on youth information work given by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency ERYICA. Most youth information services are provided by local youth information and counselling centres, but some services are only available on the Internet. The information and counselling subject areas available in the youth information and counselling centres are largely similar. They are intended to cover issues relating to the everyday life of young people, and are based on inquiries about the information needs of the local youth.

Finnish youth information and counselling centres have organised national level cooperation on voluntary basis through their own network. The national youth work organisation, acting both as a service provider and as a representative interest group, The Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi and the Centre for International Mobility, CIMO, are the main cooperation partners<sup>2</sup> in the Finnish youth information network. CIMO operates as the national Euroguidance Centre and Eurodesk Coordinator. Euroguidance supports the activities of education and labour administration in questions of international and multicultural guidance and counselling.

The Ministry of Education supports the youth information network and its partners in activities promoting the development of youth information services, such as the organisation of training. The planning and training events of the Finnish youth information and counselling network are held two times a year. The youth information network organises work seminars in cooperation with Allianssi and CIMO. In addition, the youth information and counselling centres organise local and regional seminars.

Municipalities receive state subsidy for their youth work. Municipalities have broad self-government powers and decide on what services they provide. Municipalities are in general obliged by the Municipalities Act to disseminate information to the residents, although young people have not been mentioned as a specific target group (Timonen-Verma & Fedotoff 2003). It can be considered a feature peculiar to Finland that municipalities provide a significant amount of the financial resources for the youth information centres and services.

Municipal youth information services are based on the choice and target areas chosen by individual municipalities. Municipal information is provided as part of basic public services, in connection with different projects, or by schools, libraries and youth work. The use of the Internet and other electronic services has increased in municipal information services. Issues relating to the provision of information have been discussed in the educational events, web pages, and newsletters of The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

The Finnish library system is comprehensive and provides one source to meet young people's information needs: there is a public library in every municipality, most of which have branch libraries and operate book buses. Library services are free of charge and during the last few years the number of Internet terminals in libraries has increased. Many libraries have computers specifically designated for the use of children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> In Finland the terms youth information and counselling point and centre mean the same thing in terms of operating principles.

<sup>2</sup> Allianssi represents Finnish youth information centres in ERYICA. Allianssi also provides its own information services to the youth information and counselling centres. In addition, Allianssi maintains the Allison web info service for young people and participates in the EURO<26 youth card system.

In addition to actual youth information and counselling centres, there are several other specialised information services concentrating on specific issues, which are also used by young people. CIMO, for example, provides guidance and advice on issues relating to international mobility opportunities.

Information about careers advice and entrance to the labour market is included in the student guidance offered by educational institutions. Vocational guidance and career planning as well as the education and vocational data services are provided by labour administration.

Voluntary organisations promoting youth information and counselling services include The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and SETA, an organisation promoting sexual equality in Finland. The Mannerheim League organises peer group counselling by supporting pupil mentor activities and runs a helpline for children and young people, as well as a helpline providing support for parents. Among other activities, SETA organises education targeted at lower and upper secondary schools, offering young people an opportunity to obtain information on the diversity of sexuality and gender, and an opportunity to discuss the issue.

A list of organisations providing and disseminating information targeted at young people and national youth information and counselling websites is appended to this document (see Appendix 1).

All in all, the areas of youth services include careers counselling, social and health services, education and employment services as well as benefits, and recreation and leisure services. Due to the wide range of other services available, a feature peculiar to Finnish society is that youth information and counselling services concentrate on general youth information work: the provision of information, guidance and counselling based on questions asked by the client. Youth guidance and counselling services are needed as a public service providing an opportunity for all young people to find, understand and use the available information.

This report concentrates on reviewing the development of youth information and counselling services in terms of availability, participation and quality. In 2003 the number of youth information and counselling centres was on the increase, but there were also clearly definable gaps. Measures for ensuring quality youth information and counselling services largely remained the responsibility of the municipalities providing the services, individual people who are active in youth information work and interested in the methodology, and the voluntary youth information network. There was some experience of the participation of young people in youth information and counselling work, and it was coming to be one of the central issues discussed in the area of youth information services.

## **2 Actions undertaken at the national level since the adoption of the common objectives, by objective and by line of action**

The effort to increase the availability of services has been one of the most important lines of action in Finland. Availability has been improved through project funding provided by the Ministry of Education. The participation of young people in producing information has also been promoted.

An important task for the future is to develop a national youth information strategy that would support the development of information services throughout the country. At the moment the EU White Paper on youth policy gives the guidelines for actions. The need for a counselling strategy and for a national coordinating body for a youth information has been recognised. The Ministry of Education and the voluntary Youth Information Network have been working on a national youth information strategy, but as yet there is no national coordinator. The issue has been discussed in the meetings of the Youth Information Network and at the youth information seminar organised in spring 2005 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The latter presented alternative models for implementing national coordination. The coordination plans will probably be executed in 2006.

The Ministry of Education has made efforts to promote the availability, quality and participatory aspect of youth information. In 2004 the Ministry informed the municipalities on the European Union common objectives for information for young people. In addition, the funding of the Ministry of Education has played a vital role in the development of youth information and counselling services. On the national level, the form of work and methods to be used will receive qualitative specifications if the Youth Act currently under preparation becomes effective in 2006. The renewed Youth Act will reinforce the role of youth information and counselling services. The act provides a strong basis for the development of services, diverse cooperation and training.

The Act on the Financing of Education and Culture that regulates municipal youth work will be reformed on the same schedule as the Youth Act. In addition to government transfers, municipal youth work will be subsidised by targeted state contributions. Targeted state subsidies include appropriations for the development of youth information and counselling services.

According to the Ministry of Education, youth information and counselling services should be developed so that all young people have access to them. Particularly IT-based youth information and data management systems should be developed, not forgetting the importance of person-to-person counselling. The indicator system under the responsibility of the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs (NUORA) can be utilised in the evaluation and development of this sector. Young people should be encouraged to produce information themselves.

In 2004 NUORA published recommendations to local authorities for increasing the opportunities of young people for participation and empowerment. Among other things, the guidelines state that “young people should be given information on municipal decision making and activities in a way that they find interesting. This can be done, for instance, as peer group communication of information by young people themselves, for example, when school classes or other youth groups produce a regularly published paper or web pages for other young people.”

Attempts have been made to keep youth information and counselling activities up-to-date. The updated version of the European Youth Information Charter approved by ERYICA in 2004 has been translated into Finnish. ERYICA’s draft for the organisation of peer group youth information activities, completed in 2005, has also been translated into Finnish.

CIMO participates in European and national cooperation on youth information activities. The development of quality has been one of the priorities of Eurodesk activities in 2005. A European-level quality project will be completed by the end of the year, and it has been used for mapping out

services on European, national, and local levels. The objective of the project is to create quality criteria appropriate to the data, tools and work methods offered by the Eurodesk network.

## **Objective 1. Access for young people to information services**

***Line of action 1 a. Promote, at the appropriate levels, the development in Member States of comprehensive, coherent and coordinated information services which take account of the specific needs of young people and are as youth friendly and economically accessible as possible***

Sub-regional projects have been organised with the objective of improving the accessibility of information to young people living in remote areas. Sub-regional projects have also been implemented in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The organisation of sub-regional youth information and counselling services has been facilitated, among other things, by project subsidies allocated by the Ministry of Education.

One target has been the development of web services. Regional and local websites have improved the availability of services, also among young people living in remote areas. Mobile service applications have been developed, and with their aid it is possible to reach even those young people who do not have access to the Internet.

The development of web-based services has increased the availability of services, but at the same time the need for personal counselling has become apparent, and thus the establishment of local information centres is being promoted in connection with the projects (see Appendix 2, example 1). It is characteristic of Finnish youth information centres that there is always a possibility for personal guidance by a youth worker.

Generally the objective of the projects is to make the activity a permanent part of youth work carried out by municipalities. The proliferation of regional and local services also highlights the need for national coordination. A body for the national coordination of youth information services is on the drawing board, and will probably be implemented in 2006.

***Line of action 1 b. Facilitate equal access of all young people to information, while avoiding any form of discrimination or exclusion based on economic, social, gender, cultural or geographical grounds***

One of the principles of Finnish communities operating for the public good is that they do not target their operations only at narrow user segments. This has been taken into consideration with youth information and counselling services in order to guarantee equal access to the service for all.

As a rule, youth information and counselling services are free of charge, so that access to the services does not depend on the financial situation of young people. Most of the locations offering services are also accessible to mobility impaired users.

Equal access to information has also been promoted by adding to the number of language versions available on the info pages. The web services of some centres have been realised in as many as five languages, but generally the language alternatives available on the websites or services include, depending on the location of the centre and the number of young people with different mother

tongues, in addition to Finnish, at least Swedish and English or Sami, Russian etc. Furthermore, the Internet terminals in the youth information centres enable those with a foreign language background to use the services provided in their own language and corresponding to their cultural background. Located near some of the centres there are also other services targeted at young people, or an international meeting point. Youth information and counselling centres have been recognised as part of the activities aimed at the integration and social cohesion of immigrants.

The needs of different user groups and regional differences can also be taken into account in the acquisition of material: for example, young people living in remote areas are provided with information on education opportunities throughout the country, there should be separate educational material for girls and boys, and different language versions of the material available.

There are only a few youth information and counselling centres that offer special services. On some websites answers to special questions and problem areas are answered by experts from different fields, in addition to youth workers. As the number of staff in most youth information and counselling centres in Finland is relatively limited, it has been important to network with other local operators. Special problem areas of young people have been addressed in the context of specific projects (see Appendix 2, example 2).

***Line of action 1 c. Encourage the development of national, regional and local youth portals linked to the European Youth Portal.***

CIMO maintains a net service (Maailmalle.Net) promoting international mobility. The service is targeted particularly at young people and the information is presented in a userfriendly way. Access to information is facilitated especially by utilising information technology in information, guidance, and counselling work. In addition to a national youth portal presenting the opportunities for international mobility, CIMO participates in the content production and development of the European PLOTEUS web services and the European Youth Portal. The youth portal is the principal communications medium of the European Youth Week organised in December 2005, and all the youth information and counselling centres were provided with material related to the youth portal beforehand. To promote the active use and easy availability of the portal, information and specific training related to its operation is to be provided during 2006.

In addition to electronic services, CIMO's help line promotes the accessibility of services. CIMO's objective as a national Euroguidance Centre is that geographic equality is realised in the services relating to questions of international opportunities for young people provided by education and labour administration. An increasing number of youth counsellors are also working with young immigrants, and in this respect CIMO's Euroguidance activities provide an additional resource for the development of multicultural cooperation.

**Objective 2. Quality information**

***Line of action 2 a. monitor the quality of youth information, taking existing instruments into account (e.g. good practices and the ERYICA's European Youth Information Charter)***

ERYICA's principles promote the implementation of high quality youth information and counselling work, but also local authorities have responsibility for the services they provide. As quality processes are a crucial part of municipal youth work, quality and customer feedback systems for youth information work have been developed in several municipalities for many years now. Statistics on youth information and counselling work are collected locally, and many youth work and counselling centres have created their own feedback systems. Various indicators for monitoring quality have also been developed in connection with many projects.

Networking on national and European levels (Eurodesk, Euroguidance) has played an important role in the quality of youth information relating to international issues. At CIMO, quality control is carried out by regular evaluation of the information and customer service it offers.

A national coordination body for youth information and counselling services would promote the development not only of more efficient and systematic quality control methods but also of higher quality information content. The development of content quality in the provision of information is considered an important issue. Usually the information made available by the youth information and counselling centres is divided under various themes, and the areas of responsibility are allocated among staff members. In the production of materials it has been possible to acquire information from reliable and independent data service providers and sources. Experts from different fields and young people have also participated in the production of content for many areas of information. The realisation of information material in local youth information and counselling points is also seen as an advantage, because in this way specific local needs, that should be considered in the implementation of the national coordination of youth information services as well, can be taken into account.

***Line of action 2 b. Improve the education and training of those working in the field of youth information***

Most youth information workers have a qualification in youth work. (Timonen-Verma & Fedotoff 2003). In the basic qualification in youth and recreational counselling (dating from 2001) youth information activities have been specified as one of the primary areas of content in Interaction and Communication studies. At the moment some of the educational institutions offer more comprehensive courses in youth information and counselling in their curriculum, but the responsibility for developing the training is mostly left up to individual schools.

People with a long career in youth information and counselling have for the most part gained their knowledge abroad, through various seminars and conferences. The Ministry of Education has granted funding for youth information training seminars. In the workplace, know-how has been updated by participating in national and European development and cooperation, seminars, and training, and by relying on cooperation networks, such as other youth information centres, experienced youth information workers and work counselling.

Further training is needed for example on new information technology and a new form of youth work: the participation of young people in youth information and counselling activities. The last education event on peer group youth information and counselling was organised in spring 2005 in collaboration with the youth work departments of the cities of Helsinki and Tallinn (Estonia).

Education on the provision of information about internationalisation is the responsibility of CIMO, which as the national coordinator of the Eurodesk network has actively promoted the operation of

youth information centres and also provided training in the form of various meetings and seminars on both national and European levels. Youth information centres which are members of Eurodesk have been offered technical training in addition to meetings. Through Euroguidance activities, training on young people's international opportunities is provided annually for student advisers and careers counsellors.

It has been possible to apply for funding for Job Shadow training from the EU Youth Programme, but the utilisation of this opportunity has been rather limited, due to limited language skills and a shortage of staff resources, among other things.

The need for additional training and regular briefing and development meetings of workers has been acknowledged. The establishment of a national coordination body for youth information would improve the situation.

***Line of Action 2 c. Improve the link between information and counselling, with the aim of encouraging a learning and capacity building process among young people on how to obtain, select and evaluate information in order to become informed users of information***

In Finland youth information centres are always also counselling centres, as every local centre has a youth worker to answer young people's questions. Although Internet connections and guidance files enable independent search for information in almost all the centres, person-to-person counselling and guidance is considered a particularly important part of information services for young people. Centres concentrating on special problems and counselling are few, however, and networking with other information and counselling service providers is important. The youth departments of cities or municipalities have part of the responsibility for providing information, guidance and counselling for young people in problem situations. For example, LUOTSI, the detached youth work team operates in the streets of Helsinki in addition to which the Helsinki City Youth Department runs a youth support centre called Dooris.

***Line of action 2 d. Promote the dissemination of specific information for young people through all information channels, particularly those most frequently used by young people, such as the Internet, mobile phones, video films and cinema.***

The most advanced technology has been applied successfully to youth information in Finland for a decade now. Young people are skilled users of new technologies. Internet connections are standard in local youth information centres and they may also have video material, PowerPoint presentations etc on offer. Technology has been utilised particularly in the development of on-line services (see Appendix 2, example 3). In the creation of on-line services, attention has been paid to easy use of the sites and providing a wide range of services. Mobile services have also been developed to increase the accessibility of information and counselling services beyond the sphere of Internet connections (see Appendix 2, example 4). The intention is that service portals and new technology should only provide the medium enabling the relay of information and counselling. In the application of new technology in youth information and counselling efforts have been made to keep in mind the quality of the information content and the importance of person-to-person contact, which is of prime significance in youth information and counselling.

### **Objective 3. Participation by young people in information**

***Line of action 3 a. promote the participation of youth organisations and people working in the area of youth information at European, national, regional and local level in the preparation and implementation of youth information strategies***

The youth information network formed by youth information and counselling centres and other parties involved in youth information offers employers an opportunity to participate in the planning of youth information strategy and in the development of services. In the years 2000–2003 over thirty youth information workers from different parts of Finland participated in the preparation of a youth information strategy. The last development event was the youth information quality workshop held in connection with the Youth Work Days in Turku in spring 2005. At the moment, the youth work strategy is inevitably formulated also through training in this form of work, that is, in situations where experienced workers in the field meet students at the early stages of their professional development. Moreover, the production of content for the European Youth Portal was executed in Finland in such a way that all youth information centres were offered an opportunity to participate in the production of the content.

In many local and regional youth information and counselling centres the staff have been closely involved in the preparation of the information strategy. The entire youth department team could take part in the planning and implementation of a youth information centre.

***Line of action 3 b. Promote involvement by young people in the preparation of understandable, user-friendly, targeted information products, so as to improve the quality of the information and access for all young people***

The goal in Finnish youth information services is to meet the information needs of local young people, mostly based on questionnaires and studies on the information needs of young people. This has made it possible to map out specific needs locally, taking into account the educational background of the young people, the needs of religious and other minorities or, for example, information needs arising from internal migration. In this way the content of information corresponds with the needs of local youth, even if they have not always participated in practice in the preparation of the information material.

The participation of young people in the planning of information is reviewed in more detail in Line of Action 3 c. The planning of information and production of content converges in peer group information with the provision of information and counselling for other young people.

***Line of action 3 c. Encourage greater involvement by young people in the dissemination of information and advice (particularly in youth information centres, schools, youth organisations and the media), in order to help all young people to access information***

Peer group youth information<sup>3</sup> is a form of activity that enables the participation of young people in youth information and counselling activities. In many youth information centres the participation in

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<sup>3</sup> Päivi Timonen-Verma defines peer group youth information activities as a form of participation where a young person approaches an aspect of information activities comprehensively whereas in peer group information activities a young person concentrates on communicating information about his or her own activity, for example by producing a flyer or similar material.

peer group youth information and counselling activities is still only at the planning stage, but much has also been accomplished. In local youth information and counselling centres young people have been offered possibilities to participate in the peer group information work for peer group youth information activities. Local youth councils have also cooperated with youth information workers. The level of youth participation may vary significantly.

- Guidebooks have been prepared in cooperation with youth information workers.
- Young people have participated in the creation of youth information and counselling centre web pages or web magazines<sup>4</sup>.
- Youth councils have produced their own Internet pages independently.
- Young people have created info points in youth centres and schools.
- Young people have created video info material themselves.
- Peer group youth information has been successfully implemented in connection with various fairs.
- Young people have established their own radio channel.
- For their part, the Internet cafes operating in connection with youth information and counselling centres enable peer group youth information work to take place in everyday situations. (see also Appendix 2, example 6).

The opportunities offered by peer group youth information work are at least tried out or considered in different centres and alongside various projects (see Appendix 2, example 5). Camps and courses providing information on peer group youth information activities have been organised in connection with projects.

The Helsinki City Youth Department is currently developing peer group youth information activities with the aid of a development project started towards the end of 2004, following the guidelines on youth information in the EU White Paper on youth policy. In the Helsinki project the objective in the promotion of peer group youth information activities is to encourage young people between 13–17 years of age residing in Helsinki to participate in the collection, production and dissemination of information targeted at and of interest to them, and in related counselling activities in the youth information centre premises. The goals also include the involvement of interested parties in the youth department and youth workers in developing activities.

#### Project description:

- Peer group information activities are a new form of youth information work. In the development phase of the project the work is based on youth information activities as well as on previously developed models of peer group youth information and on the search for suitable partners.
- In spring 2005 a training session on participatory peer group information activities as a work method as a joint project with youth departments from Helsinki and Tallinn.
- In the project young people themselves run a peer group youth information point in the premises of a local youth centre and receive related training.
- According to the plan, courses on peer group information and counselling will be organised for young people and youth workers, and workers will be given guidance in starting peer group information work at their respective centres

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<sup>4</sup> In some websites young people can publish their own texts and they might also publish their own Web magazine. Examples of peer group information include Web magazine news or a discussion forum. Alternatively, on the youth information and counselling website there might be a Web space where young people can register when they want information on the activities of the youth department.

- During the year 2005 the participants prepared an info material package on peer group information.
- The objectives of the project include making peer group information part of the plans for participation within the sphere of youth work activities.
- The goals also include defining the criteria for peer group youth information work from the perspective of youth participation. Peer group youth information work can be carried out to cater for different levels of participation, but the goal is to attain genuine peer group information, where young people decide on the content of activity according to their own interests.
- A model is being developed for evaluating peer group youth information activities, which in the future may be utilised in youth information and counselling work,.
- In peer group youth information work the core process can be measured, i.e. the provision of non-formal participatory education for young people. The results can be measured from the perspective of effectiveness, in other words by evaluating how participation has benefited a young person and his or her circle of friends.

### **3 Actions taken for identifying existing knowledge in information and for implementing measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it**

Systematic measures for mapping out the state of youth information activities and to facilitate the utilisation of data are relatively few. Information on the subject is available from different sources.

- Steps have been taken on a local level in the form of questionnaires to map out the information needs of young people, needs regarding the content and form of information, and the needs of youth information workers, but the results have not yet been published in a compiled form.
- A book on youth information and counselling consisting of a comprehensive set of articles *Näkökulmia nuorisotiedotus- ja -neuvontatyöhön* (Perspectives on Youth Information and Counselling Work) was published in 2003. In addition, guide books published by ERYICA have been translated into Finnish.
- The national youth work information event organised by the Youth Information Network serves as a forum where existing knowledge and experiences can be shared and brought to a wider audience. For example, the work seminar report drafted by the Ministry of Education and the Youth Information Network dating from spring 2005, provides a partial picture of the state of youth information and counselling.
- No specific study or review on youth information activities has been carried out.
- The follow up the documents in the White Paper can be found on the Ministry of Education website (including the youth information) and this report, too, contributes to the mapping out of the youth information situation.
- Some data on youth information and counselling have been compiled on certain websites. For example, the website of the Youth Information Centre Kompassi, in Helsinki, contains facts on youth information work as a profession, educational opportunities and the principles of ERYICA. The Oulu-based NettiNappi site is updating information on youth information centres operating in Finland. In addition the site contains some information on the ethics and principles of youth information.

A national coordinating body for youth information would also be useful in terms of updating and mapping out the current state of youth information services.

## **4 Ways young people have been consulted for the implementation of the common objectives and for drawing up the report**

On a national level, the participation and hearing of young people themselves for the implementation of the objectives of youth information is still rather a new development, but on a local level participation has been more common (see Line of Action 3 c). On the local level young people's opinions have mainly been heard on the issue of participation (Objective 3).

It was proposed in 2003 that the Youth Councils play a cooperative role together with the actors involved in youth information and counselling. In some cases youth councils and forums were heard and they participated in the discussions where local authorities were considering the implementation or development of youth information and counselling services<sup>5</sup>. Young people have also sometimes been involved in teamwork. Youth teams include young people from the region, representatives of the youth councils and experts, who meet, hold discussions, and propose ideas for developing electronic youth services. This work has produced good results. Generally the idea is to involve different youth action groups over a wide spectrum, so that as many as possible feel that they are able to participate.

To involve young people in drawing up this report, a questionnaire on youth information was sent to youth councils and equivalent bodies. In this context it was mentioned that the responses would be treated confidentially. The purpose was to elicit critical comments from young people<sup>6</sup>. Judging from the questionnaires, young people themselves felt that youth information and counselling was important, regardless of whether there was a youth information centre in the locality where they live.

### **Comments of youth councils and young people on youth information and counselling:**

- Regional cooperation was seen as a good form of action. In addition to a regional website network it was considered that real centres should be established in order to ensure that local information is available to young people.
- The participation of youth councils in providing information was seen as an opportunity for active young people to be involved. It was also seen as a further advantage of the youth delegations that they are in contact with young people, with schools and educational institutions and with students. Hopes were expressed that other youth groups and organisations and young people in danger of being marginalised should be involved in these activities. The involvement of young people was needed because their peers would find it easier to ask questions and talk to them.
- With a few exceptions it was felt that the main responsibility for the activities should lie with the local authority's youth department, i.e. with adults. Adults are needed mainly for providing funds, or because they give credibility and being involved in working life and decision making, they have the means to promote youth affairs.

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<sup>5</sup> In the Youth Forum of Lapland, for example, the participation of young people in the development of youth information services has been emphasised. In addition, Future Workshops, with participants among others from the local youth council, have been organised in Lapland's capital Rovaniemi. In these workshops the participants have sought and prepared important areas of development. Issues of information services have also played a central role.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the respondents wished to remain anonymous, but mainly because they wished to present their own opinions rather than those of the local youth council. Some of the replies were supplied in the name of youth councils or delegations.

- It was felt that a positive spirit of cooperation encourages the meaningful participation of young people, while it was seen as a minus point that participation in youth activities takes up too much time.
- In general, working with the media was considered a meaningful form of participation. (Appendix 2, example 7 lists the forms of participation that young people found most attractive.)

## **5 Obstacles met in the implementation of the objectives and lines of action at the national level**

Lack of national coordination: Youth information of a high standard would be promoted by the organisation of national coordination and the creation of a clear structure for regular meetings and for the resourcing and planning of national action. Meetings of the Youth Information Network have been based on relatively unstructured cooperation. One problem has been inadequate training due to lack of qualified instructors. Each centre has to rely on its own resources and it is difficult to ensure that the youth information services follow the principles created by ERYICA. Therefore, a national body coordinating youth information and counselling is planned and will be implemented during the year 2006.

Benefits of national coordination:

- The development and quality assessment of training would be facilitated and meetings would be easier to arrange.
- The national coordination body would act as a consultant and offer support for new and planned services.
- The updating of information on current youth information and counselling services, centres and projects would be facilitated and quality monitoring would be easier.

Problems of IT-based mediation in relation to the quality of services: web portals are seen as a good form of youth information and counselling. With the new technology it is possible to bring young people within reach of the services over a wide area. However, IT-based mediation of services has its problems:

- IT-mediated interaction. Person-to-person interaction and counselling are seen as important in meeting the needs of young people.
- Developing IT-based peer group activities is a challenging task, and on the other hand, it is considered particularly desirable to promote the type of everyday peer group communication that takes place in youth centres and youth information centres. Meeting and acting together with other young people is felt to be an important form of communality.
- It is difficult to define the scope of responsibility in youth information and counselling services targeted at young people. Important issues in developing an Internet-based information and counselling service are the accurate targeting of the web service, defining the scope of responsibility and developing the information content.

Problems relating to the participation of young people: The youth councils were expected to be good partners in youth information cooperation. However, in some localities the problem has arisen that the youth councils already consider themselves to be fully occupied. Their resources are

insufficient for youth information tasks, such as giving information on study, summer jobs and the activities of various organisations, or providing educational material on sex and drugs.

Even though there are many successful examples of young people's participation in peer group youth information work in Finland, it has sometimes been difficult to arouse enthusiasm among young people for these activities. The question arose of what would be the wisest way to support young people's participation. Young people are active users of the new media, but opportunities offered by the local youth information centers and youth work are limited. Although there are good examples of young people participating in producing their own newspaper, website pages, video material and the like, lack of financial resources may be an obstacle to such activities.

When targets are set very high, realising the participation of young people in concrete terms may become problematic. On the other hand, everyday discussion, interaction and doing things together are specifically seen as important forms of participation and peer group youth information work. Youth groups do not necessarily form around youth information centres in the same way as they do around youth centres, and therefore cooperation between youth information centres and youth facilities could be increased.

Lack of human and financial resources and how to ensure continuity: In some youth information centres the personnel are in charge of several projects or other tasks, although youth information and counselling alone requires expertise in a variety of fields and is very time-consuming. Giving a positive picture of youth information in a small locality may seem a difficult challenge for one person to meet, as local authorities struggle with scanty budgets and human resources. In projects, too, the problem may be uncertainty about their continuity. Developing youth information requires a consistent, long-term effort and investment in the quality of youth information and counselling. By increasing awareness of youth information and counselling and its opportunities on both a local and a national level, we could strengthen its position as a method and form of youth work.

## **6 Impact noted so far and impact expected**

### **Impacts**

#### **The status of youth information in Finland in 2005:**

- In Finland there are at present about 40 youth information and counselling centres. The number of centres is expected to increase in the next few years to about 70. In addition the Finnish youth information network comprises regional portals and interactive electronic web services. The Eurodesk network has 14 youth information and counselling centres in Finland.
- The financial support of the Ministry of Education and the development funds of the regions have been useful in promoting the availability of the youth information services. At the end of 2005 there were nine youth information and counselling network projects funded by the Ministry of Education under way. Steps taken in connection with sub-regional projects include the utilisation of new information technology and the development of regional youth portals. Person-to-person youth information and counselling is ensured by establishing local centres as part of these projects. The Ministry of Education has also supported certain other national projects relating to youth information and counselling (see Appendix 3).

- More and more the discussion of youth information and counselling focuses on questions of youth participation and involvement in producing services and developing them so that they stress the needs of the young people themselves, in addition to traditional services. Young people have in fact been involved in producing information content and in peer group youth information work.
- In the case of immigrants, youth information and counselling centres have been found to serve as important meeting points and means of acculturation.
- As regards the quality of the training of youth workers and of information, and the monitoring of quality, it can be considered a step forward that a national body for coordinating youth information and counselling services is planned and will probably be implemented in the year 2006.

### **Long-term impacts:**

- The time span involved here is rather short to talk about long-term quality impacts. In the various local municipalities and sub-regions, youth information work of a very professional quality has already been started, but only when the national coordination body and strategy are implemented will it be possible to improve the evaluation of its quality. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities monitors and supports projects in the municipalities, but the impact of youth information is not yet known. No actual research has been carried out on the subject.
- People in youth information and counselling services have themselves done important peer group information work and coaching, and thus have been able to exchange experiences on the impact of the work. On a local level, the impacts have been positive according to general feedback received by youth information centres. A few peer group information projects have collected feedback on how young people have experienced their participation in peer group information work. According to the feedback, young people have felt that they could influence the content and implementation of peer group information projects and that they were able to produce information suited to their needs. Peer group youth information has thus had positive impacts on young people, at least on a personal level in local projects.

**Expectations in sparsely populated areas:** In sparsely populated areas youth information and counselling is expected to have important impacts on the way young people experience living in their area. In addition youth information is expected to improve the knowledge of young people about society and directly influence their readiness for civic life and at the same time also their opportunities for participation and influence. In Lapland and other sparsely populated regions, the activities of the youth information centre have even been seen as an important factor for status, and the representatives of municipalities are indeed convinced of the benefits to be gained from such activities. Even in small localities youth affairs can be given extensive consideration.

**7 Indication of the inventoried lines of action that were most and least useful, the easiest and the most difficult to implement, and proposals for adding to, deleting or modifying these lines of action.**

Most useful:

On the whole, the EU White Paper has been an important factor in promoting youth information and making the activities known both on national and local levels. The White Paper has served to arouse discussion and instigate cooperation, and to be used as a tool and means to open up funding opportunities.

In general, all the lines of action promoting the common objectives are seen as useful.

Finland is relatively sparsely populated, and therefore the Line of Action 1 a, promoting the development of comprehensive, coherent and coordinated information services, is considered as crucial. Establishing youth information centres is relatively expensive for small localities, but in spite of this, the number of youth information and counselling centres is expected to increase considerably in the next few years. Accessibility has been improved, for example, in projects funded by the Ministry of Education, through sub-regional cooperation, and local web services, and also by establishing local youth information and counselling services. As the services increase in number, national coordination is seen as important, and it is being implemented.

Also considered important is the availability of information and person-to-person counselling in all youth information and counselling centres (line of action 2 c). Despite the effectiveness of new technology and its positive impacts on the accessibility of information, the importance of human contact should not be forgotten. Not all young people have the ability to find, analyse and process information on the Internet, and this makes it advisable to discuss and consider information and its impact on the young person's own life situation with an adult.

Youth participation is felt to be a new but important issue and the lines of action supporting it (3 b and 3 c) have been promoted. Young people have acted as information producers and as coordinators for peer group youth information work. In addition to political involvement, other types of everyday community activity and participation are seen as important ways of helping young people to find their place in society. For example, the role of youth information and counselling centres in the acculturation of young immigrants has recently been brought up for discussion.

Least useful:

None of the lines of action were considered useless.

Most easily implemented:

It has been relatively easy to use the information channels favoured by young people in youth information and counselling work (line of action 2 d), as Finland is fairly advanced in the application of new IT. In Finland there are several portals supporting national youth information and counselling, and in addition there are a number of local or regional youth information and counselling portals. Portals have been relatively easy to establish, but maintaining and developing the quality of the information to be found there is felt to be both challenging and important.

Most difficult to implement:

The development of systematic training (line of action 2 b) and quality monitoring and evaluation (line of action 2 a) present a challenge as long as there is no national coordinating body.

Proposals for adding to the lines of action:

European cooperation on further education for youth workers in the field of youth information and counselling is considered useful and it is hoped that it will be increased. There is a need at the moment for further education in youth information at the European level, but methodological training courses have been cut.

Proposals for deleting lines of action:

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Proposals for developing lines of action:

It is hoped that in the future young people will participate more than ever in youth information and counselling (lines of action 3 b and c), so that youth information work keeps up with changes affecting young people, youth culture, everyday life and IT. Measures in support of participation should promote concrete plans and models for action. Defining participation in youth information work and developing methods of evaluation are seen as important steps for the future.

## **8 Summary**

In summary, it can be said that the objectives and lines of action set down in the EU's White Paper have proved useful and essential for the development of youth information and counselling. In Finland promoting the availability of youth information and counselling services and improvement of their quality have become the most important of the objectives. Active participation of young people in producing and disseminating information is still a fairly new form of action in Finland, but is nevertheless being developed continuously.

On a national level, the challenges facing the promotion of youth information are the organisation of a national coordinating body, the development of web-based information and counselling services and support for peer group youth information work. By developing web services and the utilisation of IT, the accessibility of youth information services can be improved especially in sparsely populated areas. At the same time, however, the need to ensure the high quality of content and the importance of person-to-person counselling are also stressed. At youth information centres in Finland, it is the established practice that young people can always obtain counselling under the guidance of a youth worker. This requires an investment in financial and human resources.

Finland considers it important to promote the quality of youth information and counselling and to develop methods of evaluation. The most important measure towards improving quality is seen as development of the basic qualification in youth and recreational guidance work by including youth information and counselling in the degree requirements.

The preparation of the report was entrusted to Nina Rahja, an independent researcher for the Finnish Youth Research Network. The report has been drawn up on the basis of various questionnaires and enquiries. The literature and the Internet were used as further sources of information. A questionnaire carried out for the report charted the status of youth information from the perspective of the local youth information centre. The questionnaire was sent to the e-mailing list of the youth information network, which includes all the Finnish youth information and counselling centres. The national status of youth information was charted by sending a questionnaire to the following experts: Päivi Timonen-Verma/Helsinki, Jaana Fedotoff/Oulu, Kaisa Ahokas/Kanneljärvi Institute, Sari Rehell/CIMO and Jarkko Lehtikainen/Allianssi ry, all of whom are active members of the youth information network. In addition, information was requested from Kari Sjöholm, who is special expert on sports and youth work for the Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities. Enquiries on youth information and counselling projects were sent to Kimmo Aaltonen (Youth Policy Division of the Ministry of Education) and to the regional authorities (State Provincial Offices). On November 9, 2005, a seminar on youth information and participation was held, where representatives of youth information and counselling centres and those active in the field of youth information had the opportunity to comment on the report.

A questionnaire targeted at young people was sent to all the youth councils or to one or two delegation members, whose e-mail addresses were available.

The draft report was reviewed by a working group of the Ministry of Education that was responsible for coordinating the national action required by EU youth policy. The members of the coordination group include youth researchers and organisations in addition to representatives of various areas and levels of public administration. The members representing youth organisations were responsible for presenting the views of these organisations. The Advisory Council for Youth Affairs is represented in the working group as a permanent expert member. The Section for Youth and Sports under the Committee for EU Affairs reviewed the report in a meeting held on December 8, 2005.

Responses to the questionnaires and inquiries were received from:

Päivi Timonen-Verma, Helsinki City Youth Department, Centralised Services, coordinator of targeted youth work

Kaisa Ahokas, Kanneljärvi Institute, pedagogical director for professional development and training  
Jaana Fedotoff/ Oulu Youth Information and Counselling Centre Nappi, Head of youth information and counselling services

Sari Rehell, Centre for International Mobility CIMO, Youth Affairs coordinator.

Jarkko Lehikoinen, head of international affairs Finnish Youth Cooperation Allianssi, the umbrella organisation of Finnish youth organisations

Kari Sjöholm, expert adviser on sports and youth work, The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

Kimmo Aaltonen, Director of Cultural Affairs, Department of Culture, Sports, and Youth Policy, Youth Division, Ministry of Education

Kirsi Kohonen, coordinator, State Provincial Office of Eastern Finland, Youth and Sports Department,

Marja Hanni and Seija Kähkönen, coordinators State Provincial Office of Lapland,

Erik Häggman, State Provincial Office of Western Finland:

Youth information centres:

Espoo Youth Information Centre Omena

Eurajoki Municipality Youth Information Project: Marja Oksanen and Eija Aro

City of Kemi, Youth Work Department

Kitee Youth Information Centre: Aija Penttinen

Lohja Youth Support and Counselling Centre LINKKI: Jarkko Stirrkinen

Youth Information and Counselling Centre, City of Porvoo: Satu Hautala

Helsinki Youth Information Centre Kompassi: Pirjo Mattila

Kokkola Youth Information and Counselling Centre NAPA: Mika Pietilä

Youth Information and Counselling Centre Nappi, Oulu

Ranua Youth Information Centre: Anitta Jaakola

Youth Information and Counselling Centre Jeesi, Vantaa: Susanna Vainio

Ylivieska Sub-region Youth Information Project: Merja Haukipuro

Other youth work partners:

Itä-Savon nuorisotoiminnan tuki ry, (Association for the Support of Youth Work in Itä-Savo), Director Jaana Luostarinen

Espoo Youth Council, Secretary General Mira Ahola

Kainuu Youth Information and Counselling Project, project manager Sanna-Maria Jokela

Youth Participation Project of Rovaseutu, Merja Tervo

Youth councils and young people:

Hämeenlinna Youth Forum

Toijala Youth Delegation

Taivalkoski Youth Delegation Nedu,

In addition, three young persons from different youth councils responded to the questionnaire.

Other sources:

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Allisivut: <http://www.alli.fi/tieto/nuorisotyö/nuorisotiedotus.html>. Information retrieved 15.10.2005.

Youth Information Centre Kompassi: [http://kompassi.lasipalatsi.fi/page.asp?\\_item\\_id=704](http://kompassi.lasipalatsi.fi/page.asp?_item_id=704).

State Provincial Office of Lapland:

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Oulu Youth Information and Counselling Centre website Nettinappi:

<http://www.nettinappi.fi/nuorisotiedotus/>. Information retrieved 15.10.2005.

Ministry of Education, Youth: <http://www.minedu.fi/opm/nuoriso/index.html>,

[http://www.minedu.fi/opm/nuoriso/yleiskirje\\_EUnuoriso.pdf](http://www.minedu.fi/opm/nuoriso/yleiskirje_EUnuoriso.pdf) Information retrieved 28.10.2005.

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