

EUROPEAN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFICERS' FORUM

STATEMENT ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION

"Young people have little power in our Society and yet are full of hope, ideas and aspirations. In youth work, our job is to encourage young people to fulfill their hopes and ambitions and in doing so gain more control over their lives both individually and collectively".

The forum reaffirms its belief in the importance and necessity for all States to develop and implement a Youth Policy which ensures practical ways and means for young people to authentically participate in all levels of decision making.

Young people are marginalised and thus feel cut off from a world which takes no account of their views. We are not talking of tokenism but the full integration of young people into our decision making structures.

Having said this, we do recognise the enormity of the task which lies before us, but every long journey begins with a single step and the process must begin now.

A number of critical areas need to be examined at the start of this process.

Young people suffer from lack of experience in relation to decision making and often thus seem unwilling to take part but this could also be attributed to the fact that they do not see the relevance of many of the areas of decision making that they are invited to participate in.

We must struggle, with the young, to find ways of identifying the issues which are relevant to them and then fully explore a wide range of methods which will encourage young people to examine these issues and make their views clear.

We should not assume that the present systems are the best and we should be prepared to be flexible.

It is also important that this problem be tackled in all areas of young peoples lives and not in isolated contexts. The process must be started in schools, the work place, in the home and in the community.

The problem of willingness does not only lie with the young and we must be aware that our decision makers hold the key to full participation. One of the main keys to power is having all of the relevant information. Decisions that are made without all of the information cannot be competent. Thus we must ensure that all information that is relevant to an issue is made available to young people and that it is clear enough to be understood.

The role of the worker is crucial in this process. We should recognise that we too are not only products of the same system which denies the young their rightful place in society but that we are often the bridge between young people and the adult world.

We invite all workers to look at their own practice and to truthfully examine whether or not we are part of the process of liberation or domination.