

Generalist Youth Information Services in Slovenia in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Slovenia**
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 “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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SLOVENIA

INTRODUCTION

The first youth information and counselling centres in Slovenia were established at the beginning of the 1970s on the initiative of youth work specialists, who sought to interest young people and to promote constructive working relations with them. Young people came to these centres for help with much more confidence than they would have had when going to official institutions. Today, a number of such centres are operating in different parts of the country. They are usually non-governmental organisations, and they offer information and counselling, in almost all fields, specifically to the young. They provide information related to leisure activities, as well as help and counselling in the fields of employment, alternative education, etc., in addition to dealing with psycho-social and health problems.

In 1994, the Youth Office in Nova Gorica, and later the Youth Office of the Republic, which is largely responsible for youth policy in Slovenia, in co-ordination with the Youth Council of Slovenia as well as some specialists from non-governmental organisations, took the initiative to discuss and draft the “**Concept for Providing Information and Counselling for Young People in Slovenia**”, as a document to provide a framework for youth information and counselling services.

Following the decision by the Government to organise services on the basis of the “Concept” document, it was recognised

that there was a need for a national co-ordinating body that would support local centres, non-governmental organisations and various existing counselling institutions, with information and advisory services on a non-commercial, non-political and ideologically independent basis. This body would offer information and advice to those working with young people as well as to young people themselves. MISSS was established in 1995 to fulfil this function.

MISSS began operating in January 1996. Initially it set out to collect data concerning organisations throughout the country and to ascertain the current situation in the various regions concerning the needs of young people and the needs of existing information and counselling services.

On the basis of 12 centres which operated according to the principles contained in the European Youth Information Charter (adopted by ERYICA in 1993), the work of MISSS advanced rapidly and in a few short months it had organised the existing centres into a youth information network.

The information for this text has been provided by “Mladinsko informativno svetovalno središče Slovenije” (MISSS):

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The relationship between MISSS (as the national centre) and local centres is not a hierarchical one. It is, however, important that local centres undertake to operate in accordance with the twelve principles of the European Charter (which each centre signs), and that they are prepared to co-operate with MISSS, which works to obtain for the network as a whole the information and counselling services of independent specialists from every region who have experience of youth matters.

AIMS OF YOUTH INFORMATION

In this area the role of the Youth Office of the Republic of Slovenia is to stimulate the development of youth information and counselling services in Slovenia, and its basic policy on this subject is based on Recommendation 7 adopted in 1990 by the Committee of Ministers in the framework of the Council of Europe. The Youth Office organised the preparation of the “Concept for Providing Information and Counselling for Young People in Slovenia” which provided for the establishment of a youth information and counselling network, and for the creation of a national co-ordinating body responsible for the development and operation of this network, as well as for co-operating with European partners.

The Concept document laid down the theoretical and organisational framework for the development of these activities in Slovenia. Decisions concerning the content of the information and counselling services to be provided are made according to the needs and interests expressed by young people in Slovenia over time, provided that they do not conflict with the Council of Europe Recommendation.

When the Slovenian network was established, certain criteria for joining the network were decided (which are contained in a declaration signed by the organisation seeking to join); these criteria

are in accordance with the principles presented in the European Youth Information Charter.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

The legal requirements which authorise the provision of information and counselling for young people are contained in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia adopted in 1992, which refers to various basic constitutional rights and freedoms, and stipulates that young people have the right to complete, universal and reliable information without obstacles, as well as to advice concerning all problems and spheres which interest them. The specific rights mentioned in the **Constitution** include the following:

- Rights of Children & Minors (Article 56)
- Education and Schooling (Article 57)
- Security of Employment (Article 49)
- Freedom of Work (Article 49)
- Provision of Proper Housing (Article 78)
- Protection of Personal Data (Article 38)
- Protection of the Right to Privacy and of Individual Rights (Article 35).

The “Concept” document was prepared at a time when various forms of youth information and counselling were already being successfully provided on a local level in Slovenia. There was, however, no organised network of such services and they lacked common criteria governing their operations, which were necessary and would have assisted their insertion into the local and national framework of social services. The Concept determines:

- the social, technical and ethical aspects of developing youth information and counselling services (definition of terms, aims, basic principles, content and forms)
- the organisational aspects of providing youth information and counselling services (co-ordination of sources of information and of those offering inform-

ation and counselling services, collection and distribution of information, evaluation of services)

- who should be the providers of youth information and counselling services in Slovenia (the Youth Office of the Republic, MISSS and local centres, the Joint Committee for Youth Information and Counselling).

The governmental body responsible for youth information policy in Slovenia is the **Youth Office of the Republic** (Smartinska 134/b, SLO-1000 Ljubljana - ☎ 386+61-446.326 - fax 386+61-445.598), which is part of the Ministry of Education and Sport.

Until 1991, youth policy was decided on a centralised state level. The participation of non-governmental organisations in youth policy was limited. Following the independence of Slovenia in June 1991, there was a move to establish non-governmental organisations throughout the country, which reflected the needs of local communities, especially in the field of help with personal problems, self-help forms of assistance and the organisation of leisure activities. This development of non-governmental structures confirmed the increasing pluralism of Slovenian society and life in general.

The policies followed by local centres vary from region to region, depending upon the past circumstances that reigned in a specific area. They also differ according to the different population structures, the varying levels of economic and social development, as well as the ability of authorities and local inhabitants to understand youth matters.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

The main aim of establishing new local youth information centres is to develop non-political, non-governmental organis-

ations, and to restructure existing organisations which, as remnants of the former system, represent the only (or strongest) bodies which are working with young people in their localities.

An effort is also made to support the individuals who provide youth information and counselling. MISSS promotes the involvement of young people in this work, especially unemployed youngsters who have at least a basic qualification relevant to these activities. In addition to logistical support, MISSS organises training for them, with the help of specialists who are already working in the youth information network or in some other organisation involved in youth work.

Voluntary work has a long tradition in Slovenia, and there is a range of prevention centres and alternative centres dealing with youth-related issues, especially in student organisations. Volunteers are mainly students who wish to develop their knowledge in the field of their studies: students finishing their degrees, and young professionals who are not yet employed. They receive some remuneration for their efforts, the amount usually depending on the financial capabilities of the organisation. Public programmes to reduce unemployment also provide opportunities for unemployed individuals who wish to work for the good of the public, which includes youth information work. While the State pays their salaries, the employees are solely responsible for their work to the centre in which they are employed. This type of employment is usually for a pre-determined period, often with the option of prolonging the employment contract.

The financing of a youth information centre, especially one that is a non-governmental organisation, depends to a large degree upon the centre itself and its ability to obtain the support of funding agencies, which may be the central

government, the municipality, private companies or sponsors. As a member of the youth information network, each centre will receive professional support from MISSS, as well as assistance in dealing with local authorities in order to obtain premises, financial means and other benefits for their activities.

Profile of the Slovenian Network

National Co-ordinating Body:

- MISSS

Network:

- 1 national centre (MISSS)
- 12 local centres

Legal Status:

All the centres (including MISSS) are non-profit associations.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

15 salaried employees

Responsible Governmental Body:

Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

MISSS provides support for existing activities, assistance in making contacts, securing premises and funding, as well as professional advice for those who are establishing local centres in areas where youth information and counselling are needed.

The youth information and counselling network in Slovenia has developed in response to a number of needs related to

the development and functioning of local and regional centres, and is now a part of their daily reality.

Admittance into the network is subject to certain conditions which are laid down in the Concept document. Organisations which are providing information and counselling must undertake to operate in accordance with the 12 principles of the European Charter, which also apply to MISSS at the national level. As the funding for the operation of MISSS is secured on the basis of a long-term agreement, admittance into the network is on a non-profit basis. Belonging to the network offers access to data, help in forming contacts with other providers, a mutual exchange of information, assistance with operational matters, training of staff, and joint efforts in searching for the financial means to purchase information technology. A co-ordinating body of the network ensures that the activities conform to general regulations.

This **national Joint Committee for Youth Information and Counselling** is composed of 8 persons, being 5 representatives of the local centres in the youth information network, 2 representatives of MISSS and 1 representative of the Youth Office of the Republic.

The role of this body is to review and supervise the management of the network's regional members, and to co-ordinate and contribute to the decision-making process relating to national policy in the field of youth information and counselling.

The tasks of the Committee include evaluating the work of the local centres, planning the development of youth information and counselling activities in the various regions, preparing recommendations for the improvement of the network, dealing with the issues and problems that arise in youth information work, and contributing ideas and plans for the future.

It is significant that youth information and counselling in Slovenia has rapidly developed from a situation with a few individual local counselling centres into a functioning information and counselling network for young people. In the past, work with young people was heavily institutionalised by the State, now it has been re-oriented into a more friendly treatment of young people. This approach has also been based on the needs which young people themselves have expressed. The Preventive Information and Counselling Centre (PICCC, in Ljubljana), which is the structure from which MISSS has been developed, has also managed to move out of its previous State framework, and re-organise itself as a non-governmental organisation. In a short period of time MISSS has become the reference-point for youth information and counselling in Slovenia, combining counselling activities with information work and offering a range of information and advisory services to both young people and to those who work with young people.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION STRUCTURES

The Youth Office of the Republic, which is the primary body for managing, developing and carrying out youth policy, has young individuals in its services whose main principles are efficiency and friendliness to the user. Thus, there has been no experience of political pressure exerted concerning youth information work, although there is a strong desire to connect the local centres throughout Slovenia with the network. A specific situation has thus arisen, which places the different partners in an equal position, with spokespersons for the profession involved at the government level. This means that MISSS is autonomous in the management of the content of the work. As for the Youth Office, it is part of the network as a member of the Joint Committee, where it

acts to stimulate the development of activities by contributing various recommendations and ideas, many of which have so far led to successful measures for determining the needs of individual centres, training specialists and conducting evaluations.

Concerning contacts with local authorities, where developments are slower, there was widespread approval of the Concept document in all parts of the country. Many confirmed their support by presenting plans for the development of youth information and counselling services in their areas. Local authorities also actively co-operate in the search for premises for youth information and counselling services; in some places they help to cover the costs of such premises.

At both the national and local level, the priority areas in which information is provided for young people are: **providing help with personal problems and crises**, and **informing about leisure activities**. Within these two spheres, the more precise areas of information are adjusted according to the specific needs expressed by young people. To date, there has not been any type of "recommendation" or intervention from the State that would impede the quality of the information and the relative independence of the local and national centres.

TYPICAL SERVICES OFFERED BY CENTRES

The majority of local information and counselling centres were established with a view to meeting the needs of young people in their localities, especially needs related to their social life, leisure activities and entertainment. The people working in these centres are increasingly young students and specialists, who could improve the organisation of activities and services for young people and who could offer information about professional help

services (both governmental and non-governmental). They co-operate with cultural societies, youth clubs, employment services for youth and students, careers advice services, schools and other educational services, centres for youth tourism, organisers of youth entertainment, and on the basis of this co-operation they offer to young people an extended information service. Concerning the content of information services, the general recommendation of MISSS is to cover at least the following fields of information:

- **education** (full-time, part-time, supplementary, scholarships, student housing)
- **employment** (full-time, part-time, career planning, public services)
- **health** (addictions, AIDS, handicaps, mental health)
- **personal problems** (adolescence, family relations, crisis situations)
- **leisure activities** (information about culture, sports, entertainment, youth tourism at home and abroad)
- **legal advice** (information about non-commercial legal aid services, access to lawyers)
- **other topics of interest to young people** (religion, new age, sub-cultures).

MISSS promotes the development of counselling activities and help services for young people within the framework of the local centres; this approach is necessary due to the fact that young people tend to avoid dealing with official institutions, which operate according to different principles and regulations that are not particularly familiar to young people. The result is that young people do not solve their problems in an appropriate manner, or even not at all. The worker in an information and counselling centre, especially if s/he is also young, may be able to establish a better contact with the user. The availability of a service offering appropriate information in a professional manner enables a young person to make decisions

and solve problems in the quickest and cheapest way possible.

As the network was established in Slovenia effectively in 1996, it has not yet been possible to analyse the typical approaches to young people in the each region. The general advice of MISSS is that offering a quality information service can already serve as a good introduction to effective counselling.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The conditions for access to information are relatively good in Slovenia, since the former governmental structure for youth work was a non-profit political organisation that provided services based on the work of volunteers. The good side of this heritage is the philosophy which still treats youth as a population which does not have to pay for information and counselling services. In searching for specialists to help with the activities of the network, the non-commercial approach is widely supported.

In determining the opening hours of services, the local centres and the providers of information and counselling are advised to adjust their work schedules to the needs of young people. The MISSS recommends that services be open in the afternoon when the majority of young people finish with their daily school obligations. The members of the network agree with this aspiration, although it is more difficult to achieve this with the providers of the individual services, especially where institutionalised forms of welfare and counselling are concerned.

For the collection and selection of data, MISSS recommends that information received from those providers who submit their programmes and are prepared to co-operate with the local and national centres on a long-term basis be collected in a

register of information services. This means that the providers will notify all changes in their activities (discontinuation of particular activities, new programmes, changes of address), thus maintaining a high level of accuracy and quality in the information made available to the public.

The training of information workers and counsellors will focus on the areas of primary and secondary prevention, communications and language learning; for the latter an effort is made to obtain sponsorships at relevant language schools. It is also intended to develop internal training concerning the functioning of the network, and the possibilities for international co-operation in the field of youth information and counselling.