

Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017
at the 1287th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members, *inter alia*, by promoting a youth policy based on common principles;

Having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (adopted in 1950, ETS No. 5, subsequently amended and supplemented), as applied and interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights, and the European Social Charter (adopted in 1961, ETS No. 35, revised in 1996, ETS No. 163, and subsequently amended and supplemented), as applied and interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights;

Recalling Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 of the Committee of Ministers on the youth policy of the Council of Europe;

Recalling the applicability of existing principles set out in relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to the member States, in particular:

Recommendation Rec(2003)8 on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people; Recommendation Rec(2004)13 on the participation of young people in local and regional life; Recommendation Rec(2006)1 on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development; Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education; Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education; Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 on youth information; Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18; Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education; Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights; Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights;

Bearing in mind the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Recalling Parliamentary Assembly Recommendations 1437 (2000) on "Non-formal education"; 1978 (2011) "Towards a European framework convention on youth rights"; 2015 (2013) on "Young people's access to fundamental rights"; and its Resolution 1885 (2012) "The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis", as well as the replies of the Committee of Ministers to these recommendations;

Recalling the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Resolution 386 (2015) "Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people", and its Recommendation 128 (2003) on "The revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life", as well as the reply of the Committee of Ministers to this recommendation;

Having further regard to the Declaration and Action Plan adopted at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005) which stated that the Council of Europe would further develop its unique position in the youth field;

Convinced that:

- the sustainability of European identity and the Council of Europe's core values (human rights, rule of law and democracy) relies on the creativity, competences, social commitment and contribution of young people and on their confidence in the future as well;
- government policies should support young people in realising their full potential as autonomous members of society, enabling them to develop life plans and exercise their democratic citizenship;
- youth work makes an important contribution to active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for civic engagement and social action;

Recognising the complexities and challenges of transition from childhood to adulthood and autonomy, as well as the decline in opportunities for young people as a result of increasing unemployment, poverty, discrimination and social exclusion;

Being aware of the impact of the economic crisis on youth work provision in some member States;

Acknowledging the work undertaken by the Council of Europe's youth sector to support youth policies promoting human rights, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and the active participation of young people, in particular through its European Youth Centres, the European Youth Foundation, its intergovernmental co-operation and co-managed statutory bodies and the partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the youth field;

Acknowledging the importance of achieving coherence and synergy with the efforts of all relevant stakeholders, including with the European Union, in the field of youth work;

Acknowledging the positive contribution of youth workers in all member States to empowering and engaging young people in developing inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies;

Drawing on the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention (2015), entitled "Making a world of difference", which aimed to set a European agenda for youth work,

Recommends that the governments of the member States, within their sphere of competence, renew their support for youth work by:

1. ensuring 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. Taking into account the diversity of youth work across and within member States, special attention should be paid to the need for strategies, frameworks, legislation, sustainable structures and resources, effective co-ordination with other sectors, as well as to related policies that promote equal access to youth work for all young people. Youth workers and young people should be actively engaged in any planned measures for implementation;
2. establishing a coherent and flexible competency-based framework for the education and training of paid and volunteer youth workers that takes into account existing practice, new trends and arenas, as well as the diversity of youth work. Stakeholders, including youth workers and young people, should be involved in developing this framework;
3. taking into consideration the measures and principles proposed in the appendix to this recommendation and encouraging providers of youth work to do the same;
4. supporting the initiative of the Council of Europe's youth sector to set up an ad hoc high-level taskforce of the relevant stakeholders in youth work in Europe, which can elaborate a mid-term strategy for the knowledge-based development of European youth work, in order to:
 - improve co-ordination of and access to youth work knowledge and resources at European, national, regional and local levels;

- further support the exchange of youth work practices, peer learning and the creation of sustainable networks and partnerships;
 - stimulate co-operation within the youth sector and among sectors and fields of expertise wherever youth work takes place in order to reinforce ties, in particular between formal education and youth work and between public authorities, the private sector and civil society;
 - strengthen the dialogue between youth work, youth policy and youth research;
 - strengthen the capacity of youth work to respond to the changes and trends in our society and the emerging challenges faced by young people;
 - carry out a mapping exercise on existing education and training (such as vocational training and higher education) and existing systems for validation of competences for paid and volunteer youth workers;
 - develop a range of assistance measures to support member States in taking forward and implementing this recommendation;
5. fostering national and European research on the different forms of youth work and their value, impact and merit;
6. supporting the development of appropriate forms of review and evaluation of the impact and outcomes of youth work and by reinforcing the dissemination, recognition and impact of the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio in the member States;
7. promoting the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres as an example of good practice;

It further recommends that the governments of the member States:

- ensure that this recommendation, including its appendix, is translated and disseminated (in accessible formats) to relevant authorities and stakeholders, with a view to raising awareness of, and strengthening commitment to, the further development of quality youth work;
- examine, within the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of this recommendation five years after adoption.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4

A. Scope and purpose of the recommendation – definition and scope of youth work

This recommendation applies to youth work in all its diversity. It aims to encourage member States to develop their youth work policy and practice within their sphere of competence and invites member States to adopt a range of measures that will strengthen the necessary support for youth work at local, regional, national and European levels.

The age range of those who benefit from youth work provision should reflect the legal and constitutional framework and existing practices in each of the member States.

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. 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. Through this process of non-formal and informal learning, young people gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need in order to move forward with confidence.

In order to facilitate these outcomes, youth work should create an enabling environment that is actively inclusive and socially engaging, creative and safe, fun and serious, playful and planned. It should be characterised by accessibility, openness and flexibility and at the same time promote dialogue between young people and the rest of society. It should focus on young people and create spaces for association and bridges to support transition to adulthood and autonomy.

It is acknowledged 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. For example:

- 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.

These positive outcomes, in the face of the current challenges in Europe and the disproportionately negative effects on young people, underline the vital importance of member States ensuring access to quality youth work for all young people. The risks of not doing so could be significant.

Young people are a key resource in building a social and just Europe. Societies are at high risk of undermining stability and social cohesion if they allow the current difficult circumstances to create a "lost generation" of disillusioned and disengaged young people. Adequately supporting young people today, including through the provision of quality youth work, is an important investment Europe has to make for its present and for the future. Not doing so represents a loss of opportunity to strengthen contemporary civil society, a threat to social cohesion and weakens the potential for dealing effectively with some of the major challenges of our time such as migration, unemployment, social exclusion and violent extremism.

B. Principles

The recommendation builds on the existing values, principles and benefits of youth work as enshrined in the instruments referred to in the text above. The design and delivery of youth work are underpinned by the principles of voluntary and active participation, equality of access, openness and flexibility. It should be rights-based, inclusive and centred on young people, their needs and abilities.

As participation is one of the key principles of youth work, young people, youth workers, youth and other organisations providing youth work are recognised as active partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of youth work policy and practice.

Member States are encouraged to secure the active participation of all these stakeholders when taking forward the recommendations and the following measures.

C. Measures

In establishing policies that safeguard and proactively support the establishment and further development of youth work at all levels, member States are invited to:

- i. provide an enabling environment and conditions for both proven and innovative youth work practices (including for example, sustainable structures and resources), particularly at the local level, while acknowledging that youth work benefits from regional, national and international opportunities and co-operation;
- ii. strengthen the role and position of youth work in order to facilitate cross-sectoral co-operation between youth work – whether it is provided by public authorities, the private sector or civil society – and other sectors, including for example: social care, health, sport, culture, formal education, employment services and criminal justice;
- iii. promote and support co-ordination between local, regional, national and European levels of youth work, thereby facilitating networking, co-operation, peer learning and exchange;
- iv. promote the recognition of the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding developed through participating in and delivering youth work;
- v. promote equal access to youth work;
- vi. promote the role of youth work by:
 - informing young people of their rights and of the opportunities and services available to them;
 - strengthening the active citizenship, participation and social inclusion of all young people, especially those who are at risk and marginalised;
 - broadening intercultural competences, European identity and international understanding among young people;
 - encouraging young people to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in their living environment;
 - addressing and preventing discrimination, intolerance and social exclusion;
 - enhancing non-formal and informal learning;
- vii. respect the freedom and autonomy of youth organisations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) doing youth work;
- viii. foster knowledge-based youth work that can respond to the changes and trends in our societies and the emerging challenges faced by young people;
- ix. encourage the use of research, evaluation and continuous follow-up in developing knowledge-based, quality youth work ensuring that mechanisms are in place to measure its outcomes and impact.

In establishing a coherent and flexible competency-based framework for the education and training of paid and volunteer youth workers, member States are invited to:

- i. work with youth work providers and other stakeholders to develop a set of core competences (for example values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding) that should be expected from youth workers;
- ii. establish frameworks, strategies, programmes and pathways for the education, training, capacity building and professional development of youth workers based on the agreed set of competences;

- iii. establish new, or further develop existing mechanisms for the documentation, validation, certification and recognition of competences, which paid and volunteer youth workers gain through their practice;
- iv. give increased support to implementing the existing and future European frameworks and agendas on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.