

Generalist Youth Information Services in Norway in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Norway** 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” - 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 “Websites 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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NORWAY

INTRODUCTION

The first "generalist" youth information centre in Norway was created in 1980 in Oslo, by the Oslo Municipality. At the present time, there are 9 such centres in Norway and one information point.

The first youth information centre was closed in 1988. Since 1989, youth information policy in Norway has entered a new stage, with the concept of "generalist" youth information gaining credibility at the level of national government, and the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs supporting a number of local projects. 16 youth information centres have been created since that time.

The Norwegian law which regulates the functions of local authorities states that **each local authority is responsible for its own information strategy**, as long as it fulfils certain requirements concerning the information to be provided to the public. In the field of information for young people, this means that each local authority decides whether or not to operate a separate youth information centre. Most centres are administered by the local authority where the centre is located.

The youth information centre in the centre of Oslo is the only one which is run by a non-governmental organisation. The City of Oslo is both a county and a local authority, split into 25 semi-autonomous regions. Oslo has two other youth information centres, which are run by local administrations.

The centres are different in size but, in principle, they all offer the same range of information, in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter. One of the centres, organised on the county level, is about to establish youth information points in local libraries.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The primary aim of each youth information centre is to increase young people's level of knowledge and understanding through information and advice, and thereby to improve their ability to take responsibility for their own development.

The basis of youth information work in Norway corresponds to the principles and goals stated in the **European Youth Information Charter**.

The information for this text has been provided by UngInfo Oslo, which represented the Norwegian youth information centres at the international level until November 1997:

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GOVERNMENT POLICY ON YOUTH INFORMATION

In Norway, the Royal Ministry for Children and Family Affairs (BFD) has a department which is responsible for youth policy at the national level. Youth information is a part of youth policy, and the Ministry's strategy in this area is currently being reviewed and developed. One important issue is youth participation.

During the last few years, there have not been any major political or structural changes which have affected youth information in Norway.

As mentioned before, there is no national policy on the location of youth information centres, as this task has been transferred to the counties or local authorities. If a county or local authority wishes to start a youth information centre, they may do so, but not all have received, or can expect to receive, project funding for this purpose from the Ministry.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

One centre is run by a voluntary organisation (UngInfo Oslo), one is run by a county (UngInfo Nordland), and the rest are run by local authorities. Usually the staff of the centres are employed by the local authority. However, a few are employed by a non-governmental organisation, and in addition some centres have conscientious objectors working for them and/or staff paid through employment promotion programmes.

At the present time, there are 18 full-time employees working in the youth information centres in Norway. Voluntary workers are not employed in youth information activities. As has already been mentioned, the current policy of the BFD is very positive towards youth

participation. This is expected to have an effect on youth information centres.

The centres are financed by local authorities or counties and by project funding from the central government.

Profile of Norwegian Network

National Youth Information Forum:

Samarbeidsforum for
Ungdomsinformasjon i Norge

Network:

9 local Centres

Legal Status:

Most local centres are administered by local authorities.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

18 salaried employees

Responsible Governmental Body:

Royal Ministry for Children and Family
Affairs (*national level*)

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

Until November 1997, UngInfo Oslo represented the youth information centres in Norway within the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), being a joint member of the Agency with Atlantis Youth Exchange. As from November 1997, UngInfo Nordland took over the representation, still sharing the membership with Atlantis. The Norwegian representatives distribute information from the European network to the other youth information centres in Norway.

In September 1997, the youth information centres in Norway established a **national forum for youth information**. All youth information centres existing at the time of establishing the forum became members of it. The idea is to create a stronger network between the centres and to develop youth information further as a profession in Norway. The forum has a board which meets two to four times a year; the forum itself meets annually. There is no membership fee, so financial assistance will be sought from the Ministry to meet the costs of meetings.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION STRUCTURES

Governmental structures do play a role in relation to youth information centres, at the level of funding as well as in the definition of their aims. Especially through their budget decisions, governmental structures decide the fields of work which will be given priority in a given period. It is rare for an official structure to initiate an information campaign on a topic concerning young people.

There is no system of official recognition of youth information centres. The Ministry for Children and Family Affairs has indicated that it does not wish to initiate any such recognition system.

The centres do not produce research material, but may provide information on young people's information needs. This is done, inter alia, in the annual reports of the centres and in other papers. The mass media use the centres when they need information on the situation of youth or on their attitudes to particular issues.

The youth information centres are primarily oriented towards providing information, and are not very controversial, neither in terms of management nor in their services.

TYPICAL SERVICES OFFERED BY CENTRES

Most of the centres provide information, not counselling. The centres seek to provide information materials on every issue that concerns young people. The information covers the following main topics: employment, education, housing, cultural and leisure activities, health, social and political issues, rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers, financial and legal matters, and travel.

It is common that the centres offer computer facilities to prepare job or housing applications, a telephone, and increasingly access to Internet so that the user has access to a wider range of information. In addition, each summer UngInfo-Oslo runs "Use It", a tourist information service for young visitors to Norway.

There are not yet any written guidelines on how to set up and run a youth information centre in Norway. The newly-established forum is now working on common guidelines. As it happens, the centres are very similar, largely because there has been regular and close contact between them. The European Youth Information Charter is well-known in Norway and is applied by all the centres.

Youth information in Norway has, as its primary target-group, young people between 15 and 25 years of age. All services are free of charge, including brochures and the use of telephone or computers. Opening hours differ, according to the specific location of each centre.

Every centre has its own procedures for collecting, storing and disseminating information material. A detailed filing system was once developed by the Stavanger centre, but it was mainly used as a starting-point for the system adopted by

each centre since it proved to be too detailed to be practical for everyday use in some centres.

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Very little organised research has been conducted in Norway into the information needs of young people.

Young people visiting a youth information centre will normally be registered according to the type of information requested, the date and hour of the visit or of the call (if the enquiry was made by telephone). In this way, a centre can identify what topics are of interest to young people, and at which time of year they ask about a specific topic. Some issues seem to be more seasonal than others. The informal observations of the centre's staff also play an important role in the assessment of the information needs of young people.

The centres have their own methods of applying the information which they obtain when they assess the information needs of young people. At present, there is no common approach in this area.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

Most centres direct young people to other services if they themselves cannot provide the information or service which is requested. As the centres basically provide information and counselling, a young person will be directed, for instance, to a local youth health centre, if she or he suffers from physical or psychological problems.

It is up to the centres themselves to create and formalise their co-operation with other institutions, but most centres in Norway seem to collaborate well with employment offices, social security agencies and

education offices, as well as with other relevant youth services.

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

As an ideal, the information provided shall meet the need expressed by the user, shall be objective, and independent of any political and/or commercial interests. Every centre is expected to ensure that this is so, and this is a constant concern in the daily work of the centres.

Until now, there is no general provision for the external training of centre staff. The centres provide internal training, and some organise external training in the use of new information and communication technologies, or in the development of information strategies. Study visits are also made to other countries to see how their youth information centres operate.

SPECIALISED INFORMATION SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In addition to the "generalist" youth information centres, there are specialised information services in Norway aimed at young people in a number of fields.

Vocational guidance and careers counselling is to some extent provided by the Employment Offices, and by a small number of private firms.

Schools have their own **health services** and **pedagogical / psychological services**. Many local authorities have their own health centres for young people. These services are free.

In the field of **personal relations and sexuality**, there are a number of health services for young people, as well as medical services specialising in the field of sexuality and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. There are in addition a number of free telephone services, which

young people can use to obtain advice on these issues, or to talk about personal problems.

In the area of the **prevention of drug abuse**, there are specific telephone services which provide information and access to counselling and assistance.

International youth exchanges: Atlantis Youth Exchange (*Rolf Holmsgt. 18, N-0665 Oslo 6*) is a non-profit-making foundation, established by the Norwegian Youth Council in 1987. The objective of Atlantis is to promote intercultural understanding among young people. This goal is pursued by offering to youth organisations and to individual young people various types of exchange programmes as well as information and guidance in the field of youth mobility.

Atlantis Youth Exchange shares the membership in ERYICA with UngInfo Oslo. Atlantis has published the booklet "*Guide for Young Visitors to Norway*" as part of the ERYICA series. Previously a guide-book for Norwegians dealing with youth exchanges has been published, in addition to various information leaflets on mobility-related topics.

Atlantis was also responsible for the Norwegian part of "*Nordisk Ungdomshåndbok*" (Nordic Youth Handbook), a guide to the systems of employment, education and exchange in the Nordic countries. This publication, initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers, was published in 1995.

When Eurodesk, a data-bank on education, training and youth programmes initiated by the European Commission, was launched in Norway, it was operated by Atlantis. From 1 January 1998, a structure depending on the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs will be responsible for this service.