

SUMMARY REPORT: BULGARIA

ATTITUDES OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS ON ANTI-RACISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

May 2013

PART 1: ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The present Summary report presents the main findings of a research set to explore the attitudes within youth organizations in relation to human rights and anti-racism in Bulgaria. The research was conducted in the period March-May 2013 and was done in the framework of the CHARM project (www.charmingyouth.eu). Like within the whole project, in this report the term 'youth organization' implies any entity (legal or not, public or private) which organizes youth activities and works with young people; the term 'racism' (respectively 'anti-racism') refers to any intolerant attitude towards a group of people, based on their race, ethnic belonging, gender, sexual orientation, religious belonging, etc.

The information for the present research was collected through three main instruments: online survey, 2 focus groups and 5 in-depth interviews.

The online survey was filled in by 51 people who identified as belonging to youth organizations (70 people started filling-up the survey, but 19 dropped out before finishing it). 60% of the respondents came from registered non-governmental associations. 45% came from organizations working mainly with young people as opposed to organizations where the majority of the members are under 29 years (23.2%) and organizations with another main target group, but also working with young people (31.9%). The most common main sphere of work of the organizations was encouraging volunteering (19.4%), followed by art and culture (16.1%), education (9.7%), social services (9.7%), leisure time activities (8.1%) and development of local communities (8.1%). Concerning the profile of the people who filled in the survey, they predominantly identified as ethnic Bulgarian, where only 2 people pointed out 'Roma' and 2 pointed out 'others'. 56.6% of the respondents were over the age of 30 years old and the same percentage of people claimed to have more than 5 years of experience in youth work.

The focus groups were organized on 26.04.2013 and 10.05.2013 and each of them gathered 10 participants, representing a wide range from organizations from Sofia and the country. The focus groups were organized in the framework of 6 hours and followed an interactive methodology, including discussion and comments on parts of the preliminary online survey results.

The five in-depth interviews were conducted with a youth trainer, staff of the Directorate of Youth within the Ministry of Youth and Sport and members of the management of the National Youth Forum, the representative umbrella youth organization.

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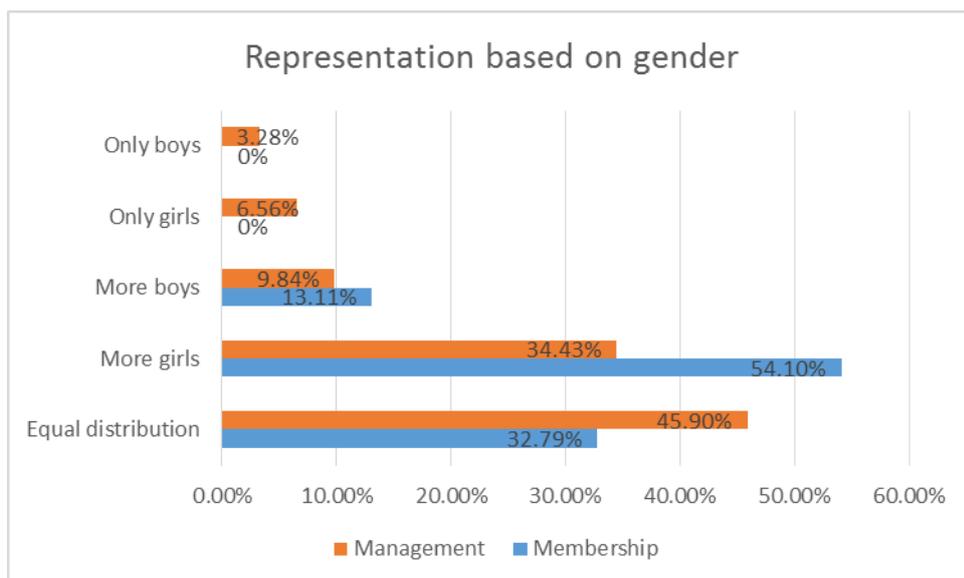
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PART 2: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Situation with diversity within the organizations.

Diversity within the organizations was mainly explored on the bases of ethnic origin, gender, disability and sexual orientation. According to the online research, the majority of the youth organizations in Bulgaria engage people from different ethnic groups within their membership base. 30% of the organization admit that only ethnic Bulgarians constitute their membership, while the rest engage representatives of one more minority ethnic groups. However, the situation is quite different when it comes to the ethnic composition of the management teams - in 78.8% of the cases the management consists of ethnic Bulgarians only. The most common explanation provided both through the online survey and the focus group is that young people from ethnic groups are not part of the organization (or the management), because they didn't express interest to join. Only a couple of respondents would look for the reasons within the organizations and would admit that they never made efforts to engage minority. One online respondent pointed out that people from ethnic minorities 'have no place' in the management of a youth organization.

Similar situation is observed through a gender perspective of the membership and management of youth organizations. While in the majority of the cases girls constitute more than half of the membership base of the respondent youth organizations, their participation in the management - even if still high - is not proportionate to their participation in the membership base.



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40% of the respondents said that there are young people with disabilities within the members of youth organizations, while 26.7% responded that they don't know. The numbers are quite different in the case of sexuality. Only 16.7% of the respondents stated that they have members with sexual orientation different from heterosexual. While the majority answered that they don't know (60%), 23.3% stated that they don't have such people within their membership base, which is an interesting statement as it raises the question what kind of 'test' would prove it. In general, the results in regards to sexuality pose a lot of questions about the involvement and/or the visibility of the LGBT young people within the youth organizations.

Racism and Human Rights.

The understanding of youth organizations on the topics of racism and Human Rights was mainly explored through the focus groups.

There is a general negative attitude towards racism by the youth organizations. Respondents would clearly position their organizations outside of this concept and would condemn racism as something bad and unacceptable. However, it needs to be noted that the understanding of youth organizations would be very limited. They would understand racism and racist practices only when in relation to the term 'race' and only in its extreme forms. Many focus group participants would condemn racism and at the same time pose statements and points of views that can be perceived as racist in different contexts (especially when referring to Roma and LGBT). In some cases researchers had the feeling that racism is condemned 'by default' because there is a social expectation that it needs to be condemned; in other cases participants were honestly see themselves as anti-racist, but applying a very limitative understanding to the concept.

In the case of Human Rights, respondents show an overall positive attitude. It is mainly associated with freedom, democracy and something that brings benefit to everybody. Outside of the positive associations however, participants would fail to define Human Rights. There is a vague and very abstract idea on what Human Rights are, how are they established, violated and protected. Asked to connect Human Rights to different spheres of work and especially the spheres they come from, respondents would find it difficult, which is understandable considering the level of abstractness they apply to the concept. They would draw connections based on similarity of words than concepts. For example, 'education of young people is connected to human rights because

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right to education is a human right'. While this is true, it certainly does not exhaust the relation to human rights and especially to anti-racism.

Examples of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices.

Youth organizations rarely have specific anti-racist and anti-organizational policies and/or practices who are strictly defined. 65.5% of the online respondents state that there is a common understanding within the organization on basic principles for establishing equal opportunities, fight against discrimination or other forms of intolerance. In most of the cases, they refer to their Articles, which puts brought definition or principles of non-discrimination. Many would also mention a Code of Conduct, which is rarely specifically targeting anti-racist and anti-discrimination measures. Pro-active practices for engaging young people from excluded groups are only mentioned in 2-3 cases. During focus groups and interviews a couple of things were highlighted: 1) Youth organizations in general need to strengthen their organizational development capacity, as there are a lot of internal organizational issues which are not clear; 2) Some organizations would produce internal documents on paper without actually implementing them strictly or assessing their implementation and impact; 3) Youth organizations are very much project-oriented and activities-oriented and pay less attention to organizational development and policies; 4) Whenever speaking about outreach to traditionally excluded young people, youth organizations would bring activities they did 'for' them rather than 'with' them, while engaging them as members and team members is usually not considered. For example, one respondent would say: 'Yes, we work with disadvantaged young people. Every year we organize an event in an orphanage for the kids'.

Stereotypes

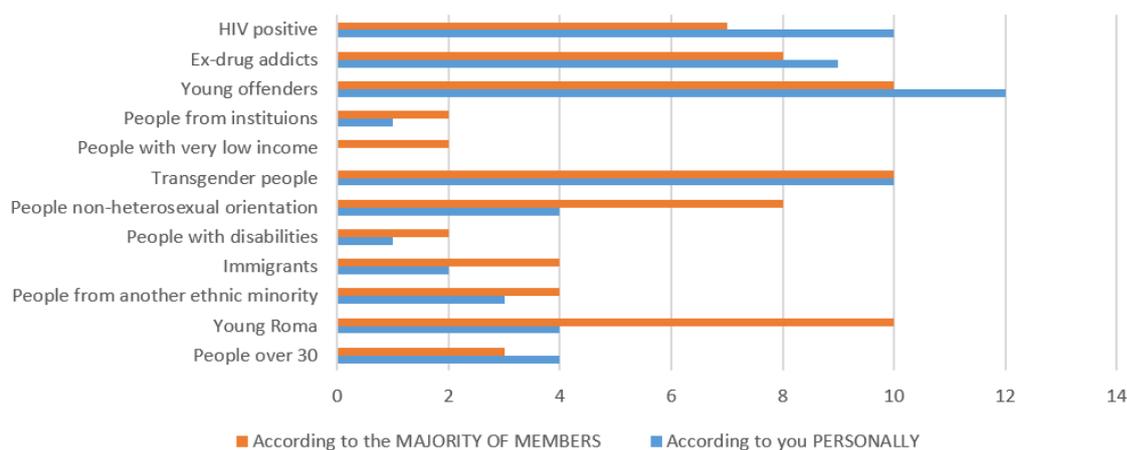
Young offenders, HIV positive, Roma and people from the LGBT community are the most un-desired members of youth organizations. Even if the majority of the responses are about 'neutral' attitude towards engaging various groups of people, there are respondents who state clearly that either they themselves have a negative attitudes towards engaging various traditionally excluded groups, or that the majority of the members of the organization would have a negative attitudes. What is interesting is the difference between the personal attitude and the assumed attitude of the majority of members, especially in the case of Roma and non-heterosexual. In both cases the respondents present themselves as accepting, but imagine that their co-members would oppose engagement of these groups of people in the organization.

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Negative attitudes towards engaging the following groups of people with the organization:



It needs to be noted that some organizations admit they have criteria one needs to meet, in order to be a member. Over 50% of the organizations state that 'being able to read and write' is one such criteria. 9 organizations pose an age criteria where the members cannot be over a certain age and 5 organizations require specific school performance record from their members. Only a couple of organizations would put as a criteria lack of disability (3), certain sexual orientation (3), certain gender (2), certain ethnic belonging (1) and certain religious belonging (1).

PART 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of existing anti-racist practices within youth organizations.

1. There is a certain level of diversity within the youth organizations in Bulgaria, however there are still discrepancies between the representation of some traditionally excluded groups in the membership base and especially in the management structures of the organizations.
2. Youth organizations generally lack specific policies and practices for promoting diversity or insuring anti-racism and anti-discrimination. Where policies exist, they are broadly defined and their effect and implementation is usually not assessed.
3. The general understanding of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices is understood much more as actions 'for the outside society'

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and much less as principles to be followed internally in the organization. Youth organizations think about traditionally excluded groups as somebody to be provided services for, rather than somebody to be engaged.

4. There is reluctance to engage young offenders, HIV positive young people, Roma and LGBT people within the activities of the organization.

The learning and training needs

1. There is a need to explore the concepts of anti-racism and human rights deeply and provide an overall knowledge and understanding to make them clear and less-abstract.
2. Training activities need to take a human rights perspective, which illustrates that racism, intolerance, discrimination and exclusion have a common mindset, regardless on the ground on which it is based.
3. The concept of mainstreaming of anti-racism in youth work needs to be clearly explored with youth organization, making clear connection between anti-racism, human rights and the everyday life and operations of different organizations, regardless of their sphere of work.
4. Training activities need to address harmful stereotypes, in particular in regards to Roma and LGBT, as well as young offenders and HIV positive young people.
5. Trainings should consider including organizational development component to better explore the process of making anti-racism as a cross-cutting theme and a horizontal principle to be applied regardless of the sphere of work of different organization.

Possible motivation for engaging youth organizations on the topics of anti-racism and human rights.

1. There is a general interest in getting more training and exploring further the topics of anti-racism and human rights among youth organizations. Youth organizations recognize their learning needs on these topics. Even organizations with previous experience in projects on anti-racism, diversity and non-discrimination express the need for further training.
2. The topics of the training and the project in general need to be very clearly communicated when outreaching youth organizations, putting a stress on the fact that the aim is not to change the current spheres of work of the organizations, but to relate them to anti-racism on the dimension of organizational development and everyday operations.
3. Clear connection between different spheres of work and anti-racism needs to be underlined, as according to 63.2% of the organizations that

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would be the main motivational factors. Other factors include: participation in a training on the subject (56.1%), invitation or recommendation from a respected person or organization (50.9%), possibilities for funding (43.9%).

4. The main challenge would not be engaging youth organizations in training activities, but in a process for reflection and change within their organizations. The trainings should provide enough of motivational perspectives and tools to support this process.