

The European Youth Work Agenda

During the German Council Presidency, a resolution on a European Youth Work Agenda will be adopted by the Youth Ministerial Council*. Youth organisations and councils must be involved in the drafting of the Agenda from the outset.

With this opinion, the DBJR takes a stand on youth work and calls for the Agenda to better coordinate Member States' work on youth work and to structurally strengthen youth work in Europe through a strategic framework. The Council of Europe, its Youth Department and the Youth Partnership¹ have been working at the forefront on youth work for many years and have provided a crucial basis for the Agenda, inter alia with the CoE Recommendation to Member States in 2017. The central importance of volunteering and youth organisations in youth work should be emphasised in the Youth Work Agenda. Youth work covers not only the fields of child and youth work but also youth social work. Youth work thus describes social, educational, cultural and political activities for and with young people in Europe. Youth work is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and focused on the interests of young people. With its emphasis on voluntary work, it is carried out by voluntary or full-time professionals. Youth work encourages young people and provides them with the necessary means to become active European citizens for a democratic EU that is based on solidarity. Youth work does not aim at the employability of young people, but at their personal development into independent and responsible personalities.

The European Youth Work Agenda should deliberately focus on the structures and framework conditions for good youth work in Europe and not on individual needs orientation. Youth Work primarily takes place at local level. Linkages and coherent strategies as well as effective participation of young people at all levels are therefore crucial.

The Youth Work Agenda as a strategic framework

The Youth Work Agenda aims to strengthen coordination between Member States to create the framework conditions for good youth work across Europe. The aim must be to strengthen youth work throughout Europe and to make youth exchanges possible, even if good youth work already exists in some countries.

The central role of youth organisations and councils in youth work

Young people are involved in youth organisations on a voluntary and self-organised basis, making a concrete contribution to the development of European society. The role of youth organisations as platforms for democracy and as inclusive and locally rooted mediators is central to Youth Work, which is strongly anchored at local level. Youth organisations and their federations, the youth councils, are based on diversity, plurality and self-organisation. Value orientation, voluntary work, co-decision and self-determination are at the core of all child and youth work and should also be central to the Youth Work Agenda. Structures that have grown up locally and democratically organised youth

¹ Structural Partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe, more information here: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership>

councils should therefore be given structural and financial support. This requires a legal framework in all member states which ensures both legal recognition and financial support for the relevant structures and organisations.

A good practice from Germany is a set of federal regulations on the tasks, services and principles of child and youth welfare in Germany. Of particular relevance to youth work is the obligation of all levels to adequately promote child and youth work or youth work, as enshrined in paragraphs 11 to 13 of the Child and Youth Services Act and Book Eight of the Social Security Code (Sozialgesetzbuch VIII). Among other things, this includes the obligation to promote self-organised youth organisations while preserving their own life as defined in the statutes. It also states that their work is intended to be permanent. This makes it possible to work on a long-term and strategic basis. The European programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps currently offer this type of support only for European umbrella structures. In many countries such support is completely lacking on the national level. This leads to major problems.

Youth organisations and councils under pressure

Not least because of the Corona pandemic, the Youth Work Agenda must focus on securing and expanding the work of youth organisations and councils in Europe, both from a political and a financial perspective. It became much more visible why project funding alone is problematic for small, voluntary-based youth councils that finance their work with the administrative lump sums for projects. Some youth councils have now had to stop their work because the crisis has taken away the basis for their projects and thus for their overall financing. In future, this will require additional structural funding in the youth section of Erasmus+ to support youth organisations and councils that want to work on European level and are not secured by national regulations. In contrast to the current Erasmus+ Key Action 3 - "Support for political reforms, cooperation with civil society in the youth field" - the funding would support youth organisations on a long-term basis.

Many youth councils have come under political pressure because governments try to use youth work politically. Many national governments do not act in partnership with civil society structures. Without the involvement of experts as well as without consideration of the interests of young people and, above all, without joint cooperations processes on what constitutes good youth work, young people's self-organisations are bypassed, financially dried up or parallel structures are developed which (must) follow the politics of the respective government. Increasingly, in some countries the latter instrument is used in an attempt to supplant the national youth councils recognised at European level. The Youth Work Agenda is designed to counter all these developments. Self-organised youth, partnership with civil society and subsidiarity are important blocks on which the Youth Work Agenda must be built.

Quality assurance and further development of youth work

The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 calls on Member States to support the development of quality youth work at all levels, including the training of youth leaders and other voluntary and professional staff. With this in mind, the Youth Work Agenda aims to set the framework for professional training and development of youth workers and volunteers throughout Europe. The special needs and different traditions in the countries must be taken into account. In addition, the DBJR is critical of the fo-

cus on the validation of educational performance or acquired skills, for example in the YouthPass,² because the recognition reduces voluntary work to educational outcomes. Youth (organisations') work is more than just education: it requires freedom of action and cannot be validated. A good example of quality assurance without validation of educational outcomes is the Youth Leader-Card "Juleica" in Germany. With minimum standards and a centralised application procedure, it guarantees the quality of training nationwide. Due to regulations specific to the federal states and youth organisations as well as the many sponsors, it also stands for diversity, plurality of values and constant further development. The Youth Work Agenda should develop a European instrument that ensures quality without reducing youth work to educational outcomes.

A close exchange between practice and research is important for the further development of youth work. Especially for the implementation of the Agenda, a European understanding to monitor developments in the countries must be found. The quality standards for youth policy developed by the European Youth Forum can serve as orientation.

Based on the conclusions³ of the EU Council of Ministers of Youth in 2017, the Youth Work Agenda should also address and further develop smart youth work. Young people in particular are naturally moving in digital environments. Young people must acquire skills for this reality in order to be able to move in it self-determinedly and safely. Youth organisations have therefore been actively addressing this issue for some time. Last but not least, new ways of mobilisation are being used in youth work and aspects of digital voluntary work are being tested. The Youth Work Agenda should create the strategic and financial framework conditions that focus on emancipatory and critical digital competence, good participation as well as democratic and value-based learning.

Participation and co-management as a central point of Youth Work

Another important item on the Youth Work Agenda should be participation and the co-management of young people in all matters concerning them. There is no doubt that the future of Europe concerns young people. Only if young people are involved our democratic society and European identity will be secured and strengthened. Young people must also be involved in policy-making in order to strengthen the feeling of belonging. Conversely, this also leads to better framework conditions for youth work.

Participation must not be a mere request for opinions. It must always be transparent how and where the results of participation are incorporated into policy-making. The expectations of young people must be taken seriously if they have been promised participation beforehand. The Youth Goals are a good example of a participation process that was open to young issues and whose results should now be implemented in Europe. In order to anchor participation coherently at the local level, youth organisations and councils as well as their multipliers play a central role. The European Youth Strategy must be thought through and implemented locally. Youth organisations reach many young people; often those with fewer opportunities. They thus guarantee the important aspect of inclusion through participation. When implementing participation, the quality standards for youth participation should always be observed.

² Further information can be found here: <https://www.youthpass.eu/de/>

³ Conclusions of the 2017 Youth Minister Council: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG1207\(01\)&from=ET](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG1207(01)&from=ET)

In the Council of Europe, co-management is used to implement the participation of young people in an exemplary manner: Joint decision-making structures between the government and civil society are responsible for the development and funding of youth policy. The Council of Europe's Youth Advisory Council is made up of young people (half of whom are selected by the European Youth Forum) and works on an equal footing with the ministries. On the basis of this model, instruments should be developed at all levels within the framework of the Youth Work Agenda to enable joint responsibility for the development and funding of youth policy. For example, the awarding of European funding could in future require binding structures for the participation of youth organisations and councils and binding monitoring bodies for civil society.

The Youth Goals as fields of action

The Youth Work Agenda must also provide a framework for implementing the Youth Goals. A common understanding of the situation in Europe is needed on how to operationalise and implement the Youth Goals. Some National Youth Councils have therefore formed a strategic partnership - the Youth Goals Lab - to create the conditions for implementing the Youth Goals in Europe. This includes being able to evaluate the implementation of the Youth Goals in the member states.

Outlook

With this paper the DBJR takes stand on the current debate on Youth Work. After the adoption of the agenda, the implementation will start with the convention in December 2020. This will require additional bodies for civil society participation at European and German level to accompany the process. Especially in cases like Germany, where well-functioning child and youth work already exists, this body will be central.

As the representative of over six million young people, the DBJR aims to incorporate the expertise and interests of young people in the development and implementation of the agenda.

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