



EUROPE GOES LOCAL

Supporting Youth Work at the Municipal Level

Towards a European Charter on Local Youth Work

INTRODUCTION

A common ground

Youth work practice is, and needs to be, diverse. This is the only way it can respond to the different needs, experiences and interests of young people. However, this diversity rests on a common ground:

"Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision-making.

Despite different traditions and definitions, there is a common understanding that the primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large.

Youth work achieves this by empowering and engaging young people in the active creation, preparation, delivery and evaluation of initiatives and activities that reflect their needs, interests, ideas and experiences."

This common ground is stated in the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work¹, the most important European document on youth work so far. The Recommendation builds on the collective experience of European youth work and many previous documents arguing in the same direction². It is also the basis and starting point for this Charter.

The outcomes of youth work

The Recommendation also exemplifies the most significant outcomes of youth work. It states that "youth work, often in partnership and co-operation with other sectors, produces a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals, their communities and for society in general."³ Taken to the local level, this means that youth work, for example:

- contributes to the development of competences that facilitate further learning and labour market participation, thus counteracting early school leaving and the risk of unemployment;
- strengthens young people's sense of well-being and their capacity to resist negative influences and behaviour, thus contributing to their ability to make beneficial choices.
- enhances young people's sense of belonging to the local community, thus making them want to constructively contribute to its further development.

These outcomes also make clear that youth work is about both personal development and socialisation. They are highlighted both by research and in many significant European documents⁴, and they more than well motivate that "the establishment or further development of quality youth work is safeguarded and pro-actively supported within local, regional or national youth policies, as appropriate"⁵. Using this Charter is a means to that end⁶.

Purpose and function of the Charter – the needs of local youth work

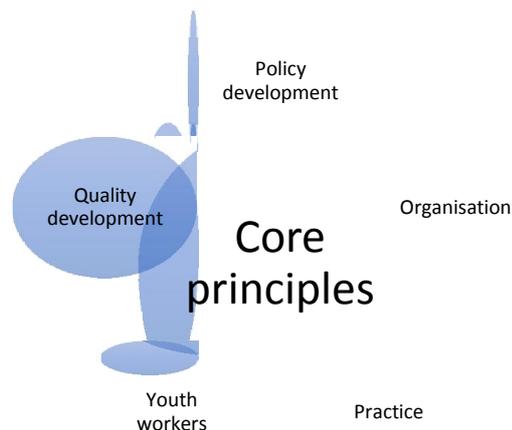
This Charter builds on the Recommendation and aims at transforming its ideas and statements into specific guidelines and a frame of reference regarding what is needed in order to establish and maintain quality in local youth work. The vast majority of youth work has its starting point and takes place at the local level. The quality of local youth work is therefore crucial to the overall development of youth work, wherever it takes place.

Through stating what is needed to assure quality in relation to different aspects of youth work, the Charter is meant to function as a check-list around which different stakeholders can gather and discuss their own local reality and what measures might be needed in order to develop youth work in their respective local contexts.

It takes the question of what is needed for quality assurance in local youth work down to a very concrete level. By doing so, but without giving specific solutions, it acknowledges that solutions must be designed and implemented at the local level. Using the Charter will therefore enrich and facilitate dialogue and reflection between all stakeholders. Serious reflection is a necessary prerequisite for both everyday local youth work and its further holistic development.

This Charter is hence not a list of mandatory obligations; rather, it is a means to highlight all the different things that need to be considered, questioned, discussed and answered if youth work is to reach its full potential and actively contribute to the personal and social development of young people.

Taken together, the different sections of the Charter illustrate the entire youth work landscape and how its different parts are connected and inter-dependent.



It evolves from the core principles that together constitute youth work and must permeate and guide all of its aspects if it is to be successful. These principles are essential to make clear the position, role and boundaries of youth work, making sure that resources intended for youth work are used in the appropriate and most efficient way⁷.

For whom is this Charter intended?

It is, however, not only youth work practice that is diverse. Youth work is also differently organised, governed and financed in, and sometimes even within, different countries. This means that different actors (from youth organisations to political decision-makers) on different levels (local, regional or national) and in different combinations are responsible for the different issues that are listed in this Charter. Being a reference document and a check-list, however, implies that any stakeholder concerned could use this Charter as a point of departure for discussions and that whoever is responsible should take it into account when discussing and deciding on youth work issues. This way, it could also be used to explain and make advocacy for local youth work when needed.

If local youth work quality development is to be efficient and sustainable, all relevant stakeholders need to be involved. Therefore, this Charter targets everyone, from policymakers to youth workers and young people, who is engaged in and wants to improve youth work. This also means that it acknowledges that youth workers can either be paid or act on a voluntary basis and that young people are not a homogenous group but, on the contrary, have diverse backgrounds and interests and might be organised or not.

This is also why this Charter has been developed through a broad consultation process, engaging young people, youth workers, organisations providing youth work, public administration and politicians on all levels, from local to European, in more than 20 European countries.

TOWARDS A CHARTER ON LOCAL YOUTH WORK

1. The core principles that should guide youth work are that it needs ...

- 1.1 to be perceived as being attractive, bringing added value and/or joy in life;
- 1.2 to be based on voluntary participation – on young people taking part out of their own will and motivation;
- 1.3 to target all young people regardless of background and living situation;
- 1.4 to actively reach out to and include groups of young people not yet reached;
- 1.5 to aim at contributing to the personal and social development of young people;
- 1.6 to meet young people as capable individuals and primary resources in their own lives, and having possibilities, not problems, as a starting point for action;
- 1.7 to be based on informal and non-formal learning;
- 1.8 to be centred around young people and strive to enhance their autonomy and access to rights;
- 1.9 to be created, organised, planned, prepared, carried out and evaluated together with young people.

2. The policy development process of local youth work needs ...

- 2.1 to be clearly structured and carried out in a democratic and transparent manner;
- 2.2 to engage all relevant stakeholders, including young people, with clear roles and mandates in all stages of the process;
- 2.3 to be knowledge-based:
 - 2.3.1 all stakeholders are well-informed, and take into account, the core principles of youth work as stated above;
 - 2.3.2 all stakeholders are well-informed, and take into account, the living situation and needs of all different groups of young people;
 - 2.3.3 all stakeholders are well-informed about research and new trends in the field of youth and youth work on European, national and local levels alike;
 - 2.3.4 there are clear routines for analysing and taking into account the follow-up and evaluation of local preconditions, work processes and outcomes;
- 2.4 to be based on clear and measurable indicators regarding what should be achieved in relation to young people's participation, influence and learning;
- 2.5 to be clearly linked to budget and organisational capacity;
- 2.6 to lead to clear and politically approved local aims and objectives;
- 2.7 to clarify the role and position of local youth work policy within the broader youth policy and other policy fields on local, regional, national and European levels;
- 2.8 to be implemented in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including young people.

3. The organisation of local youth work needs ...

- 3.1 to engage all relevant stakeholders, including young people;
- 3.2 to transform aims and objectives into coherent local strategies and plans;
- 3.3 to define and establish the preconditions and work processes needed for carrying out local quality youth work;
- 3.4 to allocate resources that are appropriate in relation to aims;
- 3.5 to be innovative, flexible and give young people access to competences and local support that answers to their different ideas, needs and interests;
- 3.6 to be able to:
 - 3.6.1 adapt to the activities that young people want to engage in and to the demands this puts on work hours, facilities, etc.
 - 3.6.2 carry out activities that answer to the needs and circumstances of the local context in which young people live;
 - 3.6.3 carry out its activities in different formats (open activities, group activities, projects, courses, etc.) depending on the needs and interests of young people;
 - 3.6.4 carry out international youth work projects;
 - 3.6.5 actively cooperate with other for young people relevant actors, through both cross- and intra-sectorial cooperation;
 - 3.6.6 guide young people to the various forms of activities and support provided by other actors;
- 3.7 to give young people access to good and suitable facilities that provide possibilities for different kinds of activities.

4. The practice of local youth work needs ...

- 4.1 to start from and respond to the needs, interests and experiences of young people as perceived by themselves;
- 4.2 to be created, organised, planned, prepared, carried out and evaluated together with young people;
- 4.3 to give young people, within given aims and frames, a decisive say in determining to what activities existing local resources should be allocated;
- 4.4 to stimulate and support:
 - 4.4.1 activities that are based on and require young people's active engagement and responsibility;
 - 4.4.2 young people to be active citizens and exercise influence in society, including taking part in political decision-making;
 - 4.4.3 young people to benefit from European projects and possibilities;
- 4.5 to constructively challenge young people and widen their horizons regarding what is possible;

- 4.6 to have a holistic perspective on young people and meet them with positive expectations;
- 4.7 to provide young people with a wide and easily accessible range of information regarding their opportunities to take part in different kinds of local, national and international activities;
- 4.8 to continuously exchange information on plans and activities with other local actors in the field of youth (e.g. school and social services) and, when relevant, engage in cooperation.
- 4.9 to establish a secure/safe environment;
- 4.10 to articulate, together with young people, learning objectives that they perceive as relevant to their personal and social development;
- 4.11 to recognise, document and make visible young people's non-formal and informal learning.

5. Youth workers need ...

- 5.1 to act within a clear ethical framework, based on the UN declaration of the rights of the child and the core principles of youth work as stated above;
- 5.2 to see the need for, and seek ways of, engaging young people in all stages of the youth work process;
- 5.3 to have relevant competence and be driven by the will to see young people develop;
- 5.4 to have a clear and consequent role/mission and not lend themselves to, or be used to fulfil, other purposes and activities than those mentioned above;
- 5.5 to have access to education and training that is relevant and adopted to local needs.

6. The quality development of local youth work needs ...

- 6.1 a clear and comprehensive system for documentation and follow-up of outcomes, preconditions and work processes in relation to measurable indicators and aims;
- 6.2 clear routines and time set aside for continuous common analysis and reflection regarding how activities and organisation match aims and missions, thus promoting organisational learning on all levels and for all stakeholders, including young people;
- 6.3 clear routines for doing follow-up and discussing outcomes together with young people;
- 6.4 clear routines for regular updates on new research and trends in the field of youth and youth work, including up-to-date mappings of local realities and needs;
- 6.5 continuous competency development of youth workers based on a clear competency framework in combination with an analysis of local outcomes, strengths and weaknesses;
- 6.6 knowledge gathered from follow-up and research to be used as input for the local policy-making process.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The CoE Recommendation on youth work is the so far most prominent and important European document regarding youth work, its scope and definition. Among the documents that have preceded the Recommendation are:

1. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

See: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

2. European Youth Strategy 2010-2018 – Investing and Empowering Youth, 2009.

See: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en

3. Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), 2009

See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009G1219%2801%29>

4. Declaration of the First Youth Work Convention, 2010

See: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2010_Declaration_European_youth_work_convention_en.pdf

5. Council Conclusions on Youth Work, 2010

See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52013XG0614%2802%29>

6. Joint EU Youth Report, 2012

See: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/report_en

7. EU Youth Conference Conclusions, May 2013

See: <http://www.youth.ie/nyci/Conclusions-EU-Youth-Conference>

8. Council Conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people, 2013

See: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013XG0614\(02\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013XG0614(02))

9. European Commission: Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union, 2014

See: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf

10. The Declaration of the 2nd Youth Work Convention, 2015

See: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/c602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85

11. Quality Youth Work – a common framework for the further development of youth work, 2015

See: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/quality-youth-work_en.pdf

12. Improving Youth Work – your guide to quality development, 2017

See: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/2017/improving-youth-work-your-guide-quality-development_en

Footnotes

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work - *Scope and purpose of the Recommendation – definition and scope of youth work*

² Two examples are:

Council Conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people, 2013, which states that youth work enhances social inclusion through emphasising accessibility and inclusiveness, nurturing the development of competences and building social solidarity.

The Declaration of the 2nd Youth Work Convention, 2015, where it is stated that “Youth work is about cultivating the imagination, initiative, integration, involvement and aspiration of young people.” “Youth work helps young people to discover their talents, and develop the capacities and capabilities to navigate an ever more complex and challenging social, cultural and political environment.”

³ In the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work it is stated that youth work

- it leads to critical reflection, innovation and changes at local, regional, national and European levels;
- it contributes to young people’s well-being, enhancing a sense of belonging and strengthening their capacity to make beneficial choices;
- it supports positive and purposeful transitions in personal, civic, economic and cultural life, enabling the development of competences that facilitate life-long learning, active citizenship and labour market participation;
- it promotes the development of various skills such as creativity, critical thinking, conflict management, digital and information literacy and leadership;
- it enhances diversity and contributes to equality, sustainable development, intercultural understanding, social cohesion, civic participation, democratic citizenship and the upholding of the values of human rights;
- it strengthens young people’s resilience and thereby their capacity to resist negative influences and behaviour.

⁴ Please see list of reference documents

⁵ Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, recommendations to member states.

⁶ There is, on a European level, also a strong political recognition of these effects and the need to further promote them. This could be seen in, for example, the Council Conclusions, 2013, where it is stated that “Effective youth work and youth initiatives seeks to empower young people and encourage their active participation in society. It equips them with skills, competences and experiences for life, thereby maximising the protective factors which enhance the development, well-being, autonomy and social inclusion of all young people, including those with fewer opportunities.”

⁷ These core principles should permeate both policy and practice. Due to youth work’s flexibility and good relations to young people there might, however, especially in times of crisis, be a temptation to use the capacity of youth work for handling urgent problems and to disregard the principles of voluntary participation and having possibilities as a starting point for action. These short-term

measures are seldom effective and pose a severe risk of harm to the credibility of youth workers, thus preventing them from fulfilling their mission and reaching their aims in the future.

You will find reference to these principles in the Recommendation and in many other different documents. Among these are:

- *Council Conclusions*, 2013, which says that “Youth work offers developmental spaces and opportunities for all young people and “is based on non-formal and informal learning processes and on voluntary participation””.
- *The Declaration of the 2nd Youth Work Convention*, 2015, where you can read that youth work is “fundamentally aimed at supporting the personal development of young people and strengthening their involvement in decision-making processes at local, regional, national and European levels.”
- The report *Quality Youth Work – a common framework for the further development of youth work*, 2015, which lays down nine core principles, including the one which states that youth work should “be designed, delivered and evaluated together with young people”.