



Policy Brief

Participatory Policy Making in Barakaldo





Introduction

This policy brief builds on the work of a pan-European study on youth inequality called the UPLIFT project. Research in Barakaldo (Basque Country) has identified local policy improvement priorities to better inform both institutional and young people's strategies for facing inequalities.

When analysing how inequalities operate and impact young people in the Basque municipality, the research focused on the resources provided by public local institutions to the young people and on the individual strategies followed by young people to improve their living conditions.

It identified significant gaps in awareness and take-up of provision and highlights the importance of more personalised advice and support for vulnerable young people. There is a lasting impact on vulnerable young people if their needs are not properly addressed that shapes future trajectories into adulthood, affecting employment and housing opportunities.

The brief concludes with practical suggestion on the implementation of participatory and reflexive policy making.



The UPLIFT project

How do young people experience and adapt to inequality? The UPLIFT project aims to understand related patterns and trends, with a focus on housing, education and employment in 16 urban areas across Europe. The project's partners, with young people and their communities, are also co-designing a tool that involves young people in the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies seeking to reduce inequalities (piloted in four out of the 16 urban locations (Amsterdam, Barakaldo, Sfântu Gheorghe and Tallinn). Through the reflexive policy making agenda, UPLIFT's objective is a new, sustainable, participatory policy process, where young people are actively contributing to policies that directly influence their life chances.

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Key findings in Barakaldo

The policy initiatives implemented in Barakaldo are not part of young people's life strategies, because they are unaware of these resources and have little interaction with institutions. Young people do not cite the principal institutions that are providing policy programmes to deal with youth inequalities in the education, housing and employment as relevant in their life. Rather, their knowledge is limited to unemployment benefits and educational scholarships, which are only a small proportion of the available and more influential resources to tackle inequalities.

The low level of interaction that young people have with institutions make them disconnected from the real needs and situations of young people. If local services and policy programmes are not designed taking into consideration the most pressing needs and situations at the forefront of young people's lives, they are unlikely to be effective in solving youth challenges. Policy implementers need to consider the real expectations, needs, and socioeconomic profiles of the youth in Barakaldo for designing and implementing policies and programmes that are addressing youth real challenges.

Youth inequality is a multidimensional challenge and policies addressing inequality should address them from an interdisciplinary perspective. Education, housing, and employment fields show an atomised and scattered map of policies for young people in the three life domains, with a great diversity of administrative levels implementing such policies and room for improved coordination.

Advice and support and the individual abilities are the most valued factors for young people to overcome difficult situations. Advice and support is mainly provided by family and friends, who provide encouragement and guidance, acting as experienced mentors in life. Individual abilities such as proactivity, perseverance, tenacity and motivation, among others, are enabling factors to overcome difficulties in life. Where advice is available or not to young people, it can limit their ability to overcome obstacles they face and result in further inequalities.



Family guidance is essential and can overcome demotivation and emotional breakdowns...This is something completely forgotten by institutions.



They (family) have always encouraged me to study.



I'd like to do upper secondary school, but I don't know how.

There is a lasting impact on vulnerable young people if their needs are not properly addressed by helping them to understand the full range of opportunities available to them with a personalised assessment of the best pathways for their situation. In Barakaldo, the day-to-day work that institutions carry out to tackle youth inequalities in education, employment and housing is not based on advice and support, with one exception: Gazte Bulegoa, a youth participation and support service. The Youth Department of the Municipality counts on a permanent, stable working team within Gazte Bulegoa that is highly experienced and qualified and includes City Council civil servants and the workers of Gazte Bulegoa.



The Basque Government refused to support me because I was earning €100 a month more than what was stated in the requirements, and although I asked for it, I was not well advised...



Recommendations

Bridging the gap between institutions and young people

It is essential to find mechanisms to bridge the gaps between policymakers and young people in the early stages of policy development. As the intended beneficiaries of such local policies, involving young people in their development will lead to solutions which are better tailored to their needs and situations.

Mechanisms that can help to close the gap include:

- Informing and educating young people about the local welfare system and opportunities for support in schools through programmes and joint collaborations, field trips to institutions, presentations, projects, and other activities intended to help young people understand more about those institutions and their role.
- Involving youth in participatory policy-making processes, so that a) policies are more tailored to the groups they seek to support, and b) the young people go through a personal development process that gets them closer to policy-making and institutions



If I'd been aware of the existing possibilities for independence in Barakaldo, I'd have become independent three years earlier.


Give young people what they really value

Institutions must recognise the influence and value of support and advice have in enabling young people to overcome situations of inequality. Currently, advice is usually provided by family and friends, leaving young people without supportive social networks (or less well-informed and connected networks) in a position of further disadvantage. Filling this gap could help address the inequalities faced by the most vulnerable young people.

Locally, it is important to invest in strengthening the service of Gazte Bulegoa as a one-stop office for young people, working closely with youth and based on supportive advice services. In the provision of these services Gazte Bulegoa should:

- Be acknowledged as relevant service provider by the different departments in the Municipality who influence youth outcomes.
- Strengthening the office as a real one-stop office for youth by offering the whole range of policies and programmes that address youth, regardless of the municipal department that delivers them.





How to involve young people in policy formation

Participatory policy making takes as its starting point the position that policy can only be responsive to the needs of individuals, households or communities if it is transparently developed, implemented and monitored in cooperation with its intended beneficiaries.

The UPLIFT project extends this to a process of “Reflexive Policy Making”, which becomes embedded on an ongoing basis. RPM aims to change the approach of policy designers and increase the capabilities of young people in order that they can generate changes together.

During the process young people are empowered to be able to enter into policy discussion with policy makers and implementers. The process is supported by facilitators who help build trust and common understanding among both young people and institutional stakeholders.

The UPLIFT project has produced a range of materials to help local groups undertake Reflexive Policy Making processes. You can find out more about the process in our [additional policy brief](#), and on each of the key stages in our [Guidebook](#), along with training materials and videos [on our website](#).



Stages in the participatory policy creation process



A mindset and commitment - Policy co-creation is a deep process which requires commitment from all stakeholders and a willingness to challenge traditional power dynamics.



Preparation - Planning with stakeholders about objectives, roles, resources and capacity.



Creating a youth board - In collaboration with a range of organisations, using supportive and inclusive methods, a diverse Youth Board is recruited.



Narrowing the focus and scope - Young people and institutional stakeholders identify the policy areas for action. The decision about the scope has implications for the way in which the co-creation process is organized and the expected outcomes.



The co-creation process - Capacity building, trust building and creative activities underpin successful co-creation. Involving a specific youth facilitator is key to an equal, safe and empowering process for all participants.



Towards a policy agenda - The stage at which the institutional and systemic realities must be navigated to identify what can be achieved in practical terms.



Policy implementation - Highly dependent on the local context, communication and engagement is essential to achieve uptake of the policy recommendations.



Reflection & evaluation - Throughout the process it is essential to engage in reflexive practice – continually learning and evaluating to inform next steps.



Participatory policy making in action

A local Youth Board collaborated with the Municipality, housing association De Key, resident organization !WOON and Delft University of Technology in order to shed light on the current housing problems of young people and formulate shared policy approaches and tools to tackle the most urgent problems.

Over two years, the Youth Board: developed a range of ideas for tackling the housing shortage, including a virtual platform for young house seekers which is being explored for development, and produced a manifesto for the municipality of Amsterdam which was presented to the Municipal councillor responsible for housing in the city.

The Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AYEC) collaborated with the University of Tartu to improve services benefiting NEET youth and, in particular, improve their educational attainment and outcomes and access to the labour market. 40 young people in vulnerable life situations were involved in the process in order to shed light on the current education, employment and housing problems facing young people and the solutions that young people see feasible to tackle their problems.

In the co-creation with young people, a new service model has been produced: The "Cross-sectoral NEET-status youth support and cooperation model of services for local governments. Description of the future model". Young people and representatives of different city institutions jointly designed a range of possible support paths (services).



Tallinn



Amsterdam



Sfantu Gheorghe



Barakaldo

A participatory policy making process brought together young people living in the Municipality, policy makers from the Barakaldo City Council and researchers from Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness, who collaborated over nine months to improve urban housing policies for young people.

As a result, the stakeholders involved have developed a reflexive policy agenda including four proposals oriented to adapt these policies to the real needs of the youth. Moreover, the process has been oriented towards the empowerment of the young people involved, allowing them to improve their personal skills, such as their knowledge on the topic, their attitudes and behaviours towards civic participation, their general socio-political skills and interest in urban development planning.

Two groups of stakeholders - a Youth Board (group of vulnerable young people) and institutional representatives - worked on identifying the causes that hinder the access to education for vulnerable young people and how to tackle these. They worked in parallel at first, then in joint groups within the framework of a co-creation process.

During the joint sessions they identified public policy proposals and created an action plan that can be implemented at the local level and can offer solutions to some of the problems identified. Besides these proposals that had been embedded in the Reflexive Policy Agenda, the biggest gains of the activity in Sfantu Gheorghe was that vulnerable young people were empowered to have their voice heard and that the institutional representatives developed a greater understanding of the benefits of cooperation and co-creation.

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