



**yw** 3rd European  
Youth Work  
Convention

# Final Declaration

of the 3<sup>rd</sup> European  
Youth Work Convention

## Signposts for the future

**Bonn, 10 December 2020**



# THE 3<sup>rd</sup> EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK CONVENTION THE 'DIGITAL CONVENTION'

## DECLARATION

### Introduction

Under Germany's joint Presidency of the European Union and the Council of Europe, around 1,000 participants gathered online for the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention. The momentum for the Convention has been fuelled by this unique political convergence that holds the promise of realising a European Youth Work Agenda through what is to be known as the Bonn process. The Convention is the start of this.

All participants belong to a vibrant youth work 'community of practice', within and across the 50 European countries represented at the Convention. This strikingly diverse community of practice (see below) has been debating and directly contributing to this final Declaration.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention has aimed explicitly at putting flesh on the bones of the European Youth Work Agenda, while respecting its political framework, and describing future steps, actions and measures to be taken under the Bonn process. This final Declaration seeks to capture the deliberations of participants, both to motivate and to guide the youth work community of practice all over Europe within the Bonn process. The final Declaration also seeks to strengthen the political commitment, at all levels, for the maintenance, development and innovation of youth work provision throughout Europe.

This final Declaration therefore addresses directly the youth work community of practice in Europe as a major active and responsible stakeholder in the Bonn process. Communities of practice have been defined as a process of social learning when 'people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions and building innovations'. The youth work community of practice needs to be fully inclusive, incorporating *all kinds of youth work*, whatever method or format it builds on, and *all kinds of youth workers*, whether they are paid or voluntary, in a life-time career or a short-term or part-time commitment, educated through formal curricula or through non-formal training, and in all 50 countries represented at the Convention.

The **youth work community of practice** includes:

youth workers and youth leaders, youth work managers, project carriers, accredited and independent youth work organisations, trainers, researchers, educators of youth workers, local communities and municipalities, National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, youth representations, young people, and policy-makers at all levels of governance.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention calls for common actions (or for a common *orientation* to our actions) within the Bonn process, be it at a local, regional, national or European level. However, youth work in Europe takes place in a variety of environments and circumstances. Therefore, the guidance that this final Declaration provides for the Bonn process should be complemented by the creativity, commitment and determination of the community of practice, to further define actions that are adapted to the role, the needs and aims of different youth work practices.

Looking ahead, a 4<sup>th</sup> European Youth Work Convention already appears on the horizon. It is a strong incentive for immediate action under the Bonn process: to be able to look back in five years on achievements, progress and success of the actions and measures proposed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Convention. However, our horizons should stretch further than this. This final Declaration is rooted in and expresses a fundamental vision valid for the longer term. Therefore, the process of maintaining, developing and innovating youth work in Europe should not be limited only to the five years ahead of us. The EU Youth Strategy to 2027<sup>1</sup> and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy to 2030<sup>2</sup> enable the youth work community of practice to continue its efforts beyond the timeframes of the Conventions. In the coming years intermediate monitoring of both strategies will enable timely reflections on the effectiveness of the Bonn process, towards and beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> Convention, as the engine of the European Youth Work Agenda.

## Context and background

### The social situation of young people in Europe

Constant changes and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic have indicated forcefully that *the future is not what it used to be* - what was foreseen in the past, in health, economy, environment and technology, is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-strategy-2030>

no longer credible or perhaps even possible. Though change is and will always be constant, times of uncertainty are evidently here. Across Europe, societies are experiencing a rise of anti-democratic tendencies coupled with shifting and shrinking spaces for civil society and violations of human rights. There is a creeping disappearance of trust in public authorities. Emerging gaps in societal architecture are shaking the stability and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Societies largely polarise as populism and fake news grow. All this is taking place within a climate crisis of which young people are acutely aware, which undoubtedly endangers social cohesion and diminishes the quality of life (presenting, ultimately, an existential threat), and a digital realm that is becoming overwhelmingly present, at times also with negative personal and social consequences, in everyday life.

Such social change clearly affects young people, too, often disproportionately. Young people from particularly marginalised groups facing multiple discrimination are particularly stricken as social inequalities increase and social justice is further away. It is young people, however, who also display creativity and imagination, and demonstrate resilience, when facing uncertainties and disruption in their lives. They should be able to do so while having full access to exercise their rights. However, many young people are still denied their rights or remain unaware of them and, as a result, are unable to express their views and voice effectively. Those 'active' and 'empowered' young people who do articulate their needs, perspectives and convictions are, too often, overlooked or ignored by the societies and communities in which they live. The support for young people to engage on their own terms and in ways they find meaningful is still largely missing for many. Commitments to the co-creation of the present and the future authentically with young people is still routinely not translated enough into practice. The implications are multi-layered for young people today, for their future and the future of societies and all of us.

Non-formal education and learning, within the educative, participative, empowering, expressive and inclusive values of youth work, provides young people with a sense of agency. Youth work, as one of the facets of civic education, should also focus on power relations, intersectionality, social justice, emancipation and true engagement of young people. It should be a guide to addressing inequalities, putting young people into focus and giving them opportunities to be competent co-creators of the European polity. By reclaiming its civic mission, youth work helps in creating critical youth citizenship that can competently respond to contemporary challenges Europe as a democratic project is facing.

## **European youth work and youth work in Europe**

Until the turn of the 21st century, there was little reference to 'youth work' at a European level. More recently, a history of youth work in Europe series

sheds more light on what has gone on in the past<sup>3</sup> and what youth work might usefully do in the present. This led to the European Youth Work Conventions in 2010 and 2015, and now in 2020.

Youth work throughout Europe reflects *diversity* in many ways – in its historical roots, its philosophy, its practice, its resourcing and its professionalism. At the same time, the diversity of youth work across Europe already possesses significant *common ground* – not least in its desire to support and defend **spaces** for young people’s voice and autonomy and to build **bridges** for young people to take the next steps, with competence and confidence, in their lives<sup>4</sup>. The past decade has produced political support for youth work within both the European Union<sup>5</sup> and the Council of Europe<sup>6</sup>. The recent EU Council Resolution<sup>7</sup> supporting the establishment of a European Youth Work Agenda under Germany’s Presidency of the European Union has now confirmed that political commitment.

More grounded activity in the field of youth work research, policy and practice reveals important lines of development for youth work in Europe. However, it also demonstrates that youth work architectures across Europe remain fragmented, patchy and incomplete. Multiple challenges remain, highlighted in the recent Council Resolution under the generic headings of Concept, Competence, Credibility, Connection, and Crisis and Opportunity.

Youth work is no longer just the means or mechanism for supporting wider youth policy aspirations – it is now a distinctive arena of policy and practice. There is never, however, room for complacency. Youth work is essentially a social practice, both connecting with and challenging the prevailing and changing structures of the societies in which it operates. It can be subject both to doubts about its value and inflated expectations of what it can achieve while amidst all it finds its ‘centre of gravity’. Its political and financial support can never be taken for granted, as youth work itself seeks to navigate a path that cements its place as a ‘small but important part of social and educational policies’. Indeed, robust debate and self-critical reflection within the youth work community of practice must be matched with concerted and collective advocacy for a more secure infrastructure for youth work that can enable effective practice on the ground. It is the

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3 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/history-of-youth-work>

4 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262202/Declaration/2f264232-7324-41e4-8bb6-404c75ee5b62>; <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration+FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85>

5 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A42010Y1204%2801%29>

6 [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78)

7 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A415%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A415%3ATOC)

balance between its base and infrastructure that, ultimately, will determine youth work's sustainability and growth.

Finally, there is always a question of trust. This is an essential element of the youth work relationship with young people, but it is not always evident within the youth work community of practice, either across its different segments or through its different hierarchies. The establishment or rekindling of greater trust will be both part of the Bonn process and the fuel that will take it forward.

## **Implementing the European Youth Work Agenda through the Bonn process**

To the European youth work community of practice:

“Don't ask what the Bonn process can do for us, but what we can do for the Bonn process - as **our** contribution to the European Youth Work Agenda”

Various documents have informed this 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention. The final Declaration does not wish to repeat them, in substance or in structure. Nor does it wish to 'reinvent the wheel'; as somebody once said, if you do, 'please make sure that it is round'! However, there are two important preliminary observations to make. First, we should always be striving towards the maintenance of the good structures and practices that already exist, their development when the need arises, and the space for innovation in our thinking, our organisation and our practices. Never has this been so obvious than in the adaptability of youth work over the past year. So, secondly, we should never rule out the possibility, indeed probability, that there will be new expressions of youth work as new challenges arise.

Building on the conclusions of the youth work community of practice at the Convention, the following framework for the implementation of the Bonn process is proposed.

# Growing youth work throughout Europe

## Youth work provision

“Create spaces to listen to young people’s voices, not just offer spaces and a programme”

Strengthening youth work provision in Europe is an essential goal of the Bonn process. The ambition of the youth work community of practice should be to aim high: to **develop and expand the youth work offer**, reaching out to and involving more young people, especially to ensure that young people from all backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities, have access to youth work. Furthermore, in a post-pandemic Europe, youth work must seek to innovate and go further than the paths already known. The boundaries and parameters of youth work, in terms of age, target groups, issues and perhaps other dimensions should be strengthened in order to establish a baseline to advocate for youth work growth.

### A local youth work offer

The Convention welcomed the idea of establishing the principle of a basic youth work offer for young people all over Europe. Although cross-border mobility and European level youth work will contribute to offering opportunities to young people greatly, this will essentially be implemented at a local and national level. European policies can play an important role in order to support its development. Quality indicators can be set at European level, to inspire local and national practices.

Based on the expertise and practical experience of the field, a number of elements have been considered to be crucial:

- a **framework to set the standard**, including indicators, and to assure the sustainability of youth work, particularly at the local level;
- **not to be identical in every place**. It should, however, certainly include capacity building for all stakeholders and sustainable funding, including for the programmes of non-governmental organisations. It should encompass premises for youth work to take place, as well as detached youth work and digital youth work;
- to be **co-managed** by youth organisations, youth work providers and relevant authorities;
- to include the **creation of spaces** to listen to young people’s voices, in order to ensure that it meets the needs of young people;
- to seek connection and **build links** with other domains in the public and private spheres, including formal education, employment and vocational training, health, housing, justice, culture, sports, technology development, media and social welfare;

- to be highly accessible for young people from a diversity of backgrounds and profiles. A basic youth work offer should therefore include **a clear strategy to enhance social inclusion and diversity** among participating young people;
- to have a proactive strategy that **includes reflection on the existing structures to achieve more effective outreach** and thereby involve more young people in youth work;
- to provide a pathway to guide and **include new initiatives** of young people, in the spirit of social innovation and entrepreneurship, in the basic youth work offer.

### **The *local* youth work community of practice**

The Convention gave an important place to the local policy-making level and the role it can play in supporting the local community of practice. There is a need for **significant additional investment to strengthen the provision of quality youth work at local level.**

The local youth work community of practice should be based on cooperation between local authorities/municipalities and local youth work organisations with voluntary and paid youth workers. The European Charter on Local Youth Work<sup>8</sup> provides a useful tool to start building this community. Mapping the existing youth work provision, its needs and strengths is a first step, in view of elaborating a local youth work development plan. Young people should be actively involved to express their needs but also to shape their environment, their physical space for youth work, embedded in the local neighbourhood. Local youth centres can orientate their activity to the quality criteria established by the Council of Europe for the Quality Label for Youth Centres<sup>9</sup>.

National (youth) policy frameworks can create incentives for local (youth) policy-making through co-financing mechanisms and setting standards. Special attention should be given to rural areas, to support the development of quality youth work and the creation of a community of practice.

### **The funding of youth work and youth organisations**

Youth work in Europe demands an **increased investment in its funding**, in order to meet the growing demand and expectations. This calls for legal provisions that secure funding mechanisms for youth work at all levels, from the local to the European level. A **European Charter** should be developed to inspire good governance at all levels when building funding system(s).

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.europegoeslocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191002-egl-charter\\_ENG\\_online.pdf](https://www.europegoeslocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191002-egl-charter_ENG_online.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/quality-label-for-youth-centres>



In this respect youth work requires funding that:

- has clear processes to get access, be transparent in its implementation, be coordinated and avoid overlaps;
- strengthens the **financial sustainability of youth organisations** and allows them to build more complex and longer-term strategies, away from merely programme based or project funding;
- is **implemented on an evidence-basis**, where the real needs of youth work are reflected in the types and amounts of funding;
- allows assuring basic **conditions and protection for voluntary and professional youth workers**, including insurance, minimum salaries and safety networks for burnout;
- is **not overburdened with rules**, without neglecting the focus on governance, accountability and quality.

European funding programmes from both the European Union and the Council of Europe should also have the ambition to:

- **strengthen the cross-sectoral approach and mainstream youth work priorities** in overall European funding (such as European Solidarity Corps, European Social Fund, Climate Pact, and Horizon 2020);
- ensure **stronger access of youth work to European funding** by promoting opportunities, raising more awareness of the youth work community of practice and including more young people in the funded actions;
- assure that supporting structures (such as National Agencies for the EU Youth Programmes and the European Youth Foundation) do not only offer funds, but also more **long-term support and vision**;
- be **recognised as tools** to achieve policy objectives, including the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda under the Bonn process.

## Quality development

**Quality**, and how this is perceived by young people, is **essential** if they want **to participate, engage and take advantage of the learning possibilities** that youth work offers. The first impressions of youth work, which for most young people is at the local level, are therefore critical.

However, the question on **how to support further quality development of youth work** remains very broad and has many different dimensions. It ranges from the frameworks embedding quality youth work to how those are to be developed, from quality assurance systems and the development of quality indicators to competences development schemes, and from long-

term sustainable funding to the development of evidence-based policies and practice.

Quality development in youth work is closely linked to other issues and therefore it **needs to be discussed and handled in a more holistic and at the same time structured way**. It needs to focus on specific aspects, while at the same time relating these to the bigger picture of youth work policy and practice and **connect them with the basic values and principles of youth work**. This connects to the fact that the context where it should take place, and the points from where quality development should start are very diverse, even if the aims are typically in the same direction.

Many ideas that came up during the discussions on quality were in line with already existing – though not yet usually visible enough - structures, initiatives and guidelines. Thus, this clearly **calls for better outreach and information about existing support structures and mechanisms** as well as for the need to make them more accessible to the local level. Some examples of existing support that should be used and further disseminated and activated were the European Training Strategy<sup>10</sup>, the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres and the European Charter on Local Youth Work.

Taken together, this leads to the central conclusion that arguably the overarching need for the development of quality youth work is to **develop clearer structures for cooperation and co-creation within and between all levels** and stakeholder groups within the youth work community of practice. There is a clearly expressed need to **strengthen existing networks at all levels** and at the same time find, or create, structures and spaces that **connect these different networks to each other** and establish clear and coordinated processes for spreading information, having continuous dialogue and working together around common quality issues.

Discussions on quality development also reinforced the need to:

- **establish occupational standards**, and build coherent routes, relevant curricula and appropriate institutional locations for the education and training of youth workers;
- have a **youth work research agenda** focusing on participatory action research carried out in cooperation between research and practice and creating a knowledge base relevant for both practice, policy and education;
- **map and spread knowledge** on existing quality (assurance) systems and using these as a basis for fine-tuning and (further) developing models adapted to local conditions;

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3301/European%20Training%20Strategy%20in%20the%20field%20of%20Youth\\_en.pdf](https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3301/European%20Training%20Strategy%20in%20the%20field%20of%20Youth_en.pdf)

- establish **national working groups**, representative of the youth work community of practice, that could function as connection points, knowledge hubs and coordinators of all the different measures needed in order to develop quality.

## A common direction

### Within the youth work community of practice

“Only through communication can we discover what we don’t know that we don’t know!”

Co-creation and the engagement of all the qualities of the youth work community of practice are fundamental prerequisites to develop quality youth work practices and policies. This requires the **provision of spaces to explore, exchange and build on examples of good practices across different styles of practice**, via (digital) networks, platforms and other means, from local to European level. The flow of communication and deliberative collaboration within the youth work community of practice both horizontally (*between different actors within the community of practice*) and vertically (*between European, national, regional and local levels*) are essential.

For youth work in Europe to thrive, **a coordinated approach to learning, sharing, supporting and building on youth work development and good practices at the local level, towards regional, national and European levels**, and vice versa, is needed. Furthermore, more common ground can be secured through regional European networks and exchange within and between them in order to advance shared youth work architectures across Europe. The European dimension in the youth work practice at different levels needs to be strengthened and integrated, particularly for more marginalised young people to be able to access a wider range of opportunities. Local youth organisations and local youth work need to *know* about the opportunities at other levels, become familiar with ‘European youth policy’ and take part in European youth work and European youth programmes, as well as develop them further.

The Convention has identified the need to strengthen **cooperation within the youth work community of practice** across Europe. There is also a need to **reinforce relations between national and European youth work development strategies** as well as underline their interdependence and interconnectedness. To those ends, it will be important to establish inclusive, democratic and accessible **multilingual** communication, cooperation and working relationships within the community of practice and most notably through youth research, youth policy and youth work practice. It is necessary to improve the capacity of youth work to analyse, examine and discuss (global) trends in relation to its own practice, work together on improving quality and determine **common approaches** to youth work

development in Europe. Convention participants also highlighted the need to **bridge gaps and missing links** between different youth work contexts and different actors within the community of practice through interacting, learning, being inspired and supported, building capacities, sharing and receiving up-to-date information and becoming familiar with relevant policy frameworks and legislation.

Proposed measures:

- **map** the community of practice and establish communication and working relationships within, particularly, the triangle of practice, research and policy in the youth sector;
- establish **national and international networks for youth work**, as well as creating youth work professional alliances, structures and unions;
- secure **structural national and European funding** for collaborative youth work structures and networks and participatory knowledge and practice co-creation;
- provide **information and capacity building on the European dimension**, European youth programmes and existing resources for youth workers active at other levels of practice;
- develop, through participatory processes, an open, inclusive, accessible and multilingual **European digital platform on youth work** as an evolving tool for the community of practice, in synergy and complementarity with existing platforms; promoting such a platform to local youth workers, facilitating their use of it as a place for peer-learning and mutual support, for innovation and piloting, for discussing quality and emerging issues;
- establish 'cooperation evaluation' within a **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Board** to follow progress;
- use a **European Youth Work Convention** every five years to evaluate progress, revise objectives and set pathways to reaching them.

## Beyond the youth work community of practice

"Young people are not restricted to one domain and their voice needs to be heard across!"

In the reality of unpredictable societal changes, well-connected and supported youth work is a driving force for youth and community resilience. It is important to **communicate the value of youth work**, facilitate and stimulate structural and strategic cooperation with other sectors relevant to young people's lives.

The youth work community of practice should be **engaging effectively with different sectors**, both public and private, in order to remain

relevant to young people and advance in the context of youth work recognition, innovation and sustainability. Synergies between different sectors and actors are crucial for reaching out to all young people, giving them a voice and supporting them to take action, as well as providing them with multiple entry points to public services and, as a result, leaving no-one behind.

There is a need for **strategic and operational approaches** to cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as greater **horizontal cooperation** on youth (and youth work) at all levels.

Proposed measures:

- define **with whom** cross-sectoral cooperation is to be established in line with the priorities of specific segments of the youth work community of practice at any given level and **on which shared objectives**; bringing together different actors from different sectors and from different levels together to **build synergies**;
- supporting the creation and the functioning of **multidisciplinary structures, networks and bodies on youth** at local and national levels.

## Recognition

“Employability pressure has made us think of competences as individual property. Pleas for solidarity and interdependence are calling us to recognise the systemic nature of competences. No competence is developed in a vacuum. We need other people.”

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Convention has demonstrated that there is still too little attention dedicated to the promotion and recognition of youth work and the Bonn process can be the space to create a **common narrative** not only for the recognition and validation of learning in youth work, but also for the recognition and validation of youth work in general. While recognition *per se* is the outcome of a series of developments, such a process requires **more investment in strategic and coordinated efforts and resources to make youth work better understood, visible and credible as a self-standing work arena**. While this calls for cooperation, relationships and partnerships with other sectors, youth work nevertheless deserves its own rightful place within European policy agendas.

The challenge of a shared understanding of youth work partially connects with the diverse interpretations of youth work-related terminology. Developing a **common language, a set of common terms supporting a widespread generic definition** of youth work can support building a better and wider understanding of that field of work. While this ought to **leave enough space to adjust and connect to local context and**

**realities**, it requires generic fundamentals all sectors and levels can resonate with.

Proposed measures:

- organise **punctual and recurrent events**, such as targeted campaigns or yearly thematic days or week;
- develop a clear and tailored **communication plan** that connects all levels;
- develop a **set of common terms**, existing definition(s) of youth work, that can be agreed upon and used at national level, in user-friendly and the corresponding languages;
- ensure **joined efforts in promotion**, communication and dissemination of youth work related contents.

Moving towards the recognition of youth work implies strengthening an evidence-based approach and mechanisms to **better showcase the impact of youth work** not only on individuals, but also or foremost on communities and on society. Moreover, when tackling professional standards, we need to pay **particular attention to voluntary youth workers' practices** to gain a better understanding of their contribution to the field. In the light of the European Youth Work Agenda and of today's situation of young people in Europe, a particular focus should be dedicated to a clear (though not exhaustive) Youth Work Research Agenda:

- research on the provisions for **establishing youth work at a national level** in all European countries (incl. legislation for education and training of youth workers);
- research on **existing common agreed professional standards for youth workers education and training** (e.g. competence models and frameworks, code of ethics, curriculum);
- **translate youth work research findings** into formats that youth workers and policy-makers (and others) can use;
- research **the youth work engagement** of voluntary youth workers;
- ensure thematic youth work research **reviews**.

Building bridges from the perspective of education and training also means to go **beyond the idea of integrating non-formal education and learning into formal education** settings and rather work towards a coordinated system enhancing collaboration and cooperation between distinct sectors working on a common purpose.

Proposed measures:

- build on existing successful initiatives that **showcase higher education structures engaging with the non-academic communities**, including youth work;
- enlarge the establishment of collaborative spaces and establish a **think tank** on education and training of youth workers;

- organise **peer-learning activities** at all levels with specific education and training related purpose;
- cooperate with organisations that have developed **tools to support recognition** of the learning process and outcomes (e.g. Open Badges).

Building on past processes, **validation, certification and accreditation** remain areas of work that also require a **common narrative**. A recognised profession needs to have an **educational pathway**. Hence, connected to the proposal to have more collaborative spaces, the need to consider what networking ('social capital') implies and how this is translated in different contexts is crucial. This also means to not only further develop and implement strategies and instruments for the recognition and validation of non-formal education and learning in youth work, but also to elaborate offers that foresee **bridges between the education and the training** of youth workers.

Proposed measures:

- **clarify the difference** between recognising the profession of paid youth workers and the professionalisation of youth work;
- develop complementing **measures to validate learning in youth work** in formal education contexts, which can also imply to develop joint curriculum and standard courses at national and European levels;
- develop a shared vision of **qualification for youth workers**, to ensure the quality of certification processes both in non-formal education and learning, and formal education;
- establish a **European Network of Youth Workers Associations**, and support similar processes at national level, where they do not yet exist, connecting with current thematic strategies such as the European Training Strategy and the Youthpass strategy;
- **build on European initiatives** such as the Strategic National Agencies Cooperation projects like Europe Goes Local or on Education and Training of Youth Workers.

## Innovation and emerging challenges

“Over many years quick fixes were applied to problems and challenges in the youth work sector, but during the crisis it became evident that these quick fixes did not work and were not sufficient”

Due to the shattering pandemic effects, **youth (mobility) projects have been disrupted**. Numerous youth work organisations and youth centres were shut down, while **youth work is needed more than ever** to support young people in facing the effects of the pandemic. The social and legal consequences of COVID-19 went beyond health/epidemiological, and

showcase the importance of communicating measures adequately to young people and including them in the planning and implementation of the measures where possible.

Youth work should develop to a stage where it can be a **safety net** for all young people in times of uncertainty. **Mental health promotion** is seen as a crucial point in youth work. Youth workers should be habilitated to carry out projects **promoting and maintaining the mental health of young people**, particularly those facing intersectional and other vulnerabilities.

Youth policy-makers should engage in a constructive dialogue with young people and youth workers to **create more resilient youth work structures** grounded in evidence-informed innovation principles, encompassing **long-term thinking, reflexivity and strategy-based youth work** (rather than project-based). Any action in the European Youth Work Agenda should rely on these principles, being aware that contemporary youth work practice is embedded in a global community.

Thus, there should be a fostering of a culture of innovation in the practice and a practice of innovation in youth work by:

- improving **smart youth work** while putting greater focus on **developing digital competences** of young people and youth workers and by **investing in technological infrastructure and innovation** which will help overcome the **digital divide** and assure **access** to youth work for all young people;
- making **youth work greener**. Encourage and prioritise practices and solutions that are environmentally friendly, aligned with the principles of sustainable development that youth work seeks to instil and young people expect.

It is crucial to strengthen the capacity of youth work to navigate European and worldwide transformations by:

- recognising that, even though digital youth work is important, **not all needs of young people can be addressed by it**. Hence, youth work policies should actively support the development of **all youth work types, models and practices** in order to adequately respond to existing realities. The European Youth Work Agenda should keep strengthening the role of youth work in times of uncertainty by **keeping up the values of youth work**;
- fostering in youth work practice **a societal and global challenges dimension**;
- advocating for youth work in Europe and globally to be one of the primary civic society development strategies;
- developing practices and strategies for youth work to enable young people to **engage in a democratic society and enable them to**



- **bring change** on topics that they are already vocal about and interested in (such as the movements connected to climate change, racial discrimination or reproductive health);
- **creating spaces**, both online and offline, **for cooperation and exchange** at interregional and global level to allow the youth work community of practice to look beyond the European context.

## Policy frameworks

Young people's lives are affected by a multitude of policies being developed and implemented at all levels, from local to national, regional and European. However, practice shows that other policy areas often don't consider the impact on young people when the decisions are being taken. The youth sector has been long calling for a horizontal approach to be applied to youth policy, and this should be no different when it comes to the components of youth work in those policies. Youth work should be an integral part of youth policy, systematically incorporating the needs and measures regarding youth work into youth policies, both vertically and horizontally, where applicable.

These policies should be implemented at all levels and should be based on co-creation together with the youth work community of practice, including young people, in line with a rights-based approach to participation, recognising them as main-stakeholders whose involvement is essential in all these processes and structures. This also helps to bridge the potential gaps between reflections of policy-makers, practitioners and the real needs of young people. Involving research in policy-making should lead to a more nuanced, evidence-informed approach to dealing with these needs.

In an ever so increasingly globalised world, these policies also can and should interact with other realities beyond Europe as well. Furthermore, to ensure that these policies indeed can become a reality, sustainable funding mechanisms need to be allocated to their objectives.

Proposed measures:

- **strengthened cooperation** at European level **between the European Commission and Council of Europe** that should aim at the wider dissemination of youth (and within it, youth work) policies horizontally across other areas of policy-making;
- youth work should be continued to be embedded in both long-term **youth specific strategies** and their intermediary measures (such as Annual Work Programmes and biennial Youth Sector Priorities) in both institutions;
- **establish, maintain and further develop working methods** that involve young people as equal creators of the policies affecting them, and mainstream youth participation across different policy domains;

- **youth laws, youth work laws and strategies for youth work** should be present and promoted all over Europe, at local, regional, national and European levels, supported by the cooperation of the EU and the Council of Europe;
- European youth programmes could further contribute to the development of youth work policy in all Member States by **supporting policy related processes carried out by organisations**;
- **systematic check of youth work policies** should be established by setting a common European Quality Standard, including a set of indicators to promote the realisation of youth work at all levels;
- youth policies should also consider building bridges and exchange best practices with other realities around the world beyond Europe, embedding European youth (work) policy also in international legislative frameworks;
- capacity building of formal policy actors in how to **engage with young people and youth workers in creating, implementing and revising policies** will serve the wider understanding of young people's needs. Governmental bodies in charge of youth policies and/or youth work can also play a role in advocating amongst other governmental sectors for a more crosscutting youth policy.

## A strategic framework for youth work development

The 'wind in the back' of the European Youth Work Agenda has been provided, as noted throughout this Declaration, by the dual commitment to youth work, in recent years, of both the European Union and the Council of Europe.

An early message at the Convention was to suggest that the youth work community of practice should no longer be asking what the European institutions should be doing for youth work, but what the youth work community of practice could or should be doing for itself.

This still requires, however, the institutions to play their part, though now perhaps less as overarching drivers of the European Youth Work Agenda and more as underpinning anchors. The European Commission's Youth Unit<sup>11</sup> and the Council of Europe's Youth Department are, after all, both integral constituents of the European youth work community of practice. Convention participants expressed the conviction that the Bonn process would be best served by an even **greater alignment** of the institutions' vision for youth work within their respective youth strategies.

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<sup>11</sup> Now formally the Youth, Volunteer Solidarity and Traineeships Office within DG EAC (Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) of the European Commission

There was broad consensus that both the European Commission and the Council of Europe should conclude a joint **letter of commitment** or **memorandum of understanding** to confirm the nature and level of support both specific for the youth work community of practice and in relation to **connecting the Bonn process to wider pan-European education and learning initiatives**, such as the Bologna process for higher education. There was also a call for fuller and fairer representation of all corners of the European youth work community of practice, maintaining that there needed to be greater 'diversification of channels of involvement' if all voices from youth work were to be heard. Rather more uncertainty prevailed as to where the proposed institutional alignment should be located; there were **references to partnerships in the context of networks and co-operation**. Nonetheless, participants acknowledged that the EU-Council of Europe partnership in the field of youth has already had a significant coordinating role in many of the activities on youth work in the European context.

Within that institutional frame, as part of the strategic mission of the European Youth Work Agenda advocated by both parties, there was support for the establishment of a working group to consider co-operation, consultation and development within the Bonn process, including the monitoring of the progress of the stepping stones identified for the Bonn process and the contribution made to that process within the respective youth strategies of the two institutions.

If 'time to act' is to be more than empty rhetoric, the European institutions are considered to have a key light-touch enabling role to play in advocating, advising, assisting and inspiring the development of youth work within their member States.

Additional proposed measures:

- clear **alignment of the vision for youth work** between the two European institutions and a public statement of shared commitment;
- support for a **Joint Action Task Force** to monitor the roll-out of the Bonn process;
- **connecting** the Bonn process to other strategic social and educational initiatives within the European institutions;
- establish **National Working Groups** operating in co-creation and co-management with the whole community of practice;
- promote **recognition** of non-formal education and learning in and through youth work;
- encourage youth work **research** for evidence-informed youth work practice;
- provide '**framing conditions**' for developing national support for local youth work provision;
- **sustaining exchange and mobility** opportunities for youth workers

- priming **curriculum development** for youth worker education and training;
- backing **innovation hubs** for progressive and pioneering youth work; - ensuring **full participatory platforms** for youth work dialogue and development.

In the round, the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention calls upon the European institutions responsible for youth work to establish a robust communication and networking strategy to convey their conviction and commitment to the Bonn process.

## Conclusions/Final words

We want to thank the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and everybody involved for making the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention possible and the EU and the Council of Europe for supporting it and creating the necessary political ground and framework.

The Convention has, through intense discussion and debates among its participants, created ideas and proposals for activities and measures relevant for and covering all aspects of our diverse youth work reality. All these proposals are important. They complement and support each other and form, taken together, a comprehensive and holistic approach to the further strengthening and development of youth work. They should therefore be read and seen as a whole.

The overarching conclusion is, however, that in order to move forward we need to strengthen the connections within and between all levels of the community of practice. We need to close the gaps and more than ever engage in sharing views, co-creating, taking collaborative action, and both learn and unlearn in order to accommodate the new and the unexpected.

This Declaration puts 'flesh on the bones' of the European Youth Work Agenda. The Bonn process is our common effort to make it become real. So, let's put it into action. It is no less than the young people of Europe **demand and deserve**.