

# Generalist Youth Information Services in Belgium (Flemish Community) in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Belgium** (Flemish Community) which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“[www.eryica.org](http://www.eryica.org)” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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# B

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## BELGIUM

### Flemish Community

#### INTRODUCTION

In Flanders, at the present time, there are 19 **Youth Information and Counselling Centres** (YICCs) and 35 **Youth Information Points** (YIPs). These youth information centres and points form a network which is currently undergoing considerable development. Many of the YICCs are called Youth Advice Centres (JAC - *Jongeren Advies Centrum*).

In this document, first the work of the Youth Information and Counselling Centres is described, and then the network of Youth Information Points is explained.

#### BACKGROUND OF YICCs

The first YICCs were initiated in the early 1970's as a reaction against the traditional social services. In 1972, the Ministry of Culture (Flemish Community) subsidised a few centres under the name of "experimental youth work". The criteria for this financial support were very vague, only mentioning that there should be provision for "information" and "counselling". Based on these two criteria, a certain distinction was drawn between Youth Information Centres and Youth Counselling Centres. In 1979, both functions were integrated into one centre.

At the beginning of the 1980's the YICCs were put under the aegis of the Ministry of Welfare. In 1994, a reorganisation of welfare work was prepared, according to

which all the social services in each region had to amalgamate with the intention of improving the co-operation between the different welfare organisations. In 1995, these polyvalent centres were formed, and the YICCs were put under one roof with the other services (centres for the homeless, family advice centres, etc.)

#### AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The main principles of a YICC are: first, an informal "open door" policy, indicated by a willingness to give time and space to users. Second, the service is free of charge and confidential. The third principle is an emancipatory attitude; young people are considered as independent enquirers, with a right to information and to be allowed to make their own choices and decisions.

*The information for this text has been provided by In Petto, which supports a network of more than 50 youth information / counselling centres and points in the Flemish Community:*

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## MODUS OPERANDI

To anticipate the questions and problems of young people, the YICCs try to ensure that their services cover as wide a range of topics and needs as possible.

The functions of the YICCs are seen as information, counselling, training and preventive action. They try to address young people both collectively and individually.

### Information

Many counselling enquiries are in the form of simple information questions. And a lot of information questions contain elements of advice and/or further counselling to be provided either by the YICC itself or by some other service to whom the user is referred.

### Counselling

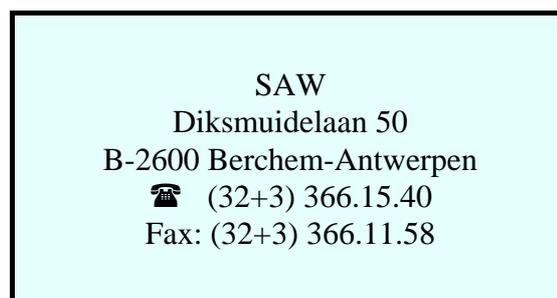
Most YICC workers are a kind of “all round” counsellors. Specialisation in one area is not really possible. The possibility to refer the user to other relevant services is important.

### Training, Prevention and Social Action

The YICC worker participates (sometimes as an individual and at other times as a representative of the centre) in social actions against racism, youth unemployment, etc. In addition to this, the YICC worker organises regular prevention campaigns on various issues, such as a street action on “safe sex”, a prevention campaign in dance-halls on the dangers of “Exstasy”, etc.

YICCs also give a lot of attention to different training projects for young people. The intention is to train young people and give them skills, to inform them about the YICC centre and to keep in touch with the life-styles of young people.

The **Federation for General Welfare Work** (SAW - *Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk*) is an umbrella organisation of different social services and is recognised by the Family and Social Welfare Administration of the Flemish Community. The most important role of SAW is to look after the general interests of affiliated centres and to support them.



## THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The Flemish Government subsidises 2,5 employees per YICC and the running costs of the Centres. Most of the employees are social workers; they are not civil servants.

Each YICC initiates its own actions, and decides the areas of work which require priority attention, depending on regional needs.

## BACKGROUND OF YIPs

Since the second half of 1991, **In Petto** (which replaced FJIAC, the former federation of YICCs) has worked, in co-operation with the Flemish Association for Youth Offices and Youth Counselling, on a plan to create a network of Youth Information Points (YIPs). Through local YIPs in more localities, it is aimed to bring information closer to young people.

Since 1995, services which already give information to young people can seek to acquire a quality label, the YIP logo. They receive this quality label when they fulfil certain criteria. Organisations which have

this quality label are called Youth Information Points.

In almost every municipality of Flanders, there is a community Youth Centre, which:

- a) is active in the preparation and execution of the local youth policy
- b) responds to the needs of support services and takes its own initiatives
- c) emphasises recreational possibilities for young people and the social integration aspect of youth provision.

Youth counsellors are civil servants who work in these Youth Centres. They constitute an ideal partner for the expansion of the YIP network. In the present first stage only community Youth Centres and YICCs can be considered to receive the YIP label, but it is envisaged that in the future other organisations such as youth houses, schools and libraries will be able to participate in this programme.

At the present time there are approximately 41 YIPs. Most YICCs and approximately 27 community Youth Centres can use the YIP logo and the number is still growing.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF YIPs**

The method of youth information is focused on giving young people a better understanding of their society, to extend their choices and to support their growing independence. Young people should be able to acquire information which is accessible, objective, up-to-date and reliable, when they need it. The contents and the form of the information should be adapted to the needs and interests of young people. YIPs should work on a pluralistic basis, offering objective and independent information to young people. Young people have the right to obtain relevant information. This right should not be limited.

### **Profile of "In Petto" Network**

#### ***Support Structure:***

In Petto

#### ***Network:***

More than 50 Youth Information and Counselling Centres and Youth Information Points

#### ***Legal Status:***

In Petto and most local centres are non-profit associations.

#### ***Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:***

60 salaried employees

#### ***Responsible Governmental Body:***

Youth Work Section  
Social Welfare Administration  
Ministry of the Flemish Community

### **HOW YIPs WORK**

Each YIP has to have links with other forms of youth work and youth welfare work. A number of professional principles have been adopted which are based on the European Youth Information Charter adopted by ERYICA in 1993.

In principle every YIP aims to have as wide a range of information on offer as possible. Easy access to the information and the clarity of its presentation are very important too. Two products help to achieve these aims:

#### **a) Delta Guide**

The Delta Guide is a computer application containing a variety of information in a

format which is accessible, objective, accurate, up-to-date and easy to consult.

## **b) Catalogue**

The catalogue consists of four sections with information-sheets on each issue (picture of the file, list of contents, price, order-form, etc). The catalogue is meant as well as for the staff as for the users of the YIPs.

## **CO-ORDINATION**

The network of YIPs in Flanders is supported by In Petto, which is recognised by the Youth Work Administration of the Flemish Government. In Petto specialises in the field of youth information and prevention activities. The support of In Petto for the centres deals primarily with the content and methodology of the work, seeking to improve the quality of the youth information services and to increase the level of support received from the Government.

At the present time the Youth Information Point network is in the process of being established, in a context where the resources available from the Government for the project are not sufficient.