

## **Who? Why? How?**

The Norwegian Youth Council (LNU) is an umbrella for more than 70 child and youth organisations in Norway. Our member organisations are diverse in activities, politics, size and strength, but are all based on voluntary work performed by children and youth from South to North in Norway.

This report is an NGO follow-up to the report delivered by the Ministry of Family Affairs evaluating Norway's youth policy. LNU has chosen some of the prioritised areas (area 8, 9, 10 and 11) with special attention to area 10, which is an area LNU constantly works with. We have also challenged our member organisations to contribute to the evaluation. Please note that the evaluations performed and presented by our member organisations not necessarily correspond with the view of LNU.

### **AREA 8: ENCOURAGING LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH**

93% of children and youth growing up in Norway take part in voluntary organised activities, including child and youth NGOs and sports. This makes Norway exceptional when it comes to voluntary activities, and one can say that Norway is an organisation society. However there is a challenge for the organisations to reach ethnic minority youth and include them in the activities. Therefore research, funding and activities are needed to enable the youth organisations to be open, inclusive and interesting for all groups of youth living in Norway. The government and the youth organisations have so far not done enough to open up for new groups of members, and as organisations are an important part of the Norwegian democracy this is a challenge that has to be faced by national governments as well as traditional youth organisations.

According to Norwegian regulations all board members have to be the age of 18 or older for an organisation to open a bank account. At the same time regulations demand that all members of the youth organisations at the age of 15 or older have equal democratic rights to get funding from The Ministry of Family Affairs. Despite fulfilling the demands from The Ministry of Family Affairs youth organisations are facing difficulties opening bank accounts. As The Ministry of Family Affairs as well as the youth organisations want youth activities to be organised by youth and for youth, this barrier for youth organisations is a strike to the democratic rights of youth. It is also a strike to the Freedom of Association as authorized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The member organisations of LNU have identified a need for a register for organisations providing the organisations with certain rights as the right to open bank accounts independently of the age of the board members. Such action should be taken with no further delays to secure young people's possibilities to arrange own and democratic leisure activities.

To support, promote and encourage the local culture life, the Parliament decided in 2000 to establish a funding mechanism for local NGO groups named Frifond. Frifond is set up in a non-bureaucratic way and is administered by The Norwegian Youth Council and other umbrellas. Frifond supports thousands of local activities every year and enriches the local culture life and variety of activities for youth.

To some extent the government recognizes the value of youth organisations' contributions to leisure activities. The Parliament has decided that sports activities and culture activities shall share the profit of the national lottery. However The Norwegian Youth Council observes that the culture organisations and institutions do not receive as much funding as the sports organisations. LNU recognizes the value of sports as a leisure activity. At the same time we will promote cultural activities open to all and activities being more democratic than most sports structures.

According to the law of education all municipalities are to offer education in music and culture on their own or in cooperation with other municipalities. The ministry of Education administrates funding earmarked for the schools offering such education. The education includes music, dance, drama and other forms of art.

In addition to a broad variety of activities organised by and for youth in the youth organisations, most local governments have youth clubs open to youth aged 13 till 18. Due to different budget situations the activity level and number of youth clubs vary between municipalities. There is no law requiring access to youth clubs, and therefore it is important to keep the support for local NGOs to ensure local activity also in municipalities and districts without public youth clubs.

Youth NGOs also need access to different arenas to perform their activities. Norway is a country with high costs, and it would be of great help for the organisations if they get access to public buildings like schools. Local governments should recognize the value of activities organized by youth NGOs. Such access should therefore be of no cost for the organisations.

Leisure-time activities are to some extent included in the education programmes. In principle the activities should be costless for the participants, but now and then parental co-funding of such activities is discovered and explained as necessary for the activity to take place. To The Norwegian Youth Council it is important that these activities are open to all with no cost for the students or parents.

Norway contributes to the European Union YOUTH Programme, and Norwegian youth groups can apply for funding for youth exchanges with other youth groups in EU member states. The selection committee, where both the government and LNU are represented, gives priority to projects including disadvantaged youth and youth with special needs. LNU supports the priorities of the selection committee. At the same time we want to raise attention to the fact that the potential for group exchanges and other activities within the YOUTH programme is a lot bigger.

## **AREA 9: ENSURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN**

In Norway girls and boys, young men and young women have by law equal rights to education. Everyone is guaranteed access to 13 years of education, including elementary school (7 years), secondary school (3 years) and upper secondary school (3 years). There are kindergartens for students, and single parents are given priority in these kindergartens to ensure they have a chance to study.

When it comes to participation in working life there is still a big frustration between youth in Norway.

- 1) Young people are frustrated that there are still gaps between the salary for male and female employees.
- 2) Even if political parties, public institutions and private companies reach a certain “acceptable” number of women in boards, committees and so on, there is still a barrier for women to take leading positions within the structures. This barrier can be perceived as a glass ceiling, an invisible but still concrete barrier.

Despite the fact that young women take higher education than young men, women are still likely to be paid less than men for the same job in Norway. The Minister of Family Affairs is encouraging the trade unions and their counterparts to wipe out the gaps in salary between men and women. Norwegian law declares women the full right to keep their job after pregnancy and giving birth. Costs connected to pregnancy leaves are also fully reimbursed by the government. LNU supports this work towards equality in work life and encourages the Government to strengthen the actions to achieve the goal on equality in work life.

Women are underrepresented in the boards of companies and in public decision-making bodies. The government has put pressure on Norwegian companies, so if the companies do not have at least 40% female representatives in their boards within 2005, a law will be adopted that requires this. There will be economical and other sanctions towards companies that do not recruit the desired percentage of women.

Despite the fact that men and women are given the same legal rights to school and jobs we still find gender segregated patterns when it comes to education and work life. Young women and young men still choose differently and traditionally in upper secondary school. Too little has been done to show young women and men what opportunities they have also if they choose differently.

All companies are obliged to report on measures taken to ensure gender equality at work for employees in their annual report.

The Norwegian Youth Council is by the Government given most of the responsibility for recruiting youth delegates to Norwegian delegations to international meetings. The Norwegian Youth Council has gender balance as one of the criteria to consider in the election process. However, during the last years too few young women were nominated for international representation on the European level compared to the number of men. LNU is now trying to change this by focusing on equal rights to participation.

The Ministry of Family Affairs has co-funded a position in Statistics Norway to provide gender sensitive statistics.

**Key figures on gender equality:**

- 3 out of 5 students at universities and university colleges are women
- 2 out of 3 women are employed
- 1 out of 2 immigrant women are employed
- 2 out of 5 employed women work part-time
- 3 out of 10 middle managers are women
- 2 out of 3 children aged 1-5 have a kindergarten place
- 1 out of 3 representatives to the parliament are women

Source: Statistics Norway

## **AREA 10: FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE LIFE OF SOCIETY AND IN DECISION-MAKING**

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child children and youth shall be heard and their opinions considered when decisions regarding them are taken. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated in Norwegian law 2003.

Since children and youth under the age of 18 do not have the right to vote, other structures to ensure that youth are heard are needed. Such structures could be advisory councils on youth, co-management structures (structures where officials from the government and youth representatives make decisions together) and youth councils as well as hearing mechanisms.

Approximately 21% of the Norwegian population is under the age of 30. According to numbers from the Ministry of Administration only 3% of representatives pointed out for public committees, councils and boards are under the age of 30. There is no culture for taking youth seriously in Norway. Youth are under-represented in the formal democracy, and in many cases youth are also excluded from more informal political processes.

One concrete example is the Commission evaluating the local democracy. The mandate of the commission states that the commission shall investigate reasons for low voting rates within ethnic minority groups and youth. The commission shall also propose solutions and means to overcome barriers for groups under-represented in the formal democracy to strengthen the local democracy. However the average age of the members in the Commission evaluating the local democracy is 48, and as far as we have experienced there are no ethnic minorities in the commission. The Norwegian Youth Council has offered to provide the commission with a youth representative, but the responsible ministry, the Ministry of Regional development, has refused the offer with the argument that all pressure groups cannot be represented in the commission.

At the same time the same ministry is the ministry with the most fruitful and recent experience when it comes to international youth representation. Since 2003 LNU has recruited Youth Representatives to the governing structures of UN-Habitat. In 2005 the ministry and LNU in cooperation drafted a resolution developing UN-Habitat's youth policy. During the Governing Council of UN-Habitat in Nairobi April 2005 the youth representatives of Norway proposed and negotiated the resolution on behalf of Norway, and the resolution was adopted with a few amendments. The ministry and UN-Habitat as well as LNU gained knowledge from the youth representatives, and the youth representatives proved they deserved the trust from the government.

Since 1971 Norway has also sent youth delegates to the UN General Assembly. LNU recruits and prepares the youth delegates, and they participate with full delegate status in the Norwegian delegation. However, Norway has no great traditions for following up the negotiations on youth resolutions and other youth related issues in the General Assembly. The problem has been discussed with the permanent mission to the UN, which claims a need for instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to give priority for youth related issues. It is LNU's hope that such

signals will be given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the UNGA60 takes place in New York 2005.

Youth representation from Norway to international structures has increased during the last years, and LNU recruits and prepares youth representatives to different UN commissions, programs and organisations such as the Commission on the Status of Women, UNESCO and UN-Habitat as well as meetings on the Nordic and European level. To ensure democratic recruitment procedures, LNU needs time to spread information on these representations within our member organisations and other interested organisations on beforehand. Too often we experience that invitations from the different ministries to join delegations and international meetings come too late, some times so late that the youth representatives do not even get the time to get recommended vaccinations. To ensure enhanced and increased youth representation such invitations should be planned one year ahead in cooperation with LNU.

The Ministry of Family Affairs has acknowledged the term “Nothing about us without us” and is a key player when it comes to enhancing youth representation in decision making. There are strong links between youth organisations, LNU and the ministry, and the ministry is a strong partner in our lobbying to convince other ministries on the need for youth participation. However the different parts promoting youth representation face a lot of challenges within different ministries and other public decision making bodies.

A practical issue to be dealt with is time limits for voluntary work. Today some students get time off their studies to engage in youth NGOs and some students do not. This means representatives of a political party can participate in the same meeting with different rights to education. Non formal learning from youth NGOs should be recognized by the government and the schools, and all students should be given time to do voluntary work with no fear of “punishment” from the educational institutions.

Despite good experiences on the international arena the Norwegian Youth Council experiences a lack of will to ensure youth participation in local and regional political processes. Most local and regional youth councils express their regret that their chances to influence decision making processes are small or not existing.

For the elections for Parliament September 2001 the 165 representatives from 8 different parties were of this age while elected:

Party	-24	25– 29	30– 34	35– 39	40– 44	45– 49	50– 54	55– 59	60– 64	65 -	Total	
A		0	1	1	7	2	5	17	9	1	0	43
FrP		0	1	2	3	6	4	3	5	1	1	26
KrF		0	0	2	1	1	3	6	8	1	0	22
H		0	3	3	5	2	7	10	4	2	2	38
Sp		0	0	0	1	1	2	4	2	0	0	10
SV		3	3	4	0	3	6	3	1	0	0	23
V		0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Kp		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total		3	8	12	17	16	27	43	31	5	3	165

## **AREA 11: GLOBALIZATION**

The Norwegian government has established good support mechanisms for arranging democratic and development cooperation between youth organisations in Norway and DAC countries (countries on the list of the Development Aid Committee within OECD, the Organisation for Economical Cooperation and Development).

However there are legal obstacles for the cooperation, obstacles that prevent youth organisations' contribution to a democratic approach to globalization. The last year LNU has worked against at least two law proposals that will contribute to bind the youth mobility.

The first legal obstacle was proposed to prevent arranged and forced marriages. To fulfil this need it was decided that youth under the age of 21 had to earn at least 161000 NOK, which is twice the amount of money a student gets in student loan, to have the right to reunion with one's husband or wife. How effective the law will be to prevent arranged marriages, we do not know at the moment, but it will make it harder for all youth, to get married to the one they love if the person is not from a Schengen country.

The second case has not yet been formulated to a law, but has been discussed in Stortinget (the Parliament). The suggestion is to demand 25 000 NOK in a deposit to get a visa for Norway. The deposit is to be returned upon the visa holder's departure. This will especially be a burden for youth and youth organisations having visitors coming on a tourist visa. Obtaining visas for Norway is a bureaucratic, non-transparent and demanding process already, and the proposal for a deposit is not what is needed to ensure young people's participation in a globalizing world society.

(Christoffer Grønstad)

Norway has a broad span of programmes to prevent the use and misuse of alcohol and drugs among youth. Many of these programs are run by NGOs, often youth-NGOs, and financed by the government. The government is not running and administrating many of these programmes themselves. This is because the government often not see them selves as the right sender of the message, and instead stimulates the rich amount of NGOs to work towards the population and the communities on these issues.

These programmes may be divided into primary and secondary prevention. The primary prevention is the most common form of prevention in the Norwegian society. This reaches out toward all youth and no group in particular. It aims to affect all youth from developing behavioural pattern witch would later place them in a so called “risk-group”. The main attempt is to generate knowledge and create general attitude among youth and in society in general toward a drug- and alcohol free/restrictive lifestyle. This is done both trough spreading information, but many of the programmes work is generating “healthy” and giving youth-environments and there-by socially and knowledgeable empowering the youth, making the presence and demand of alcohol and drugs lesser.

Secondary prevention is the sort of prevention witch reaches out to the youth that already have shown a problematic behaviour and are defined in this “risk-group”. They often have observed in situations with alcohol, drugs, crime, violence or a combination of one or more of these. In secondary prevention one aim to reach and correct the problematic behaviour, and train the kids in personal skills that hopefully will adjust their behavioural patterns into a non problematic one. This could be skills of conflict-solving, dealing with authorities, respect for rules and boundaries and social skills. The “training” is often focused through social activities where the youth deals with these activities in a positive setting. This to not only show what is not accepted and punishing this, but to replace the “negative” behaviour with “positive” behaviour.

In Norway, most of the effort is put into primary prevention. That is because one in Norway believe that it is better, both for society and the person, to try to avoid problems for happening, instead of fixing and correcting the damage afterwards. The idea is that this costs the society much less economically and generates less suffering to both to the victims, offender and everyone touched by the problematic behaviour. At the same time, there is a focus on dealing with the problem when it has occurred, and “early intervention” is one of the big mantras, again, as early intervention, the less suffering for society and person.

The successes of this way of working with prevention is that one get a prevention based on knowledge, experience and the engagement of the members in the organisations conducting the prevention. The work is in many cases done all or partly by volunteers, trained by their organisation, driven by a wish to make the world a better place, bit by bit. One of the main constraints of the cooperation is the balance between the NGOs philosophy and idea, and the wishes of the authority fully or partly financing the work. Their demands on methods and demands for evidence of effect, can in some situation put restraints on the NGOs work and to some extent making the NGOs an entrepreneur doing the governments work in a high quality lo-cost manner based on engagement and volunteer work.