

Strengthen the rights of young people!

– Summaries from three seminars on the theme *Awareness of provided social services and rights for young people within the project *Youth Policy Cooperation between Turkey and Sweden**

Foreword

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs and the Department of Youth Services at the General Directorate for Youth and Sports in Turkey are working together in the project *Youth Policy Cooperation between Turkey and Sweden* between 2008 and 2010. One aim of the project is to increase knowledge of the living conditions of young people in both countries. Another aim is to demonstrate the potential of young people and increase their participation in society.

The project has five components with the following themes: concepts in youth policy, knowledge of young people's living conditions, networking for people who work with and for young people, promotion of best practices for young people on the labour market, and awareness of provided social services and rights for young people.

The Turkish Youth Services Department and The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs would like to thank the National Agencies for the Youth in Action programme of both countries for their financial supports for organising the National Seminars in both countries and the Contact Making Seminar in Stockholm on the theme awareness of provided social services and rights for young people.

Content

Rights and responsibilities of young people	4
Youth influence develops society!	5
By Ihsan Kellecioglu, The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs and Vildan Görbil, Turkish General Directorate of Youth and Sports	
Strengthen the rights of young people and children!	8
By Anette Persson, The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs	
Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Swedish and Turkish law	14
Statement on youth rights	15

Rights and responsibilities of young people

In order for young people to become active citizens they need to be aware of their rights and the possibilities that exist in society. Youth participation is a responsibility that has to be taken by the young people themselves and by politicians and civil servants who should create conditions for youth participation.

However, the attitude to youth involvement is not always positive; politicians do not always see young people as a resource and are not always willing to share their power. At the same time, young people are not always eager to get involved in voluntary work.

During spring 2009 three seminars were arranged on the theme *Awareness of provided social services and rights for young people* within the cooperation project between Sweden and Turkey. The overall purpose of the seminars is to spread ideas, experiences and knowledge to everyone working with youth issues in order to include young people in society.

Politicians from parliaments and municipalities, civil servants on both the national and municipal level, youth workers and young people from youth organisations participated in the seminars. Two national seminars have been held, one in Sweden and one in Turkey. At those seminars the participants identified current problems concerning youth participation in their own country (Sweden or Turkey) and what can be done in order to change the situation.

At the last seminar the Swedish and Turkish participants compared the situation in both countries and discussed ways to increase youth participation and created statements addressed to the decision-makers in both countries.

This is a summary of the discussions from the three seminars, with two texts, one from the national seminars in Sweden and Turkey and one from the final joint seminar.

Youth influence develops society!

By Ihsan Kellecioglu, The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs and Vildan Görbil, Turkish General Directorate of Youth and Sports

The perspectives from the Swedish seminar

The ideal society is characterized by positive attitudes towards young people and their abilities. Through youth influence, society gains access to young people's resources, leading to societal development and reduced discrimination. These were some of the participants' opinions at the Swedish seminar in Stockholm on 26 – 27 March 2009.

Fifteen participants – one member of the parliament, two local politicians, four civil servants and eight young people from youth organisations in Sweden – met to discuss how young people can become active participants in society. They focused on the situation for youth participation in Sweden.

The participants identified the problems concerning youth participation in Sweden today by choosing four themes that they wanted to discuss in-depth. One of the groups discussed what they considered “segregation” within the school system. Students with, for example, learning difficulties such as reading and writing disabilities, dyslexia, or students with non-Swedish ethnical backgrounds, are placed in so-called special classes. This can create a feeling of being segregated and less important than the other students and may also encourage bullying. One suggestion to solve this problem was to educate teachers in different pedagogical methods so that students can get the help they need according to their way of learning. This was one of the measures that would stop segregation in schools according to the participants.

In the second group the participants thought that the general problem regarding lack of youth participation is that some politicians are not interested in young people's opinions and that they don't listen to young people. Also, often politicians or civil servants decide what kind of influence young people should have, but young people themselves don't consider this real power or influence. One suggestion from the participants to counteract this was that adults and young people should discuss, on equal terms, the methods and structures for youth participation. It's also important that politicians and civil servants give feedback to young people about their opinions so they know that their views are taken seriously.

The third group thought that young people have a duty to take an active interest in society and take responsibility for their own lives and their existence. They also thought that young people who know how to influence society have an extra responsibility to do so, and also to inform young people who don't know about their opportunities and rights they have. But to make this happen society needs to create genuine platforms for young people to be involved in. One suggestion to make it easier for young people to influence society was that each municipality in Sweden should employ one person as a youth representative. Young people don't always know who to contact in society, but this would mean that they could go directly to the youth representative to get the information they need.

The last group discussed how to work to make the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” into law. The participants thought that the Convention is too weak since the rights in the Convention is not prescribed by law and can become alternative rights since there are other Swedish laws that may have precedence over them. Therefore the participants wanted to make the Convention into law. The participants thought that the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be taken into account in every political decision, including in matters such as social planning and public transportation, which also affect young people but are often forgotten. In order to help the decision-makers it’s a good idea to give them laminated cards with the articles of the Convention so that they can read them before every decision. And finally, everyone working with children and young people should know about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and how to work with youth participation.

The Swedish participants agreed that these questions would create an ideal society that would be characterized by positive attitudes towards young people and their abilities. The message from the participants was that participation is a tool for strengthening young people so that they can take control of their own lives.

The perspectives from the Turkish seminar

“Young people should be accepted as individuals and even if not directly included in decision-making processes, their opinions should be regarded as important and taken into account”, “It is necessary to make a clear description of the concept of youth”, “The first step is to establish a youth policy that will be implemented and used in all parts of the society”, “Youth policies should be set by the people who are young now, not by the ones who were once young”. These were some of the participants’ opinions at the seminar in Ankara on 2-3 April 2009.

Twenty participants – members of the parliament, local politicians, civil servants at the municipal and governmental level and youth organisations – were involved in discussions on youth influence and the rights of young people in Turkey. The participants identified problems in society and which measures Turkey should take in order to achieve an ideal society for young people. Like the Swedish seminar, there were four different groups that all addressed a problem and suggested a solution to that problem.

The first group thought that young people are part of a tough society; and may encounter difficulties in their family, school and working lives. It was expressed that this situation leads to great difficulties in young people’s integration into society and also creates conflicts between adults and young people. It was stated that the entire society, especially adults, has a responsibility to help young people and boost their self-esteem, which is important for society. It was mentioned that, that’s why, there should be a common culture that permeates the family, school, and working lives and society overall. Solution proposals were as such; enabling a common life culture through family communication therapies and therapy methods regarding school and working life, and establishment of the Ministry of Family, Children and Youth, which will implement all these methods.

The second group emphasized the importance of non-formal learning methods. It was stated that non-formal education should be used as support to formal education. It was also expressed that non-formal education methods would help participants to become active and to take action on the issues they find important. It was mentioned that this method creates the teacher-student dialogue, which is significant for a society demanding its citizens to take part in democratic processes. It was also stated that using non-formal education methods

more frequently would enable the formation of a more dynamic and efficient society, and the young people would be more active and eager to take responsibility.

The third group in the seminar expressed that the youth NGOs in Turkey cannot take part in the decision-making mechanisms which means that they are not a part of decisions that are related to them. Moreover, it was highlighted that the studies on the solution of the problems of young people are insufficient since “youth” is not considered as a sector and there are only a few experts on this field. It was emphasized that the young people cannot express themselves, the notion of volunteering is not on a sufficient level, there is prejudice among young people and the young people are not aware of their rights and responsibilities. “Creating a national youth policy together with the local and national authorities and youth organizations, where the influence of young people is clearly defined” was proposed as a solution. It was stated that such a youth policy would create a situation where the young people have more impact and their ideas are regarded by the decision-makers.

The fourth group also had similar ideas to those of the third. The importance of developing a youth policy was expressed and it was emphasized that before all else the issues related to young people should be identified and compiled through a legislation screening. It was highlighted that the youth policy would help young people in creating independent and strong NGOs which is an indicator of social development. It was mentioned that all relevant parties (government, NGOs, academicians, young people) should come together in leadership of the decision-makers to identify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities, and to establish a national umbrella organization where young people are represented (National Youth Council). According to the participants these would be important steps towards achieving the ideal society. Furthermore, it was expressed that if the existing youth councils in local municipalities would be more active and independent so as to have an impact on the decision-making process, it would have a positive contribution to development. The group emphasized that it is important that these councils should be independent and should not be under the influence of the municipal authorities.

The Turkish participants agreed on two key points that would lead to reach an ideal society; creating a “genuine” platform for youth influence and a youth policy established together with the participation of all related stakeholders and where young people have an important role in the decision-making process.

Strengthen the rights of young people and children!

By Anette Persson, The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Politicians and civil servants must see young people as a resource and include them in democratic processes. Strengthen children's and young people's rights by making the Convention on the Rights of the Child a law. Those were the most important opinions of the Swedish and Turkish participants at the seminar in Istanbul 5–7 May 2009.

Nineteen participants – three members of parliament, two researchers, seven civil servants from different municipalities and seven young people from youth organisations in Sweden and Turkey – met to discuss how to increase youth participation in both Turkey and Sweden and the importance of young people taking part in society. The participants had taken part in the two previous national seminars, the Turkish participants in Ankara and the Swedish participants in Stockholm.

Differences between Turkey and Sweden

The participants identified the main differences between youth policy in Turkey and in Sweden. They thought that Turkey tends to view young people as a group, as opposed to Sweden that views young people more as individuals. Furthermore, the laws concerning young people in Turkey focus a lot on protection of young people and also centre on the family; in Sweden the focus is more on empowering young people to be creative and to fulfil their potential.

The participants also thought that Turkey wants to educate young people about the structures in society (e.g. about youth participation) in order for them to fit in, whereas Sweden discusses how to change the structures so that young people can be independent.

Moreover, the participants were of the opinion that Turkey thinks that NGOs are important, but that the state wants to create the basic conditions for them rather than let young people develop NGOs themselves.

Same words – different meaning

The participants examined different aspects of democracy, oligarchy and anarchy in order to establish a similar understanding and similar concepts. It was evident that the same words and concepts meant different things and stirred up different reactions among the Swedish and the Turkish participants.

For example, the statement “I want power” was mostly seen as a positive statement by the Swedish group, who wanted to have power in order to change society, whereas many of the Turkish participants saw it more negatively and to most of them the word power represented the abuse of power.

Another example is the concept of civil disobedience, which also sparked different reactions among the participants. Some of them thought that in some situations it is okay for citizens to react and resort to actions outside the democratic system, when for example human rights are threatened, as happened in Nazi Germany. Others thought that people always have to act within the boundaries of democracy.

Decision-makers must include young people

The participants stressed that politicians and civil servants must see young people as a resource and include them in democratic processes, especially the process of creating a youth policy. They also stressed that it's important that youth councils are independent and that it is the responsibility of the politicians to create structures for youth influence.

Youth policy and youth NGOs

Identified problems

In Turkey there are around 14 state institutions that handle youth issues in different ways. The institutions are not formally connected to each other regarding youth issues, so there is no cooperation that provides an overall picture of the conditions for young people in Turkey. This means that there is no comprehensive national youth policy; and the participants thought that it's very important that Turkey has one.

The participants identified a few questions that need to be answered in the process of creating a youth policy: Who should be involved in the youth policy process? What does a youth policy consist of? How do we ensure that everybody can participate and that we take their opinions into account? How do we make the youth policy sustainable?

Furthermore, in Turkey the municipalities have a youth policy of their own and the participants thought that it's difficult for each municipality to understand and to stay informed about young people's needs and living conditions.

The participants also expressed the need for an umbrella organisation for youth NGOs in Turkey. There is little cooperation between youth NGOs and there is no umbrella organisation that mobilises youth NGOs in the same direction.

In Sweden, on the other hand, there is an umbrella organisation for youth NGOs called LSU. But the Swedish participants thought that it's difficult for LSU to find a joint agenda for the many different NGOs and to formulate concrete and clear suggestions – LSU has to compromise too much.

One participant, from a youth NGO in Turkey, expressed the opinion that the Turkish government creates structures for youth NGOs by itself, without asking the NGOs what they need and want. The participant from the NGO also said that the NGOs first need to become autonomous, after which they can then elaborate on what they want concerning a youth policy structure. One Turkish civil servant said that the NGOs work alone and can't agree on anything and that the politicians wanted to create structures to unite and gather the NGOs. Another participant said that municipalities in Turkey only invite NGOs that share the municipality's political views which mean discrimination between the NGOs.

Action plans

The participants thought that it's important to create a governmental structure for youth policy in Turkey and to gather all policies that concern young people under one governmental body. They also thought that it's important to create a national youth policy and an umbrella organisation for the NGOs in Turkey.

When it comes to creating a youth policy the participants concluded that in order to obtain many different perspectives it's important to let as many actors as possible to participate in the process of creating the policy, such as youth NGOs, other young people, the government, and also the opposition parties. They also thought that it's vital to include the latter in order to make the policy sustainable and that it's a good idea to let the parliament decide about the youth policy. Otherwise, a new government might want to decide upon a new policy when it comes into power.

The participants also thought that it's essential to create structures for an inclusive dialogue between the government and an independent youth umbrella organisation. Additionally, the government should also talk to other NGOs and youth councils.

The participants also pointed out that it's significant that youth policy includes youth empowerment, views young people as a resource and ensures young people's full participation. Furthermore, it's important to define which political issues concern young people – “only” education and employment or other issues as well?

To make sure that the opinions of the various actors are considered, the participants suggested a referral process where the opinions of NGOs and other significant actors on a special subject come to the decision-makers' attention. It is then crucial that the decision-makers' are really willing to listen and take the opinions into account.

The participants also thought that it's important to educate teachers in Turkey about the significance of young people's possibilities to organise themselves in associations. One of the parliamentarians from Sweden pointed out that it's important that governments provide organisational support to NGOs, not activity support.

Moreover, the participants thought that both decision-makers and adults in general must be aware of the living conditions of young people so that the structures in society can change in order to provide young people with social and financial opportunities.

As a Swedish member of parliament expressed it: “If the government and the parliament don't understand that the living conditions of young people are different today than they were ten years ago, we cannot have a society. It's important to have young people in the parliament because they have a perspective that other politicians lack”.

Youth councils

Identified problems

The participants thought that the objectives, the purpose and the authority of youth councils in Sweden are all unspecified. As a result youth councils work with different things. For example, some youth councils are mostly involved with cultural activities while others work more with creating political suggestions and answering referrals etc.

Another problem identified by the participants is that it's unclear whether the youth council is independent of the municipality. The fact that youth councils often receive funding from municipalities, and that a civil servant often is employed to support the council, can make it difficult for the youth council to criticise the municipality, if necessary. Furthermore, it's uncertain if the youth council is part of the municipality's organisation or if it is an organisation of its own. One participant pointed out that there are some benefits involved in the youth council being part of the municipality, such as free premises and grants.

Yet another problem that the participants saw refers to the representativity of the youth council – has it really got the mandate to speak for other young people in matters that concern them? Or is it LSU, the Swedish umbrella organisation for youth NGOs, that represents the young people?

Some of the Turkish participants said that youth councils in Turkey have the same problem – they are not independent and after an election the members of a youth council may be replaced with others that share the opinions of the winning political party. One participant also said that in one municipality there were conflicts between the mayor and some members of the youth council, which resulted in the mayor removing the members.

Another problem in Turkey according to the participants is that youth councils think that they are the only representatives for young people and don't want to work together with other NGOs.

Finally, the participants concluded that youth councils in both Sweden and Turkey face the same challenges.

Action plans

The participants recommended a solution to the identified problems of objectives, organisational structure, mandate and independence that originates from the organisation The Swedish Association of Youth Councils.

It recommends a model for youth councils with three main functions, which should be separated from each other: 1. A youth council is an organisation that takes care of the interests of young people and is independent of the municipality, 2. The municipality is responsible for creating structures for youth influence and taking young people's opinions into account, regardless of the age of the young people and 3. The municipality should have a quality control system for its youth policy work.

Strengthen children's rights

The discussions also focused on how to make Turkey withdraw its reservations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The participants talked about children's situation in Turkey and Sweden, focusing especially on imprisoned children in Turkey.

Identified problems

Turkey has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child but has made reservations on articles 17, 29 and 30. These articles concern access to information and mass media, goals of education and the rights of the children of minorities or indigenous groups. The participants believe that Turkey's reservations lead to inequality and discrimination. If Turkey withdraws its reservations it would, on the other hand, lead to freedom of expression and the right of every child to choose their religion.

One participant, working as a voluntary lawyer in Turkey helping children under arrest, said that 495 children have been sentenced for terrorism in Turkey, even though Turkey has implemented the Child protection law (this law has led to several improvements to the juvenile justice system, including raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 11 to 12 years and a probation system as an alternative to deprivation of liberty).

She talked about several 15-year-old children being sentenced to 42 years in prison for terrorist activity, for example throwing stones at the police. She also gave examples of poor children being sentenced to 13 years in prison for stealing food. She said that this is mainly happening in the south and southeast of Turkey. Her opinion was that the children are sentenced against the law and she explained that the whole judicial process, including trial and bureaucracy, takes at least two years, even if the child is found innocent. That means that children lose at least two years of education and freedom while they are detained in custody.

The opinion of the participants in this group was that the children don't understand that throwing stones at police can be seen as a threat to the Turkish state and the unity of the country. The participants also believe that children don't understand that terrorists might use them to perform actions according to the terrorists' purposes. They also discussed the fact that many lawyers and organisations don't think that children should be punished for this. Furthermore, the government doesn't see voluntary lawyers and organisations for children's rights as a threat, but avoids having meetings with them and ignores them. The opposition party should demand a commission of inquiry into this matter.

In Sweden young people can be sentenced from 15 years of age but can only be imprisoned at the age of 18. Instead of prison, young people between 15 and 17 can get sentenced to secure institutional treatment in a special home for young people or to community service.

The participants also discussed the situation for children in Sweden and talked especially about the fact that hidden refugee children aren't able to exercise their right to go to school. Also that the Swedish Migration Board sends refugees home without thinking about the best interests of the child, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child states. A Swedish participant said that the Swedish Migration Board refers to the fact that the Convention isn't implemented into the law – that's why the authority can make decisions without thinking about the best interests of the child. So, even though Sweden has ratified the Convention, the rights can become alternative rights since there are other Swedish laws that may have precedence over them, according to the participants.

Action plans

In order to make Turkey withdraw its reservations on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the participants thought that it's important that NGOs in Turkey work with issues concerning children's rights and that they put pressure on local politicians, the government and the parliament.

The NGOs could also take advantage of the pressure from the European Commission and the European Parliament on Turkey to fulfil the human rights before they can become members of the European Union. Furthermore, the participants suggested that NGOs in Turkey could work together with NGOs in the European Union that work with these issues.

The participants also thought that it's important to educate all people who work with child issues about the Convention, as well as children.

Finally, the participants wanted the Convention on the Rights of the Child to become law in both countries and they would like to see more severe consequences for countries that violate the Convention.

Fighting spirits

The participants thought that young people's right to influence and participation in decision-making processes and to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child into law, were the most important issues to continue working for, in order to make a change in society for young people. All of them expressed how important it is to fight for change and they were all willing to continue the work. Some comments from the participants were:

- "We are going to fight for what we want like soldiers" (young person, Swedish youth NGO).
- "I will help children and young people to raise their voice with my support" (parliamentarian, Sweden).
- "I will continue this work and spread the word" (civil servant, municipality in Sweden).
- "It's time to act, spread the word and fight" (civil servant, Turkey)
- "Every Saturday I have a meeting with my NGO to discuss things. I will give them the information from this seminar and involve the members in the organisation in the work" (young person, Turkish youth NGO).
- "I want to change the structure, the system is closed to change but with enthusiasm we can still change things" (civil servant, municipality in Turkey).

Please find enclosed the statements that were agreed on
at the seminar in Istanbul 5-7th of May

Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Swedish and Turkish law

Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by both Sweden and Turkey, there are shortcomings in both the legal system and its practice. We are of the opinion that the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be properly implemented in the legal systems. The contents of this convention should be assessed in detail and the views of the children should be taken more seriously. Moreover; officials and decision-makers in both state and the local administration levels should be further exposed to the implementation of the Convention and they should therefore be specialized on this issue.

If the Convention on the Rights of the Child was implemented in the Swedish and the Turkish law...

- ...crimes against rights of children would be taken more seriously and violations of the rights of children could then be tried in court,
 - ...authorities would be obligated to take children seriously,
 - ...the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be a compulsory part of the education for doctors, teachers, politicians etc.,
 - ...then the national law would not be stronger than the international convention,
 - ...the courts would then turn the laws to the advantage of children.
-
- **YOU MUST DO AND WE DEMAND...**
 1. Train all officials working in regard to children on the rights of the children.
 2. Educate all children on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 3. Turkey has to take back its reservations against the articles they have rejected.
 4. Implement all rights of children in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the legal system.

If Swedish and Turkish laws would be stronger than the Convention on the Rights of the Child then it means that it's only a fake document for decision-makers to play with.

We are not the future, we are now!

Statement on youth rights

Human rights are universal for everyone, always, everywhere and without any exceptions.

Youth have the right and responsibility of influence and participation in decision-making processes as well as contributing with their full potential and creativity right here, right now!

Young women and men need to be involved in decision-makings on matters, which concern them. Families have a primary role but so do the local communities, NGOs, politicians and policy makers at all levels.

Independent NGOs and public sector have a major role to play in finding new ways to involve youth in democratic process and governance. This is not about shaping youth after the structures in society but building and adjusting the structures to fit the need and participation of young people.

Youth should be regarded as a source of knowledge and resource in society. Increasing youth participation in social life is one important tool towards decreasing and eradicating exclusion and alienation.

Half the population of the world is children and youth.
Let's change and be changed!