

Signposts for the Future

The Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention

In a nutshell

Context

With the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda as strategic framework for youth work development across Europe was kicked off. This took place at a unique moment at the end of 2020: during Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union and Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Around 1,000 participants from 50 countries took part in the Convention, which was a digital event broadcasted from Bonn. A programme full of workshops, plenary discussions, keynote speeches, and delegation meetings offered inspiration and space to discuss about youth work practice, policy and research. Engaged discussions in 127 workshops lead to recommendations by the participants on eight thematic strands. These conclusions were captured by a team of rapporteurs in reports and brought to a drafting group, which condensed the main outcome of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention in writing: the final Declaration, titled 'Signposts for the Future'.

The Declaration seeks to guide the youth work community of practice in implementing the European Youth Work Agenda or in what is now known as the

Bonn Process. Its 18 pages provide the vision and set out guidelines calling for joint activities, be it at local, regional, national, or European level, and formulate recommendations for objectives, areas of work and concrete action. It addresses all stakeholders of the youth work community of practice throughout Europe directly, invoking them to become active together in the Bonn Process and take responsibility for developing and actioning the Bonn Process in the short and long term.

Starting point

Europe faces times of change and uncertainty which often disproportionately affect young people. All youth work builds on common ground: supporting spaces for young people's voice and autonomy and building bridges for the next steps in young people's lives. Youth work throughout Europe has developed a lot during the last decade, but it is still challenged with regard to its concept, competence, credibility and connections and its capacity to turn crisis into opportunities. The Bonn Process intends to pave the way for youth work development throughout Europe.

Content: Growing youth work throughout Europe in eight priority areas

'Signposts for the Future' proposes eight priority areas for the Bonn Process and invites all those active in youth work in Europe to link their own engagement to them:

Develop and expand the youth work offer

To strengthen the provision of youth work in Europe, European policies and local policy-making play an important role in supporting the further development of a quality local youth work offer. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Realise a local youth work offer
- Strengthen the local youth work community of practice
- Use quality standards
- Create a European charter for governance
- Invest in accessible and sustainable funding
- Mobilise European funding programmes

Quality development

Quality development in youth work calls for better outreach and information about existing support structures and mechanisms. Clearer structures for co-operation and co-creation within and between all levels as well as strengthening and connecting existing networks at all levels is needed. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Broaden implementation of existing quality frameworks, systems, and support structures
- Establish occupational standards for the education and training of youth workers
- Establish a youth work research agenda
- Strengthen and establish networks and structures for co-operation and co-creation
- Establish information and processes for dialogue

A common direction for the youth work community of practice

For youth work to move in the same direction, providing spaces to explore, exchange, and build on examples of good practice across different styles of practice are required. A co-ordinated approach to learning, sharing, supporting, and building on youth work development and good practice at local, regional, national, and European level is needed. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Map the community of practice and establish working relationships
- Secure structural funding for collaborative structures and networks
- Provide information and capacity-building on the European dimension
- Develop and promote a European digital platform on youth work
- Establish a monitoring, evaluation and learning board to follow progress
- Implement a European Youth Work Convention every five years

Beyond the youth work community of practice

It is important to communicate the value of youth work and engage effectively with different sectors. Strategic and operational approaches to cross-sectoral co-operation and horizontal co-operation on youth (and youth work) at all levels is needed. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Communicate the value of youth work
- Engage with other sectors strategically
- Define specific other sectors based on shared objectives and build up co-operation
- Create and maintain multi-disciplinary structures, networks, and bodies on youth

Promotion and recognition

More strategic and co-ordinated efforts are needed to make youth work better understood, visible and credible as a distinct work arena. Developing a common language, a set of terms supporting a widely shared general definition while leaving enough space to adjust and connect to local contexts and realities, will help create a common narrative. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Organise events, such as campaigns or yearly thematic days
- Develop a communications plan that connects all levels
- Organise peer-learning activities
- Develop measures to validate learning in youth work in formal education
- Establish a European network of youth workers associations
- Build on European initiatives, including Strategic National Agencies Co-operation projects

Policy frameworks

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. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Incorporate youth work as integral part of youth policies at all levels
- Strengthen co-operation between European Commission and Council of Europe on youth work
- Support involvement of young people and youth workers in policy-making and implementation
- Apply research-based and rights-based approaches in policy-making and implementation
- Promote youth laws, youth work laws and strategies for youth work
- Establish systematic checks of youth work policies by setting a common European quality standard

Innovation and emerging challenges

To be a safety net for all young people in times of uncertainty, more resilient youth work structures are required that are grounded in evidence-informed innovation principles, encompassing long-term thinking, reflexivity and strategy-based youth work. A culture of innovation in youth work practice should be fostered as well as the capacity of youth work to navigate European and worldwide transformations. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Create resilient youth work structures
- Support actions providing safety and mental health of young people
- Improve smart youth work by investing in infrastructure and competence development
- Make youth work greener
- Advocate for youth work as one of the primary civic society development strategies
- Support young people's engagement in a democratic society
- Create innovation hubs for progressive and pioneering youth work

A strategic framework for youth work development

The Bonn Process offers a framework for the youth work community of practice to consider what it could be doing for youth work itself. However, the growth of youth work throughout Europe would be even better served if European institutions further aligned their visions for youth work within their respective youth strategies. This requires a joint letter of commitment or memorandum of understanding, connecting the Bonn Process to wider pan-European education and learning initiatives. For example, the following measures are proposed:

- Align the commitment of the European institutions by a public statement
- Establish a joint action task force at European level
- Establish national working groups
- Provide framing conditions for supporting local youth work provision
- Establish a robust communications and networking strategy
- Anchor ownership of the Bonn Process throughout the whole youth work community of practice

Signposts for the future

**Growing
youth work
throughout
Europe**

Develop and expand the youth work offer

Quality development

A common direction for the youth work community of practice

Beyond the youth work community of practice

Promotion and recognition

Innovation and emerging challenges

Policy frameworks

A strategic framework for youth work development