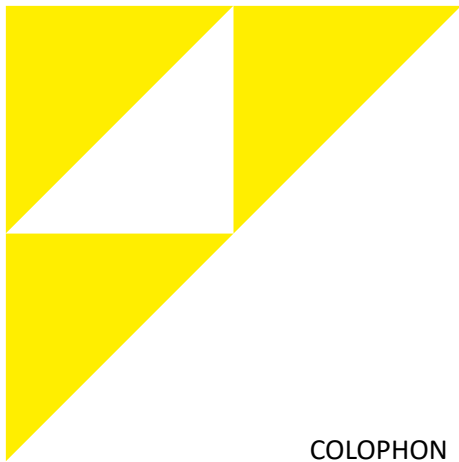


***TAKING STOCK***  
***European Expert Meeting***

Brussels, 19-20 February 2024

EU  
NEEDS  
YOUTH

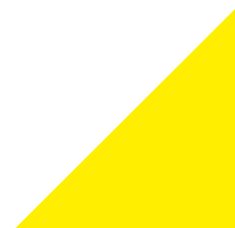


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AUTHOR: Gisèle Evrard

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## Intentions of the Expert Meeting

Since the 3rd European Youth Work Convention in 2020, a multitude of developments have taken place in the field of youth work in Europe. The book 'Taking Stock – Where Are We Now? Youth Work in Contemporary Europe'<sup>\*</sup>, provides an overview of these developments, in a larger historical timeframe of four decades of European youth policies. As such the document provides a rearview mirror to look where we have come from while looking ahead and steering where we want to go.

The 'Taking Stock' Expert Meeting aimed exactly to do that: reflect on where the discussion on youth work (and related policy) in Europe stands at this moment and what the next steps could and should be. The announcement of the 4th European Youth Work Convention creates an encouraging perspective for this exercise and can give it a clear focus.

**Koen Lambert**<sup>†</sup>, when opening the Expert Meeting, underlined that even though it may look as if this meeting is a sort of 'off-side programme' of the Presidency, it is not. Instead, it will potentially play an important role in the whole idea of what the Presidency is, and of what its follow-up can be.

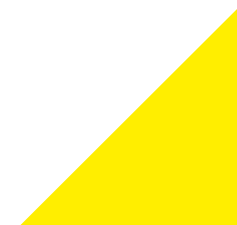
The programme<sup>‡</sup> of the Expert Meeting has been developed based on observations and insights that emerged throughout the past years and the work of the 'Resonance Group', which led to create a reflection space articulated around two main clusters and a series of questions:

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<sup>\*</sup> H. Williamson (2024)

<sup>†</sup> Koen Lambert is the director of JINT vzw, the Belgian-Flanders National Agency for the Erasmus+ youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

<sup>‡</sup> See Annex 1





#### **Cluster 1 (content):**

- What gaps are still there in the debate on youth work in Europe? What has not been discussed?
- Which common goals for youth work (policy) development? For all relevant actors? Which steps to take?
- Which tools, instruments, and platforms are to be developed to support this? How to make this sustainable?

#### **Cluster 2 (strategies):**

- How to use the European Youth Work Agenda, to develop youth work policies both in the EU and the Council of Europe, beyond 2027 or 2030?
- How should the cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe, in the field of youth, be developed (further)?
- How to better mobilise the community of practice to engage in youth work discussions?



## Opening address

Jan Vanhee<sup>5</sup> officially opened the meeting by underlining that the collective effort in preparing, implementing, and evaluating policies is not simply a service to the local communities and countries, but a significant contribution to a bigger European project.

The Expert Meeting was an invitation to widen our horizons, to embrace a pan-European perspective and spirit. It encouraged us to consider, "How can we think more in a European way?" In other words, how can we adopt a more thoughtful European spirit in our approach to youth work development? Jan underlined the Belgian Presidency's commitment to this vision, encouraging everyone to wear their 'European lenses' through which to view and address youth work across Europe.

Since the third European Youth Work Convention (EYWC), we find ourselves at an intersection, where we must consider "Where are we now?" and "Do we have a European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA)?" The period that followed the third EYWC has seen the emergence of many initiatives, such as the "[Futures of Youth Work](#)" project, exploring what youth work might look like in 2050. While numerous projects have been initiated, creating a path towards a 'Framework for the EYWA' remains a challenge and a journey that includes revisiting the [2017 Recommendation on Youth Work](#) and celebrating larger-scale projects like [Europe Goes Local](#) or [Democracy Reloading](#), which demonstrate a concrete approach to youth work development. The engagement with the community of practice is another indication of such developments.

The declaration of the third EYWC, [Signposts for the future](#), can be seen as a framework that supports setting a standard within different and diverse national perspectives on youth work development (and youth work's purpose). It underlines the urgent need for sustainable funding, quality enhancement connected to a

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Vanhee is a European and international youth policy advisor in the Division Knowledge & Policy at the Department for Culture, Youth and Media in the Flemish Community of Belgium. He is also a member of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Youth.



research agenda, and the wider recognition of youth work, a journey that started with the Strasbourg process and involves a constant commitment towards systematic training and education of youth workers and for all actors involved in youth work.

Jan continued pointing out the importance of remembering where we come from, what are our 'roots' and all the realisations and improvements we have made since, as described in Howard Williamson's retrospective exploration of the past four decades. But how do we enhance a framework supporting local youth work? The narrative around the question of standards should not be intimidating; instead, it should guide our joint efforts for quality and inclusivity. Who will lead this mission? In line with the Declaration of the third EYWC that stresses the value and importance of partnerships, it is crucial to understand the nuances and mechanisms of these collaborations to (better) foster local youth work successfully. This also challenges Member States to bring all the levels together (local, national, European) and to create synergies, requiring us to be strategic, insightful, and proactive in our approach.

As we look at the steps towards a European framework for youth work and youth policy development, we should acknowledge our current position and perspective, and the potential pathways forward. Our collective purpose is clear: we are not here to reinvent the wheel but to recognise our reality openly and to produce an agenda that reflects our shared ambitions and commitments.

Jan closed his opening address sharing his appreciation to the Belgian Presidency for steering this dialogue.



# Concept paper ‘Taking Stock – Where are we now. Youth Work in Contemporary Europe’

by Howard Williamson\*\*

“Youthless is useless”

Howard Williamson walked the audience through his recently finalised book ‘[Taking Stock – Where are we now? Youth Work in Contemporary Europe](#)’, published in the frame of the Belgian Presidency.

After dedicating his book to Jan Vanhee and Koen Lambert, he presented the key messages, elaborated through a narrative of 65000 words.

The book walks us through the last four decades and explores how youth work in Europe has evolved towards what it is today, with, along the way, critical moments and shifts in views and (youth) policies. Howards started by recalling a time when young Europeans voiced the most serious issues in their lives, such as education, employment, housing, and health: it was important to bring young people’s needs to the political forefront.

In 2008, things started to shift with the launch of the series of books ‘[History of youth work](#)’, led by Philip Coussée but written by various editors across seven volumes. This ten-year project was dedicated to creating a detailed understanding of youth work, looking at its origins, and exploring its relevance today.

The presentation continued with the numerous initiatives since 2010 that supported youth work, signalling an increasing effort to meet young people’s needs and to respond to their challenges. However, despite real improvements, there has always been a tension between the need to connect with committed individuals and the frustration of endless debates around the efforts to validate youth work’s role in

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\*\* Howard Williamson is a youth worker, academic youth researcher and lecturer, and youth policy adviser. He is a professor of *European Youth Policy* at the University of South Wales.





young people's lives and growth: proving youth work's value and dissipate misunderstandings remains a struggle today.

Howard pointed out the complexities of youth work and described the differences between various strategic frameworks like the Strasbourg process, the Bonn process, and the European Youth Work Agenda, clarifying the difficulties and confusions surrounding them, especially among those less familiar with the 'European level'. This is also connected to the general confusion about the European institutions' roles and functions, which includes the challenges of communicating the importance of youth work and differentiating it from other youth-focused initiatives.

Howard highlighted critical issues faced by young people nowadays, such as civic involvement, democratic backsliding, COVID-19, and health (even if ranked lower by young people, probably due to the feeling of 'invincibility' proper to their age) and climate change, stressing how these challenges are interconnected. Approaching those issues requires a broad and careful understanding, because of the diverse experiences and needs of young people.

Howard closed his presentation with a call to reconsider the role of youth work and its capacity to meet the complex needs of young people, urging for a thoughtful review of youth workers' education and training, the meaning of diverse participation, and the necessity for solid evidence to support validating youth work's effectiveness.

The key messages from Howard's presentation<sup>††</sup> also include looking at the challenges facing young people in contemporary Europe (in random order):

Democracy

- [L]earning
- Climate
- Technology
- Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO)
- Security

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<sup>††</sup> See the full presentation



- Energy
- Identity
- Mobility
- Health

Which can be complemented but those identified by Krastev and Leonard (2024):

- Climate
- Covid
- Conflict
- Economy
- Migration

Those challenges could be addressed through a series of elements – the five Ps -to consider for a solution-focused approach and the ‘Resolution on Youth Work policy in a contemporary Europe’:

- Play
- Participation
- Partnership
- Proof
- Proficiency

Howard’s book and presentation supported the reflection of the participants of the Expert Meeting on the key principles for moving youth work forward. Through his analogy of youth workers as jazz musicians, he highlighted the importance of adaptability, knowledge, and ‘improvisational skills’ for effective youth engagement. He also underlined the rich history and potential of youth work as a field, while also acknowledging the challenges in guaranteeing its recognition, validation, and evolution in response to the changing environments of young people’s experiences vs. societal expectations.



# Overview and analysis of European Youth Work policy documents

by Hanjo Schild.

Hanjo Schild presented a thorough overview of 38 youth policy documents of the last twenty-five years (Resolutions, Recommendations, Conclusions, Declarations, White Paper, and Charta).

His presentation focused mostly on what emerged from such an overview, where each document has been summarised into key messages, themselves clustered in thematic areas:

- Human rights, democracy, Europe
- Participation and active citizenship
- Social integration and social inclusion
- Living together in diverse societies
- Education, training, lifelong learning & mobility
- Employment, Entrepreneurship
- Health and well-being
- Creativity & culture
- Youth and the world, mobility, and migration
- Other subjects: public spaces, sustainable development, digital era, innovation

...as well as instruments and strategies:

- Initiatives & actions in the proper field of youth
- Taking more account of youth in other policies – ‘mainstreaming youth’
- Mobilization of European programmes and funds in favour of youth
- Focus on young people with fewer opportunities



Hanjo identified the key challenges outlined in relevant documents, compared them with the crises in a so-called 'new Europe', and summarised the strengths and achievements, gaps and deficits, and challenges and undervalued items.

#### **For the Council of Europe:**

- Political and social challenges in a new geopolitical context: democracy, values, lifestyles
- Violence, terrorist attacks, conflicts: democracy, access to rights, social cohesion
- Risk of precariousness: lack of opportunities

#### **For the European Union:**

- Demographic and social changes; gap young people – public affairs
- Precariousness of young people's lives; transition to adulthood
- Economic crisis and risks for the future: globalization, climate change, technological changes
- Risks for democratic life: populism, fake news, discrimination, social exclusion

Hanjo's work led to defining a series of strategic recommendations<sup>##</sup> for priority setting, enhancing European youth policy cooperation, and better supporting and promoting youth work. These recommendations are organised under two main categories such as European Youth Policy Cooperation and Support and Promotion of Youth Work, and other more specific ones, all addressing identified needs within the field:

- European Youth Policy Cooperation
- Promotion and support of Youth Work
- Human rights, democracy, Europe
- Participation and active citizenship
- Social inclusion and social integration

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<sup>##</sup> See the full presentation



- Living together in diverse societies
- Education, training, lifelong learning, mobility
- Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Health and Well-being
- Creativity and culture
- Youth in the world
- Public spaces
- Sustainable development and environmental protection
- Digital era
- Innovation

While all drafted recommendations can be read in detail from Hanjo's presentation, this report takes the liberty to summarise some of those key strategic areas, based on Hanjo's oral additional information.

The main intention of European youth policy cooperation should be to spark new energy and enthusiasm through working together on youth work and policy-making. The recommendations in that area put a strong focus on creating solid partnerships that go beyond country borders and different work areas, even reaching outside the youth field. The idea is to create a united and sound approach to get young people involved all over Europe.

When it comes to supporting and promoting youth work, there is a plea for creative and innovative ideas in how we do youth work, suggesting the need for a 'rationale playfulness' in how we engage young people. The whole issue of recognition remains a strong demand for further development of your work, and reaching out to all young people in an inclusive manner continues to be highly necessary. Hanjo underlined how important it is to address 'big themes' like human rights, democracy, and active participation in youth work, encouraging more political participation and creating a culture where young people feel that they have a say in things that matter to them. The recommendations also look at making the way we involve young people stronger, increasing the influence of local and regional authorities in getting young people



engaged, especially about social issues and in community action. Youth work needs to link strategically with areas like employment, fighting exclusion, education and training, pleading for a collective effort that involves cooperation dialogue with other sectors as well as advocacy for young people's causes, offering practical support, especially to those underprivileged. There is a need to create a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Hanjo's recommendations also revisit the need to bring back instruments like the Youth Guarantee of 2005, with a focus on the support to disadvantaged groups, with programmes such as those focusing on 'second chance' in and through education and apprenticeships. The role of social economy and cooperatives for young people with fewer opportunities must be considered as well. Hanjo highlighted the need for more partnerships on issues and approaches such as health, outdoor education, and sports, to improve young people's well-being, and called for more cultural access and creativity, especially in ways to counter the negative influence of some extremist youth cultures' attempts to dominate certain youth groups.

The strategic recommendations emphasise the importance of strengthening solidarity, raising awareness of global issues among young people, and supporting their involvement in community and international initiatives. They underline the value of making community involvement (even) more important, not just in urban areas but also in rural ones, and of forming strategic partnerships focused on community development and environmental care. Moreover, youth work should support movements like Fridays for Future more strongly and help to promote sustainability goals.

Lastly, Hanjo's recommendations stress the need to get better at using digital tools, encouraging young people to understand them and to be able to look at digital content critically, pushing for innovation in (how we do) youth work.

The presentation ended with a series of conclusions to take forward when developing youth work policies:

- The need for a broader picture of youth work & youth policy covering all aspects of young people's lives.



- Interlinkage between the relevance of topics and political developments in the respective times.
- Thematic continuities: democratic citizenship, participation, social inclusion, access to decent living conditions, living together in diverse societies.
- ▪ Pop up – themes given political urgencies without consistency: culture, youth in the world, smart and green youth work, security, violence, and public spaces.
- Undervalued items: demography and ageing societies, intergenerational solidarity, children’s rights, young women.
- Future priority areas:
  - Equal opportunities for ALL.
  - Access to rights and social cohesion.
  - Foster solidarity.
  - Fight for democracy.
  - Strengthen open and fair ways of living together.
  - Support in mastering the challenges we are facing.

## Questions and Answers

One of the comments and questions addressed to the presenters looked at the reasons why ‘policy’ is not mentioned as a sixth element of the Ps series.

Howard clarified that policy is an overarching theme present in all aspects of youth work. Youth work is often sold as a universal solution to various issues, which is not only misleading but also unrealistic since youth work is only a small part of the broader youth policy field. It has a critical but limited role in the lives of young people, trying to offer support to those who need it most. Policy is not a separate element, and should rather be mainstreamed in the other five Ps. Although this might be challenging when trying to develop a unified approach, it is nonetheless important if we want to address the needs of young people effectively.



Howard looked critically at the political environment, seen as a rather inadequate investment in youth, limiting the transformative potential of youth work. It is vital to invest in offering more opportunities to the less advantaged groups, which means expanding horizons and generating new positive experiences.

- Howard underlined once more the importance for youth workers to adjust, to be agile and adaptable, as emphasised when he compared them to jazz musicians. His answer ended with a reflection on the recurring themes and challenges within the field of youth work, calling for a more open discussion about the limitations and responsibilities of youth work and a stronger call for democratic practices in other sectors, such as education.



## Mapping the issues to be addressed in Youth Work and Youth Work Policy

**“Everything is there. We only need to implement it”**

Following the inputs from Howard and Hanjo, working groups have been formed to map and identify the youth work and youth work policy issues that still need to be addressed in the forthcoming period<sup>55</sup>.

**What is the first strong thing/image that emerged from what you have just heard? What are we learning from these two inputs?**

The groups’ discussions shed light on the complex role of youth work and the need to clearly define what it involves. It is essential to pinpoint what youth workers are responsible for and how to effectively communicate the value of their work. The main challenge probably lies in balancing the need to showcase the benefits of youth work (beyond the question of more funding and funding mechanisms), by finding innovative ways to underline and document their contributions.

The groups also tackled how to properly include the idea of fun and engagement in youth work, making sure that it is recognised as a valuable part of the learning process of young people. Questions were raised about whether the confusion around youth work policies is as common at the local level as it is at the broader European level, indicating a need for consistency and clarity (in policy-making and beyond). The importance of collecting solid evidence to demonstrate the impact of youth work was also mentioned, to strengthen its validation and the needed support from those outside the field. This forms part of a wider debate about what needs to be

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<sup>55</sup> See the list of bullet points of what the groups suggested in Annex 2



demonstrated to prove the importance of youth work. Youth work plays a crucial role in encouraging community involvement and participation at the local level.

The ability of youth work to connect with young people and their environment (e.g. families) and to bring different groups together was highlighted as a key strength. However, youth work has its limits and cannot be expected to solve all societal issues. Out of the list of the ten challenges identified, the need to focus on democracy, technology, and media literacy stands out as particularly important.

### **What are the gaps/what is still missing in youth work policy?**

The groups highlighted the need for a strong approach to ensuring more funding from policy-makers, underlining the importance of making a 'convincing case' for the benefits and impact of youth work. There is a significant 'push' to shape youth work policies starting from the community level, enhancing local involvement, and supporting exchanges between peers to ensure that these policies are relevant and impactful.

The groups also looked at the challenge of adjusting big European strategies to local realities, focusing on the extent to which these policies are already in place across various countries. Concerns were raised about youth work being too reactive, constantly adjusting its focus depending on external pressure or trendy topics. Youth work should stay focused on its initial and fundamental objectives and not be instrumentalised.

The issue of European documents (e.g. recommendations) not being mandatory is tricky, bringing up the question of how they can be effectively adapted to national and local policies. There is an ongoing debate about the identity and the future orientation of youth work, for there are different opinions that require further exchanges and reflection, to design a clear and unified path forward.

The need for better collaboration between organisations has also been tackled, highlighting that stronger partnerships could enhance the overall support for youth work across Europe. If cooperation at the European level is lacking or is more complex, creating ways to make it work at the local level is crucial. For youth work



policies to be a focus/priority at all levels, there is a need to identify where their implementation is weaker and why.

The groups mentioned that youth work needs broader recognition to guarantee that it receives the support that it requires. The groups pointed out the practice of sometimes compromising values to secure funding, which requires a commitment to the core principles of youth work, including recognising the role of playfulness in educational settings. EU funding should be more directly allocated to support the development of youth work at local and regional levels, to strengthen the success of youth work initiatives.

### **Where do we need a new impetus in/for youth work policy? What are the issues we need to address in the following 2-3 years?**

The groups underlined the need to bring fresh energy into youth work policy. They reflected on how to move forward with the new EU Youth Strategy, especially in finding ways to better incorporate youth work in it, as well as the support it requires. They also looked at how to support Member States in establishing reliable youth work policies, possibly with the help of EU youth programmes.

Strategies should be more targeted and concentrate on what young people need and expect, helping them to connect with local authorities. Youth work cannot cover everything, hence the need to identify only a few main areas for youth work to address, making it easier to support and advocate for those areas. The groups suggested that underlining the youth work practices at the grassroots level in shaping European policies and creating a standardised profile for youth workers could be steps in the right direction.

Supporting youth organisations is essential. They are key players in promoting and sustaining youth work at national and European levels. The group highlighted the importance of building on existing youth work's knowledge and achievements, to avoid wasting time in constantly having to re-explain the purpose of youth work. It is necessary to keep asking ourselves why we are doing what we do and who we are aiming to benefit, focusing our efforts on fewer key priorities.



The groups acknowledged the need for a strong monitoring system to make sure that policies are put into practice. Youth work is not a one-size-fits-all solution; other policy areas must continue their efforts to address the broader challenges that young people face. The recognition of youth work and non-formal education remains a significant concern, together with the need to focus more on other key areas like democracy and media literacy.

The groups underlined the need to establish strong youth work structures; ensuring that they have long-term funding is a necessity for them to sustain their accomplishments. This will support creating a more focused, effective approach to youth work policy that is well-equipped to meet future challenges and continue making a positive impact on the lives of young people.



## Updates on the Belgian EU Presidency

**Koen Lambert** shared a few updates about the Belgian Presidency, which can be seen on its [website](#).

Updates also integrated a few elements of the draft Resolution Youth Work Policy in a Contemporary Europe', by **Amoury Groenen** <sup>\*\*\*</sup>. The text below consists of extracts from his presentation.

The content of the Resolution will focus on:

### Quality youth work development

- Common narratives
- Description CoE CM/Rec(2017)4 Youth Work
- Strength and nature of youth work
- Beneficiaries: young people and, where relevant, children of an early age
- Learning by playing as a method of non-formal learning

### An enabling environment

- The relation with public space
- Co-creation

### Societal appreciation / recognition

- Signposts to the future (3rd Convention)
- Roles of youth work
- Social inclusion

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Amoury Groenen is Policy Officer at the Department of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Community.



More specifically, the Resolution will build further on existing policy measures, setting the parameters to enable youth work to position itself and adapt to support young people in their efforts to navigate their pathways to autonomy in new realities. This is to be achieved through the exercise of agency, participation, and inclusion, and in a context of optimum well-being, political and civic engagement, and a sense of self-determination.

Other elements of the Resolution will focus on:

- Providing youth workers with the necessary pathways to education and learning, competencies and resources (i.e., knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and critical thinking) to support young people's agency, judgment and navigational capacities in changing realities.
- Supporting the development of quality youth work and youth work policy at all levels, paying due attention to the local level, which is closest to young people.
- Making the creation of enabling environments possible, by co-creating these environments together with youth workers, and young people, to ensure that youth work activities can be organised in public spaces in ways most suited to the needs of young people.
- Ensuring equal access to youth work to all young people, also by means of outreaching youth work, for example by supporting networks between youth work and organisations directly working with young people facing barriers, such as organisations working with disabled persons, organisations working with migrants, social work, etc., where relevant.
- Supporting new forms of voluntary and civic engagement, both physical and virtual.
- Fostering societal appreciation and recognition of youth work in changing European societies.



## European Youth Work Conventions and the European Youth Work Agenda

**Koen Lambert** highlighted the history and purpose of the European Youth Work Conventions (EYWC). Over the years, three EYWCs have been organised (in 2010, 2015 and 2020, although the last one was organised online due to the COVID-19 pandemic). These EYWCs are implicitly seen as occurring every five years, and as understood as key moments for the youth work community.

Conventions are inclusive events, and their preparation involves a rather thorough process that includes all stakeholders, ensuring space for a wide range of voices and perspectives. This collaborative approach includes forming a drafting group, responsible for creating a final declaration that captures the vision, recommendations, messages, and commitments of all the participants. After the EYWCs, a political response is designed as a follow-up to the discussions and decisions made during the event. This response usually takes the shape of Resolutions and Recommendations, drawing the future direction and specific actions recommended for further developing youth work across Europe. These documents play an important role in shaping related strategies and policies, reinforcing the EYWCs' impact and their contributions to the field of youth work.

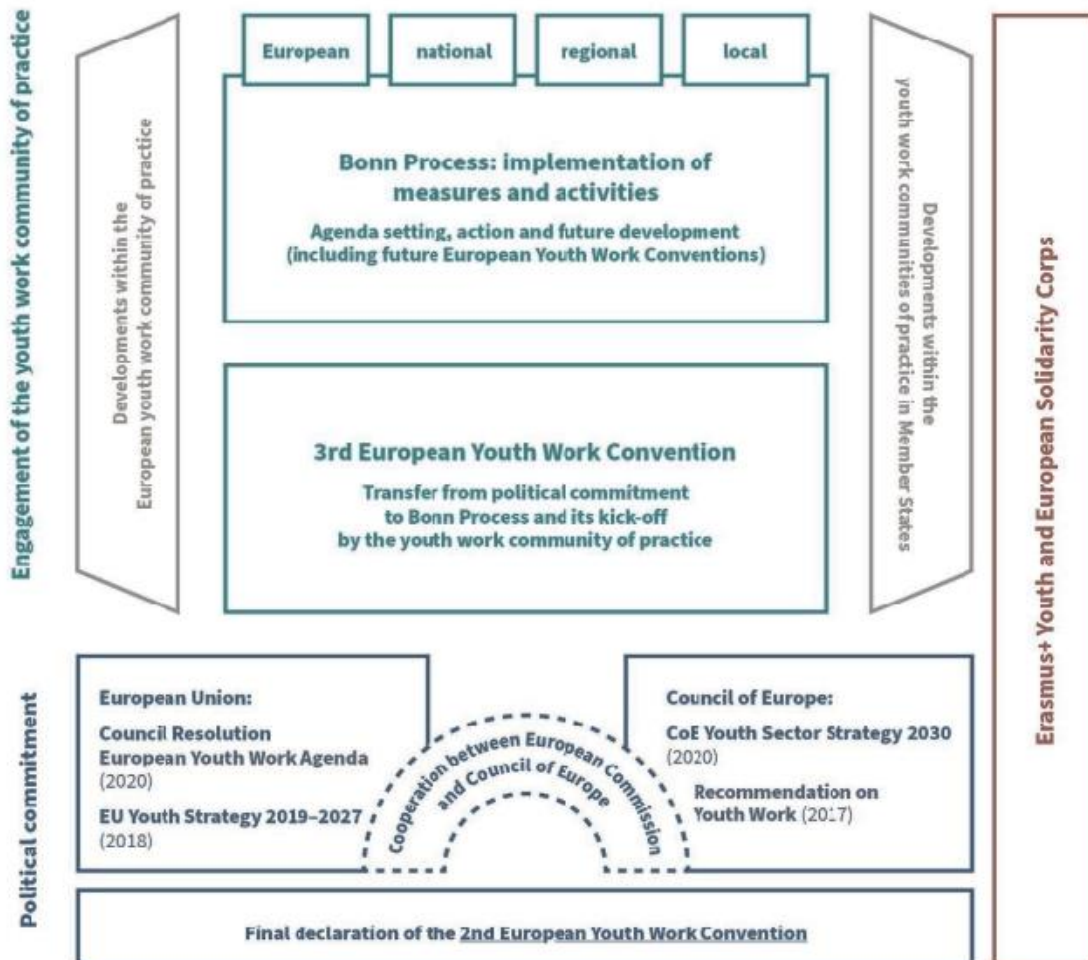
**Barbara Schmidt dos Santos<sup>+++</sup>** shared more information about the European Youth Work Agenda. Back in 2020, Germany hosted the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and chaired the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which is why the third EYWC took place in Germany, being a key element in developing the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) and the following Council Resolution that officially launched it.

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<sup>+++</sup> Barbara Schmidt dos Santos is the Coordinator of the European Youth Policy and Youth Work Unit in JUGEND für Europa, the German National Agency for the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programmes.

During the 3rd EYCW, held online because of COVID-19, the focus was on ‘putting flesh on the bone’ of the EYWA, and the final Declaration "Signposts for the Future" sets out eight main objectives to guide the EYWA’s journey ahead.

### The European Youth Work Agenda







What has happened since then? There has been progress in developing and expanding the youth work offer, with initiatives like the focus of the current Belgian Presidency, the EU Youth Conference, and the European Conference on Local Youth Work and Democracy, among others. Quality development has been pushed forward, with national working groups in various EU/Council of Europe countries working on enhancing the quality of youth work and acting as support structures for the implementation of the EYWA. Recommendations emerging from "Signposts for the Future" such as the creation of a European network of youth work associations, became a reality with an alliance now being established. Innovation is also on the rise, thanks to the European Academy on Youth Work and the preparation of its third biennial event.

A clear shift has occurred due to the pandemic, which brought the field of youth work closer and raised a stronger community feeling. Despite the challenges, there is a sense that learning how to connect went deeper, sharing experiences and good examples of practices, and moving towards a common direction for the future of youth work in Europe.



## Addressing the systemic challenges in the field of youth work - Creating conditions for change

The conditions for change have been explored through 4 sets of guiding questions:

- What is needed to enhance the cooperation amongst youth workers in Europe? How do we get organised better?
- What is needed to enhance the cooperation between the political actors? (both between the member states and between the European institutions)
- What is needed to enhance the involvement of local decision-makers in the debate about youth work and the development of the European youth work agenda?
- What needs to be changed in the European youth programmes to create better conditions for the development of youth work?

While the first topic was not addressed (participants were free to choose their group based on their interests and experience), the summary below presents the main outcomes of three key areas essential for evolving and enhancing youth work across Europe.

### Cooperation between the political actors and youth workers

The group that explored that topic looked at the challenges faced by youth work, especially in terms of its integration within other departments than those focusing on youth. The necessity of using the Erasmus+ Youth programme as leverage for policy cooperation was underlined. Suggestions included organising study visits for policy and decision-makers from different levels, including national and potentially regional representatives, as well as stakeholders from National Agencies. The idea is to facilitate learning from more 'advanced countries' through roundtables and exchange of good practices, a suggestion inspired by the Council of Europe's peer reviews and by the previous EU programmes that integrated peer learning in education. The group



highlighted the importance of integrating the EYWA into the work plan for youth, supporting the revision process of the EU youth strategy.

The group also explored how to combine efforts of the Council of Europe and the European Union regarding the EYWA, though mentioning the potential lack of coordination between the two institutions. The importance of using adopted European documents as reference points for collaborative work was stressed, as well as the need to focus on the implementation of these documents, which have supported the development of initiatives in Member States and an understanding among national policy-makers of steered processes and activities at the European level.

There is a significant lack of awareness and dissemination of youth policies at the local level, leading to a disconnection between the intentions of those policies and their operational and practical application. This underlines the need for better communication and cooperation across different governance levels to foster effective youth work initiatives and to ensure that youth workers' experiences are considered in policy-making, suggesting a more collaborative and informed approach to supporting youth work across various levels.

Funding also emerged as a topic that requires more focus, beyond the question of the lack of adequate funds. The group encouraged more collaborative dialogue to make sure to associate funding with the actual needs of youth work. The importance of increasing the visibility and understanding of youth work's value was once again underlined.

### **Involvement of local decision-makers in youth work**

The working group identified a significant issue with the integration of youth work within larger governmental departments. In many countries, reaching those in charge of youth work is challenging, as youth work-related issues do often not receive the necessary attention, a problem that probably lies within the bureaucratic structures rather than with the policy-makers themselves.



However, the group acknowledged a general willingness among policy-makers to engage in a dialogue, although the extent of such engagement depends a lot on their interests at the national level. While local associations are proactive, they often find that government bodies lack interest, which is a common issue also at the European level and that calls for a greater social recognition of youth work. The group stressed the importance of developing a unified strategy to introduce youth work policies effectively to municipalities, ensuring that there is a general understanding of the existing support mechanisms for youth work development.

Nevertheless, many municipalities are eager to engage with young people (and youth work structures). They are interested in implementing youth work policies, although they often lack knowledge about existing frameworks and how to apply them. Local authorities often look for support when facing problems, and more seldomly cooperate proactively on projects or initiatives.

The European Commission's efforts to support and use instruments like those emerging from "Democracy Reloading" were mentioned as a positive step. However, the group felt that there is still a clear obstacle to communication, emphasising the need for a way to communicate complex ideas in an accessible language. One of the examples mentioned was the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities document "[Youth Work: The Role of Local and Regional Authorities](#)" (2021) not reaching the local stakeholders.

The necessity for more engagement with youth workers was highlighted, encouraging them to discuss youth work in ways that underline its importance and relevance to policy-making. This connects with the need for clear, accessible communication and the concept of building a 'bridge' in language that everyone can resonate with.



## European youth programmes

Inputs for this topic suggest a call for significant changes in European youth programmes to better accommodate the needs of the youth work sector. The recommendations include:

- Enhancing structural and organisational support to empower youth initiatives.
- Simplifying the administrative processes of the programmes to reduce bureaucracy and make them more accessible.
- Creating a youth-specific programme guide to ensure that the programmes are tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities in youth work.
- Expanding the European dimension, possibly by reducing the focus on individual applications, which weakens widening the scope of engagement (the European dimension) and impact.
- Promoting policy experimentation within the youth sector to encourage innovative practices and solutions-focused initiatives.
- Establishing a SALTO Youth Work Policy Resource Centre, aimed at centralising expertise, resources, and support for youth work policy development and implementation.



## Strategic and policy responses - generating ideas

This last phase of the Expert Meeting focused on exploring possible/concrete strategic responses (e.g. in terms of policy, programmes, or practice) for the betterment and further development of youth work in Europe in the next 2-3 years. Groups were also encouraged to explore who should be the actors developing such strategic responses and at which level these processes could start.

### Collecting and sharing knowledge

The groups underlined the importance of collecting and sharing knowledge in a structured and systemic way. The field of youth work must compile and disseminate information effectively to ensure that useful and valuable insights and learning are accessible to all stakeholders involved in youth work. This approach will facilitate a better understanding of the field and support evidence-based practices and policy-making. This underlines once more the need to create support mechanisms for this process and link existing initiatives.

### A strategic agenda for the future of Europe

There is ongoing work on a strategic agenda for the future of Europe, initiated by the President of the European Council and the Heads of States of Member States and the European Commission is actively involved in the process. This agenda is crucial in shaping the direction of future policies of the European Union and the new Commission in 2024. As such, it could be very supportive to have a youth work policy mentioned in the agenda. This would provide an impetus for future initiatives and strategies in the youth sector across Europe. The details can be explored further [here](#).

Moreover, there is a call for the revision of the EU Youth Strategy and the development of a work plan for youth, which includes a thorough revision of programmes to enhance synergies and establish links with other programmes, such



as the European Social Fund+. This strategic approach requires working directly with youth National Agencies, other youth (work) actors, and young people, in a way that must be anticipated and set in the respective regulations. This is also naturally connected to providing structural support, highlighting the importance of an organised and coordinated framework.

### **The new generation of programmes**

The new generation of programmes should be designed to better address the needs for the development of the youth work sector. This requires creating frameworks (including at the local level) that support innovative practices, professional development, and quality improvement in youth work, ensuring that the programmes are responsive to the sector's changing needs. This includes adequate budgets and tailored key actions.

Enhancing the user-friendliness and accessibility of programmes is crucial, involving the simplification of application forms and IT tools to ensure they are more accessible for users. It is important to support and engage in dialogue with organisations and structures at the national, local, or intermediate levels, for they are key multipliers that can help extend the programmes' reach. The programmes need to adapt to the young people's perspectives, which is perhaps 'only' one of many voices, but one that requires fostering a user-oriented approach.

### **Peer learning exercises**

Peer learning exercises are highlighted as valuable for those interested in further developing their expertise and understanding of youth work. These exercises provide long-term or short-term opportunities for professionals to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and explore together new ideas and approaches to youth work. Peer learning initiatives should be run and initiated by those who are interested, be part of the EYWA, and be funded by the programmes.

Connected to the possible outcomes and support of peer learning exercises, intermediary bodies, including National Agencies and youth organisations, play a



significant role in connecting young people with European youth programmes and supporting their application process. There is a strong interest at the local level in the need to use existing documents to strengthen this engagement and create spaces for discussion.

### **The European Academy on Youth Work**

The European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW) plays a significant role in exploring and enhancing innovation in youth work. It serves as a platform for professionals – including those from the local level - to engage in a dialogue, exchange knowledge, and contribute to the ongoing development of youth work practices and policies, emphasising innovation and quality improvement in the field. The EAYW should be further developed as a sustainable and regular event in the framework of the European Youth Work Agenda.

### **The review of National Agencies Strategic Cooperation Projects (SNACs)**

The groups suggested continuing the practices of the SNACs but with a revised approach to enhance their effectiveness. This involves a critical review of existing projects to identify best practices, lessons learned, and areas for improvement, ensuring that future cooperation projects are more impactful and aligned with the evolving needs of the youth work field (hence, beyond the involved partners' countries), as well as better care for the link and transfer to the national/regional/local realities.

### **A Master on Youth Work Education**

The idea of establishing such a Master's programme in youth work education was mentioned, though specifics were not provided. Such a programme would likely aim to formalise the education pathway for youth workers, providing them with the necessary competences required to ensure the quality of their work.





## Documenting and monitoring youth work

The necessity of documenting and monitoring youth work is highlighted as a way to monetise and assess the impact of the field of youth work. This requires a strong system for documentation, follow-up, and analysis at the local level, moving beyond hard data to include evidence of effective processes that engage young people and facilitate their learning. Such documentation can serve as a quality indicator, demonstrating a clear understanding and intention in youth work activities.

Support is needed at the local level for maintaining records, monitoring activities, and analysing outcomes, which calls for a guiding comprehensive framework or system. While research is acknowledged as important, the focus should also be on its practical application and how it informs the ongoing development and adjustment of youth work practices.



## Towards the 4th European Youth Work Convention

By **Miriam Teuma**<sup>+++</sup>

“Space – Time – Silence. Now is the time to be silent, to think, to self-reflect and to self-evaluate”

The Expert Meeting closed with an invitation to look in the direction of the fourth European Youth Work Convention.

Using metaphors of eggs and colours, Miriam shared information about the planning process of the EYWC, due to take place at the end of May 2025. The intention is to maintain the previous structures of the event as described by Koen, while introducing ‘fresh procedures’. The Youth Partnership, together with Malta as a host country, is mandated to organise the event, which has already led to the first Consultative Committee for the Convention, which can be seen as a ‘container of ideas’, collecting insights, documents, and research to ensure that the event will be a true gathering of knowledge, experiences, and innovation.

The EYWC’s Consultative Committee is, so far, a compact group, that will continue the work initiated during the first meeting. The idea is to little by little expand it to broaden the reflection and exchanges to widen the range of innovative concepts and programme elements. This Committee is crucial for steering the EYWCs towards being a successful event, especially considering the financial challenges, such as the need to rely on Erasmus+ funding to complement the EYWCs’ budget.

The fourth EYWC will not be a space where to explore once again what is youth work and what it is not. The past years have witnessed the “too much, too fast” and this is probably what happened to the EYWA. Now it is the time to be silent, to think, to

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<sup>+++</sup> Miriam Teuma is the *Director of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ*, the Maltese National Agency for the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes and a member of the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee for Youth.



self-reflect, and to self-evaluate. To support this, the fourth EYWC will be a demonstration of the commitment to dialogue, innovation, and strategic planning, despite financial constraints. It will be a call for action for all stakeholders to contribute, to listen, and to ensure that this 'platform for European dialogue' becomes richer in diverse perspectives and transformative ideas.

The expectation is to create an event that will reinforce the cooperative spirit of Europe's youth work community.



## Annexe 1 – Programme

### Day 1 (16:00-19:30)

- 16:00 Welcome and Why we are here.
  - Taking Stock (Howard Williamson)
  - Mapping existing policies (Hanjo Schild)
- 18:00 *Coffee break*
- 18:20 Small groups' reflections – Mapping the issues.
  - Plenary sharing
- 19:30 Closing
- 20:00 *Dinner*

### Day 2 (9:00-13:00)

- 9:00 Insights from the Day 1
  - Updates on the Belgian EU Presidency
  - European Youth Work Conventions and the Agenda
  - Small groups' reflections – Creating conditions for change
- 10:40 *Coffee break*
- 11:00 Small groups' reflections – Strategic responses
  - Plenary sharing and Rapporteur's summary
  - Towards the 4th European Youth Work Convention
- 13:00 *Lunch*

## Annexe 2 – List of the outcomes of the working groups

### Groups on mapping the issues to be addressed in youth work and youth work policy

**What is the first strong thing/image that emerged from what you have just heard?**

**What are we learning from these two inputs?<sup>555</sup>**

- Defining responsibilities and limits of youth work.
- Define the essence of youth work and how to communicate it.
- Should we speak about ‘payback’ and ROI or simply find better ways to show and document what we are doing as youth workers?
- Finding appropriate words to address playfulness/fun as part of youth work culture and pedagogy.
- Express clearly what young people are learning in youth work.
- Is the local level of youth work as confused as the European level when it comes to creating youth work policies?
- We gather evidence about the impact of youth work but still need to be more convincing to the stakeholders outside the youth work field
- Talking about youth work is lower on the priority lists than talking about the pressing issues for young people.
- What do we need to prove that youth work is important?
- Since we don’t measure the added value of youth work in terms of money, it is challenging to communicate the value of youth work to the E&T sector.
- Youth work contributes to creating a participatory culture at the local level. This is something that we can prove.
- Reaching out to YPWFOs is one of the core strengths of youth work, as well as the ability to bring different groups together.

<sup>555</sup> See the list of bullet points of what the groups suggested in Annex 2



- We need to establish the youth work's boundaries. A lot of things will be taken up by youth policy, but youth work cannot be an antidote/solution for all these issues.
- From the list of 10 challenges, the democratic challenge, technology, and media literacy seem to be the most important ones.

#### **What are the gaps/what is still missing in youth work policy?**

- Being able to pitch for increased funding for youth work to policymakers.
- We need to build the youth work policies bottom-up through strengthening the local level and intensifying peer-to-peer exchanges.
- How to use the large European framework and bring it to the local level.
- How many countries have a youth work policy in place?
- 'Theme hopping' in youth work, following the crises or priorities set by others should be reduced. Youth work should focus on its core purpose and tasks.
- European documents are not legally binding; how can we do the 'translation' at the national and local levels?
- We also have contradictory ideas about youth work, its identity, and its future role; we need to discuss it more in the future.
- The institutions do not work well together; we need them to join forces more. This would strengthen the European message and commitments. If that does not work at the European level, how can we make it work at the local level?
- Youth work policy should be a guiding political idea at all levels.
- We are lacking the implementation, or we don't know what is happening?
- Recognition of youth work is needed outside the bubble. Recognition is needed so to ensure the youth work is supported.
- We should stop 'lying' to get funding, we need to stay firmer behind our principles, including the 'play' part in learning in youth work.
- From the EU programmes, some parts of the funding should go more directly and target the development of youth work at regional/local levels.



**Where do we need a new impetus in/for youth work policy? What are the issues we need to address in the following 2-3 years?**

- We need to discuss how to go on with the new EU Youth Strategy and how to include youth work and support for it.
- How to support Member States to put youth work policy in place, could EU youth programmes support this process?
- It is about narrowing down! We need to focus on young people's needs and expectations and support young people to connect to other authorities.
- We cannot expect youth work to do everything; we need to narrow down the purpose of youth work to a few main points, so we can more efficiently advocate for it.
- Bottom-up approaches in building European policies based on grassroots-level practices.
- Standardizing the profile of youth workers.
- Supporting youth organisations as drivers and supporters of youth work, both at national and European levels.
- Work on the common legacy (history) so we don't need to reinvent the wheel again and again to explain what we are doing.
- We need to ask questions of WHY and WHO!
- We need to focus on fewer priorities in youth work, e.g. 3 key priorities.
- Enforce the monitoring system that the policies are being implemented
- Youth Work won't solve all the problems of young people; there is a need for other policy fields to keep on their work.
- Recognition of youth work and non-formal education is still an issue.
- We need to focus on democracy and media literacy.
- We need to have and establish the youth work structures and secure their funding in the long term.

## Annexe 3 – List of Participants

Agdur	Jonas	KEKS - Sweden
Angioli	Serena	Agenzia Ioventu - National Agency Italy
Basarab	Tanya	EU-CoE Partnership in the field of Youth
Bejan	Larisa	National Youth Council Romania
Bender	Felix	European Federation for Intercultural Learning
Bongartz	Lara	Youth Council German Speaking Community, Belgium
Bruchansky	Christophe	Directorate Youth - French Community, Belgium
Bujalska	Eliza	SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre
De Bono	Marvic-Ann	EUPA - National Agency Malta
Donea	Ion	National Youth Agency Moldova
Evrard	Gisele	Rapporteur
Frith	Audrey	Eurodesk
Groenen	Amoury	Department Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Community, Belgium
Hermand	Laurence	BIJ - National Agency French Community, Belgium
Kost	Reet	Harno - National Agency Estonia
Kupec	Peter	Nivam - National Agency Slovakia
Lambert	Koen	JINT vzw- National Agency Flemish Community, Belgium
Mahiri	Lamyaa	Youth Express Network
Markovic	Darko	Facilitator
Meys	Armand	Ministry of the German Speaking Community, Belgium
Moulana	Pegah	Youth and Environment Europe
Papaioannou	Babis	European Commission - DG EAC - Unit Youth





Peeters	Elmo	De Ambrassade - Flemish Community, Belgium
Petkov	Andreas	National Youth Forum - Bulgaria
Rotondi	Simona	Agenzia loventu - National Agency Italy
Schild	Hanjo	Invited Expert - Germany
Schmidt - dos Santos	Barbara	Jugend für Europa - National Agency Germany
Skrinar	Uroš	Movit - National Agency Slovenia
Systä	Kati	JEF Europe
Teuma	Miriam	National Youth Agency of Malta
Vanhee	Jan	Department Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Community, Belgium
Voicu	Rareş	European Youth Forum
Von Hebel	Manfred	Jugend für Europa - National Agency Germany
Wicke	Hans-Georg	Invited Expert - Germany
Williamson	Howard	University of South Wales - UK
Woitalla	Jessica	YMCA Europe
Zammit	Jason	National Youth Agency of Malta