YOUTH WORK STRATEGIES MANUAL

Approaches and methods
for inspiring youth work development

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

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for inspiring youth work development

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Introduction

Youth work plays a modest role in the lives of many young people and an important role for some. As a local, low-threshold intervention, youth work provides spaces to meet with peers, enabling young people to explore and move towards realising their potential, and builds bridges to support their transition to adulthood and autonomy. Youth work is a small but arguably significant part of youth policy and covers various areas such as non-formal education and learning, leisure, culture, participation and engagement. It is therefore reasonable to speak of the emergence of youth work policy as a counterpart to youth policy, and as the policy directing youth work. Youth work policy consists of visions and measures regarding the provision and quality of youth work, to ultimately improve the situation of young people and support their personal development. Such measures can include the provision of various forms of youth work (for example youth centres, outreach and detached youth work), measures to ensure the quality of the youth work on offer (for example through education and training and ethical standards), as well as support for youth and youth-led organisations. Youth work policy at a European level, backed by the recent European Union resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe,[1] is likely to become more central within overall youth policy in the context of youth mainstreaming within the European Union[2] and strengthening a youth perspective within the Council of Europe.[3]

Although the importance of youth work is highlighted in political documents published by the European Union and the Council of Europe, realities within the member states show that youth work often remains a precarious field of action. There are many reasons for this precarity. For example, civic spaces are shrinking because of austerity measures and emergent right-wing political trends and as a result of multiple crises that have confronted society in general and often young people in particular.[4] At the local level, youth work suffers from a lack of human and financial resources, including a high turnover of youth workers on account of insecurity in employment, as well as various consequences arising from austerity measures. There seems to be a tendency in most parts of Europe to place more emphasis on short-term initiatives and projects rather than on structural capacity building. At regional and national levels, these problems are often underpinned by a lack of political support and slow (sometimes even regressive) youth work policy implementation.[5] Adopting youth work strategies can potentially help to alleviate these problems.

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1.   European Council 2024.
2.   European Commission 2024.
3.   Council of Europe 2023.
4.   Williamson 2024.
5.   Hofmann-van de Poll 2023.

But what is a youth work strategy, why is it needed and how is it done? These questions lie at the centre of this manual. Many countries have a youth strategy, on many levels, which deals with the role of young people in society, their needs and the structures that address these roles and needs. In the context of these youth strategies, youth work is but one of many structures that support and empower young people. A youth work strategy, however, is arguably more than a mere document simply laying out priorities for youth work over some period of time into the future. It can also function as a vision, highlighting the essential values for building the culture and identity of the youth work sector.

At the European level, youth work has been afforded increased attention over the past two decades. With the three European Youth Work Conventions in 2010, 2015 and 2020 and three related political documents produced by the European Union and the Council of Europe (Council of Europe CM/Rec(2017)4[6] and European Union Council Resolutions 2010/C 327/01[7] and 2020/C 415/01[8]), youth work has now been firmly anchored in youth policy at a European level. Moreover, a European definition of youth work, and accordingly a European youth work identity, seems to have emerged. Both European institutions have identified youth work as one of their priorities within their overall youth policies (the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027[9] and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030[10]). It is, therefore, now possible to claim that, from a European perspective, youth work has achieved an increased profile and prominence, both independently and in the context of wider considerations of youth policy. That position has been cemented most recently through another European Union Council Resolution (C2024/3526) on youth work policy in an empowering Europe. It is also reflected in the co-operation of the two organisations in the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (the Youth Partnership), where since 2020 youth work has been a key element of the Youth Partnership's work plan, to which this manual contributes.

The manual looks at youth work strategies from different perspectives. It considers both theory (Chapters 1 and 2) and practice (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) and is illustrated with experiences from different countries at national, regional and local levels. The authors themselves brought different perspectives to the manual, covering the triangle of research, policy and practice and thus capturing different angles on youth work strategies.

In Chapter 1 of this this manual, the central concepts of youth work, policy and strategy are defined and explained, thereby providing a solid theoretical framework. Chapter 2 sheds light on the relationships between policy and strategy, in particular youth policy, youth work policy and youth work strategy. These two theoretical chapters are followed by Chapter 3, which uses strategy development to explain step by step how a youth work strategy can be developed and which questions should be asked in the process. Chapter 4 provides reflections on the opportunities and

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6. Committee of Ministers 2017.
7. European Council 2010.
8. European Council 2020a.
9. European Council 2018.
10. Council of Europe 2020a.

challenges, promises and pitfalls of the youth work strategy development process in one European country. Chapter 5 concludes the manual with a focus on the key terminology-invoked approaches, as well as illustrations of youth (work) strategy development in four other European countries, giving the reader a deeper insight into individual elements of the strategy development process.

Chapter 1
Defining terms

This chapter considers critical terms related to youth work that demand attention before devising a youth work strategy. These terms contribute to a better understanding of the youth work landscape and facilitate more informed decision making that aligns with your particular goals.

1.1. Youth work

The aim of youth work is to support young people in their personal, emotional and social development, empowering them and enabling them to actively participate in society. It does so through means of non-formal education and learning. Youth work, over time, has been delineated in many different ways, but definitions invariably endeavour to capture dimensions such as learning, inclusion, participation, empowerment and a sense of feeling safe.

Youth work is a key aspect of community development that focuses on fostering meaningful relationships with young people. It creates spaces for young people to explore their interests and needs while building bridges to connect them with cultural, political and other relevant projects. The needs and interests of young people are central to youth work. It therefore operates in all areas that touch the core of young people's lives, and just as the lives of young people are heterogenous, so are the contexts in which youth work operates, which can include education, social services, religion and employment. Youth work may be offered by a range of institutions. The most commonly known are youth centres, clubs and youth and youth-led organisations, but other initiatives include, for example, schools or religious institutions. Furthermore, youth work services can be delivered to young people through mobile youth work, such as street work, detached and outreach work, or in public areas such as a park.[11] Youth work is based on the principles of voluntary and active participation, equality of access, openness and flexibility.[12]

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11. "European practices on mobile youth work and practical guidelines", available at
     https://issuu.com/nerijusmiginis/docs/manual__european_practices_on_mobile_youth_work_an.
12. Committee of Ministers 2017.

Several approaches characterise youth work in Europe, as testified by the final Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention in 2010.[13] Within this diversity, however, the "common ground" that characterises all forms of youth work started to be established during the 2nd European Youth Work Convention[14] in 2015, as well as through the ever-growing amount of (European) literature and documents of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (hereafter the Youth Partnership).[15]

A look at the history of youth work in Europe reveals that it has its roots in three areas, corresponding to three main methods of youth work.

1. Youth work's origins in social work point to a therapeutic and regulatory dimension, "saving" young people from exclusion and marginalisation through the provision of constructive leisure-time activities.
2. Youth work's evolution as an educational practice suggests that it engages with (social) pedagogical methods through non-formal education and learning.
3. A third pillar of youth work has often, but not always, involved advice, information and counselling, to enable young people to engage with the circumstances of their lives and make informed choices.

All three methods combine to construct "bridges" for more positive and purposeful transitions in young people's lives. Bridges, together with spaces, formed the common ground[16] identified by the youth work "community of practice" during the 2nd European Youth Work Convention. These three background influences on youth work do not produce different forms of practice but lead to somewhat different emphases and combinations in styles of practice that draw on all these roots.

In summarising the extensive knowledge gathered over 10 years through seven seminars and subsequent publications on the history of youth work in Europe,[17] Howard Williamson and Filip Coussée, in the final chapter of the final volume, discuss the policy and practice of youth work around 12 "trilemmas", or triangular dilemmas, each providing:

> The terrain (within each triangle) within which youth workers and policymakers (both elected representatives and civil servants) have to make (professional) decisions as to how to (a) position youth work, (b) manage the circumstances that derive from that positioning, and (c) negotiate and justify the position they have taken.[18]

Scrutinising these 12 trilemmas, four central areas of inquiry emerge.

▶ Why is youth work done?
▶ How and where is youth work done?

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13. Council of Europe 2010.
14. Council of Europe 2015a.
15. For non-exhaustive overviews, see Hofmann-van de Poll et al. 2020 and Schild H. 2023.
16. Williamson 2015.
17. Verschelden et al. 2009.
18. Williamson and Coussée 2018.

► For and by whom is youth work done?

► How is youth work governed at the European, national, regional and local levels?

1.1.1. Why is youth work done?

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.

This proposed core mission of youth work, taken from the Council of Europe 2017 recommendation on youth work[19] conveys not only one answer to the question "why" but also the dimensions on which youth work has an impact: the individual, the community and society.

Looking at the impact of youth work on the individual (the young person who takes part in youth work provision) the impact is particularly evident on a personal and social level. First and foremost is the personal development of young people by enabling them to explore and experience new scenarios and strengthen their skills, talents and interests. This in turn reinforces their self-confidence and self-efficacy and equips them with the belief that they are able to bring about positive changes in their own lives and in the world. Youth work also contributes to the development of important key or core skills – perhaps better understood today as life skills – such as communication skills, time management, teamwork, decision making, critical thinking and problem solving. Last but not least, the personality of young people is developed by giving them the opportunity to experiment with and shape their identity in the safe space that youth work offers.

Beyond the personal level, youth work also has a social impact on young people. After all, as many documents testify, youth work is "quintessentially a social practice", engaging with young people in groups and as a group.[20] As a social practice, youth work offers the opportunity to engage with other (young) people. It has the ambition of doing so regardless of young people's backgrounds or origins, being inclusive while maintaining a targeted approach for those who need it. By offering spaces where young people can meet, youth work offers a range of social opportunities, including meeting new people and building social networks. This helps young people to learn and try out social skills which can help them build and maintain relationships of different kinds.

Youth work also gives young people the opportunity to develop social capital (access to social networks, resources and support systems within the community) and encourages young people to participate actively in their community and take responsibility. A further impact of youth work that is often mentioned in relation to the community is the prevention of risk behaviour, for example substance misuse or delinquent acts. The questions of whether this is an aim or a side effect of youth work, and to what extent youth work can or should play a role as community problem solver, are highly debated.

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19. Committee of Ministers 2017.

20. Williamson 2008: 22.

A further impact of youth work concerns society at large. This contribution of youth work is often mentioned in broader youth policy documents, such as European Union Council conclusions. According to these documents, youth work promotes democratic values and principles, thus encouraging young people to become active in their community and in society at large and contributing to overarching societal goals like inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies. Youth work targets disadvantaged and marginalised young people, offering them opportunities they otherwise have no means to, and also contributes to the promotion of social justice and equal opportunities. Last but not least, reference is often made to the human capital that is developed through youth work. Youth work offers young people the opportunity to develop their skills, talents and interests. They can utilise these as both employees and citizens and thus can contribute to the economic and social prosperity of society.

Research is also looking into the "why" of youth work, particularly from an impact perspective. A 2019 study on the impact of youth work on the lives of young people, financed by the Erasmus+ programme, identified both personal and social aspects of this impact, including increased self-confidence and the development of friendships.[21] The study shows that youth work can change the lives of young people and empower them to support their communities.

1.1.2. How is youth work done?

The practice of youth work is underpinned by a set of fundamental guiding principles, using a variety of approaches and taking place in a wide range of settings, reflecting the rich tapestry of the needs and social contexts of young people. Youth work in this way ensures a flexible and person-centred framework for working with young people capable of responding to the dynamic landscape of their lives.

Principles of youth work "define the essential activities of enabling young people's voluntary participation and the active seeking of accountability for them and their communities".[22] The Council of Europe identified the following principles of youth work in its 2017 recommendation on youth work,[23] which was based on broad consultations with the youth work "community of practice".

> 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 around young people's needs and abilities.

These principles are indeed common to most youth work practices.[24] Young people's voluntary engagement and active participation in the design, planning and implementation of measures, programmes and activities are central to youth work. This

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21. Ord et al. 2018.
22. Petkovic and Barta 2018.
23. Committee of Ministers 2017.
24. For example, the "five pillars of youth work in Wales" are depicted as educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering" (Youth Work in Wales Review Group 2022, "Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes"). This definition built on a 1989 Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales.

way, it can be ensured that young people's needs, interests and wishes are mirrored in the youth work on offer. Youth work promotes diversity and tolerance, regardless of origin, religion or social background, by ensuring equal access, openness and inclusiveness. These principles are often complemented with a commitment to the principle of empowerment – the idea of supporting young people to discover and develop their abilities to act independently – and that of youth agency, the perception of young people as active subjects. The latter refers to the ability and potential of young people to participate actively in their own development, make decisions and exert influence on their environment and society as a whole. These principles are complemented by a holistic approach, the promotion of the development of young people not as students, patients or clients but as young people, physically, mentally and socially. As J. Macalister Brew put it well over half a century ago, youth work takes place through the heart, the head and the feet![25] Youth work goes beyond casework, teaching and control.[26]

Regarding conceptualisations of youth work practice, a distinction can be made between ethical principles, which describe how youth workers should engage with the young people they are working with, and professional principles, which suggest how youth workers act as practitioners, including principles regarding responsibility and accountability.[27]

Within these principles, youth work practice can be universal (aimed at and available to all young people) and targeted at specific groups. This two fold approach helps address a wide range of groups of young people – including those experiencing discrimination and (multiple) disadvantages. Open-access youth work develops practice for a variety of young people who may wish to be involved, and is aimed at all young people, regardless of their background, interests or social status. Targeted youth work is aimed at specific groups (such as specific genders, those dropping out of school or young people experiencing homelessness) or pays attention to particular issues (such as the rights of LGBTQI+ young people or young people with disabilities). At the same time, many youth work programmes also attempt to combine both approaches with hybrid programmes.[28] The approach to youth work in both scenarios aligns with the needs, interests and aspirations directly mentioned by young people themselves. Youth work initiatives should not be merely organised for young people but should be collaboratively designed and implemented with their active involvement and contribution, and they can also be exclusively youth-led. Youth work thrives through participation and co-creation, offering spaces and bridges for young people, as organisers, contributors and beneficiaries.[29]

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25.   Macalister Brew 1946.
26.   Jeffs and Smith 1990.
27.   Petkovic and Barta 2018.
28.   One example are PHAB (physically handicapped and able-bodied) youth clubs in the UK, which were open-access but made special efforts to involve young people with disabilities.
29.   This was not always the philosophical and principled approach to youth work, but it is clear that youth workers are not just providers of activities for young people. The paradigm shift came in the late 1970s – see Smith (1980), the seminal paper about organising an ice-skating trip.

Another major aspect of youth work is that it supports young people in their personal development, offering opportunities and experiences which enhance social skills and contribute to personal growth. The holistic approach of youth work provides, to a certain extent, a developmental framework for young people, providing them with competencies and skills that help them master their own lives in all their dimensions. Thus, youth work's dual approach of catering to the interests and needs of young people and offering them new experiences provides a holistic developmental framework, empowering young people to pursue personal goals and to be active citizens in their communities.

1.1.3. Where is youth work done?

Youth work initiatives and activities are offered in many different places by many different groups and individuals. That is why youth work appears so diverse and can therefore seem so disparate and difficult to classify. In essence, however, youth work is often seen as a service for young people in out-of-school contexts with an educational, social, cultural, developmental and leisure dimension. There are three core contexts where youth work practice can generally be located today. First, there are indoor settings in buildings that have been explicitly designed for this purpose (typically referred to as youth centres or youth clubs) and in buildings shared with other institutions and target groups (cultural, social, religious or community centres, for instance). Second, youth work can occur outdoors, in camps and residential centres, and increasingly on the street, through "outreach", "detached", "street" and "mobile" youth work. The third context is digital or online youth work, which gained significant attention during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging as a rapidly developing form of youth work practice.[30] With advancing technology, social media offers new possibilities for youth work to connect with and inform young people. Online tools provided new opportunities for youth workers to connect with young people, as well as new formats for youth work, and even for youth exchanges.[31]

Any form of youth work practice varies over time. As Howard Williamson has often noted, the youth work "journey" (Figure 1) incorporates hybrid combinations of the group of young people involved, the issue presented and addressed, the method used and the context in which it is taking place.

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30. Less than 10 years before the Covid-19 pandemic, online youth work was almost unheard of. Howard Williamson's review of the Helsinki Youth Department considered the work of Verke and its early development of "online youth work", which seemed strange and almost alien at the time. See Williamson 2012.

31. An example is the German-Turkish youth exchange organisation "Deutsch-Türkische Jugendbrücke", which offers online exchange programmes for young people from Germany and Türkiye. See www.jugendbruecke.de/ (in German and Turkish).

Figure 1 – The youth work journey

Group	Issue
Context	Method
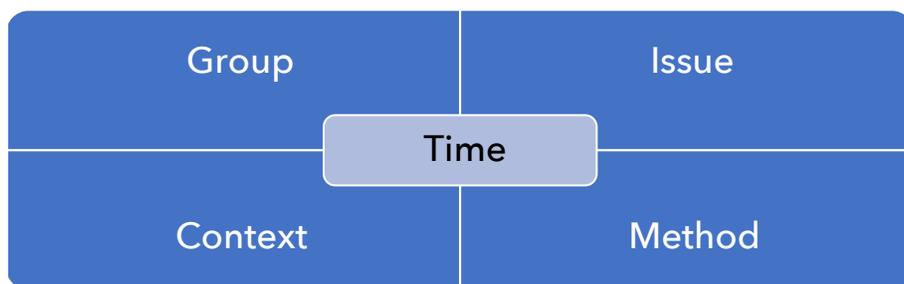
Time

(Source: Williamson 1997)

Youth work is never static, stuck with one group, issue, method or context. It moves over and through time. Moreover, youth needs, interests and aspirations are changing and so methods and instruments used in youth work also need to evolve. Additionally, youth transition pathways and processes change over the years and youth work practices must find ways and means to accompany these transitions effectively.[32] It has been argued that youth work, especially youth work at the local level (see below), is a process of "journeying together".[33] Local youth work is the most important spatial dimension of youth work, not least in the sense that it is usually where young people first experience it. Youth work happens where young people are, in the local communities and neighbourhoods where they live. This is why, as the first item in the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention[34] indicates, the provision of local youth work is so important.

Other levels of youth work, at regional, national and international levels, comprise a second spatial dimension of youth work. In England, for example, Regional Youth Work Units support the development of youth work at a regional level, while most readers will be familiar with different types of youth organisations that operate at a national level and, of course, national youth councils. All embody different forms of youth work. International youth work became established after the Second World War, primarily within the framework of bilateral programmes (such as the Franco-German Youth Office)[35] and has been continuously expanded within the framework of EU youth programmes since the 1980s. With Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, two major EU programmes are now available that offer young people and youth workers the opportunity to take part in international youth exchanges and other initiatives, including solidarity projects. By getting to know other cultures and faiths, their own prejudices are challenged and intercultural tolerance and understanding is strengthened. Furthermore, globalisation and technological developments have also contributed to other new dimensions of youth work. International youth work

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32. Pitti 2022.
33. Rogers and Smith 2010.
34. Council of Europe 2020.
35. See www.fgyo.org/homepage.

has intensified as digital transformations offer new opportunities to youth work, across a variety of borders and across continents.

1.1.4. By and for whom is youth work done?

Although youth work is offered by a range of people, institutions and organisations, young people are its key actors. They are the target group towards which youth work is directed, although there is no such thing as "the" young people. Young people are heterogenous in their needs, interests and concerns, which in all their variety have to be taken seriously in youth work. In Europe, the age range of the target group of youth work is not even clear – young people are aged 14 to 27 in EU statistics, whereas the Council of Europe directs its programmes at young people from 18 to 30 years of age.[36]

There are many reasons why youth work holds value for young people. First and foremost, it offers leisure activities and spaces to hang out and meet friends. In doing so, it provides, implicitly and explicitly, for personal development by giving young people the opportunity to explore their interests and competencies and to develop their personalities. By participating in the activities offered, young people experience social integration, developing social skills and being an integral part of the (youth work) community. Those young people who experience problems – in family, education, personal or social life, etc. – may find support from youth workers, be it a person to talk with or a referral to more specialised support agencies. This is youth work's bridging role. Finally, youth work offers education and learning experiences where young people can develop social, cultural and political views.

1.1.4.1. Youth work practised by youth workers

Of central importance in youth work is the relationship between young people as the participants in youth work and youth workers (paid or voluntary) as the practitioners of youth work.

> [A] youth worker is a professional,[37] volunteer or youth leader who facilitates young people's learning and personal and social development and motivates and supports them in becoming autonomous, active and responsible individuals and citizens. The delivery of youth work is underpinned by the principles of voluntary and active participation of young people.[38]

Youth workers can be paid or voluntary, hired by state institutions or civil society organisations. In many cases, they complement each other, for example where volunteering can supplement the existing paid youth work provision. Voluntary youth workers are often adults giving their free time to supporting young people; they may be parents

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36. Lavchyan and Williamson 2019.
37. The distinction used to be made between "professional" and "volunteer" youth workers, as in this quotation. Today the distinction is between paid and unpaid (volunteer) youth workers. It is hoped, and it is certainly an aspiration, that all youth work practitioners are professional in executing their tasks.
38. European Council 2019.

and may well possess an array of skills and qualifications that they bring to their youth work practice. They may also still be young people giving something back to projects and programmes that they themselves benefited from in earlier years.

Another form of youth work is youth-led youth work, organised by young people themselves. According to recent research, voluntary youth work often offers young people a path to a career in youth work.[39] Depending on the activities and contexts of youth work practice, responsibilities of youth workers vary. Most of them correspond, however, in one way or another to the values that youth work holds for young people. Thus, the activities of a youth worker include the organisation of leisure and educational activities as well as advice, information and support for those young people who need it. Less explicitly, the work of youth workers often includes enhancing values and social skills. Youth workers support young people in developing collaborative values and social skills, taking responsibility, empathy, solidarity and getting involved in society. This also includes equipping young people with the competencies necessary to deal with the challenges society at large is facing, such as democratic backsliding, populism, discrimination or the climate emergency.

However, the work of youth workers goes beyond direct contact and work with young people. Youth workers often are advocates for young people, supporting and voicing their interests and representing them to decision makers and society in cases where young people have no voice themselves.

Such advocating work often includes the building of networks and cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure that young people's needs and interests are met.

1.1.4.2. Youth work provided by the state

The state has, arguably, the task of ensuring the empowerment, development and support of young people and of taking appropriate measures to achieve this end. Youth work is one such measure. Thus, governmental youth work providers are responsible for developing and implementing programmes and practices to promote and support young people, including activities and open spaces where young people can meet and pursue their interests. The state can also provide financial assistance through operational grants and project grants to non-governmental youth work organisations to maintain and develop their work. Beyond this, youth work provision offered by the state can be much broader, including liaison with other dimensions of youth policy (in, for example, the areas of health or justice), the development of skills and competencies for the labour market[40] and the provision of programmes designed to cultivate talent and excellence both in young people and within youth work itself.

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39. Petkovic 2022.

40. The explicit contribution of youth work to "employability" is a contentious issue that perhaps started when the emergent scale of youth unemployment caused the UK Government to try to harness youth work to that agenda. The renowned British youth work historian, Bernard Davies, published a seminal monograph on the debate that ensued, questioning whether, in effect, youth work was selling its soul to the Devil. See Davies 1979.

Although, as stressed in many political documents and literature, youth work is offered at the local level, it is crucial that other levels of government are involved in shaping youth work. This is done for example by providing frameworks and funding for youth work services and youth work education and establishing quality benchmarks as guidelines for quality youth work.

1.1.4.3. Youth work offered by non-governmental youth work organisations

Non-governmental youth work organisations ensure that young people have a wide range of experiences and opportunities for personal development and social participation. The term "non-governmental youth work organisations" summarises a broad range of organisations that operate independently from governmental structures, even though they may co-operate and even be (partly) funded by the government.[41] They can be umbrella organisations or small organisations such as youth centres or clubs, led by paid and voluntary youth workers or young people themselves. The role of such non-governmental organisations is important in youth work, as they often act as mediators between young people and the governmental level and act as advocates for the needs and interests of young people. They are often credited with the development of innovative concepts and ideas about youth work, including new methods and formats as well as reaching out to underrepresented groups of young people.

Non-governmental youth work organisations represent young people, often in official and political settings, and deliver youth work initiatives themselves. In their representative capacity, they can act as a consultative partner during the drafting, implementation and evaluation phases of a political youth work strategy. In terms of providing initiatives, they may design their own strategy for their particular organisation's approach and priorities in youth work.

1.1.4.4. Youth work provided by youth organisations and associations

Youth organisations offer an essential and self-organised addition to governmental and non-governmental youth work structures. Youth organisations are youth-led and can take various forms, such as youth associations, student councils, political youth organisations, campaign groups and environmental or sports clubs. They pursue the goal of supporting and promoting young people's interests. Youth organisations offer their members a wide range of opportunities for participation and personal development and, as such, complement other forms of youth work practice. Nowadays,

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41. In Germany, the law can officially regulate the relationship between non-governmental and governmental youth work organisations. The relationship between public youth welfare services ("offene Träger der Jugendhilfe") and independent youth welfare organisations ("freie Träger der Jugendhilfe") is regulated in §4 of the Social Code VIII Book, stating that public youth welfare, of which youth work is part, should refrain from measures if recognised youth welfare or youth work organisations can offer suitable facilities, services and events.

there is a particular focus on the importance of more non-conventional forms of participation, especially in light of digitalisation and the subsequent emergence of online tools and platforms.[42]

At the European level, the European Youth Forum (Youth Forum Jeunesse, or YFJ) represents well over 100 national youth councils and pan-European youth organisations, promoting youth participation and advocating the rights and representation of young people within the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

1.1.5. How is youth work governed?

Although youth work is mostly carried out at the local level, other levels – regional, national and international – each have their own role in governing youth work. Co-operation and collaboration between the levels is important to offer youth work the best possibilities to support and empower young people as needed. The work at the different levels is complementary and helps ensure that youth work practice can be holistically organised. It is generally understood that most youth work happens locally, often with guidance, programmes, funding and regulation or support from other levels.

1.1.5.1 Legal frameworks on youth work

The legal framework describes the legal context in which youth work is defined and its competence and field of action are determined. It thus provides a legal structure in which youth work is carried out. At the same time, it legitimises the practice of youth work by legally stating that it exists. Legal frameworks vary considerably across Europe.

First, a small number of countries in Europe have specific legislation on youth work. In Estonia, for example, the Youth Work Act[43] (2010) provides the legal basis for the organisation and financing of youth work and defines the terms used in the youth field, the leading institutions and organisations providing youth work services and the principles of youth work practice. Youth work in Ireland has generally been implemented by non-statutory or non-governmental organisations. However, under the Irish Youth Work Act 2001,[44] there is a state responsibility to ensure the provision of youth work programmes or services. Youth work in Malta is a formally regulated profession under the Youth Work Profession Act[45] (2015), making Malta one of the few countries in Europe where youth work is a legally recognised profession.

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42. See the Youth Partnership's seminars and publications on the role and importance of conventional and non-conventional forms of participation: available at https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/participation.
43. See www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012016004/consolide.
44. See www.irishstatutebook.ie.
45. See https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/533/eng.

Second, it can be part of a general law on youth, as is the case in England and Wales, where until relatively recently it was still the 1944 Education Act that required municipalities to make "adequate provision" for young people in their leisure time.[46] The general provisions of the 1944 Education Act were supplanted by the Learning and Skills Act 2002 in Wales (which enabled a wide range of "youth support" services[47] to be provided to young people up to the age of 25) and by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 in England (which provided for "positive activities" for young people). In Finland, youth work has been part of legislation on youth policy since the early 1970s. The Youth Act[48] (2017) covers youth work activities, youth policy, central and local government responsibilities, cross-sectoral co-operation and state funding.

Third, the legal framework can include youth work in laws on youth welfare services, as in Germany for example, where youth work and youth social work are laid down in sections 11to13 of the Social Code VIII on youth welfare, including tasks, functions and providers of youth work and youth social work. The law passed in 1990 for the United Germany replaced the Youth Welfare Act of West Germany. The law created services for children, young people and parents, offering them support and help in coping with life. Because of Germany's federal structure, the law also regulates the competencies of the federal and state governments and those of public and independent youth welfare organisations and, consequently, youth work.

Fourth, in some countries, youth work is not part of youth policy or welfare services but is generally considered part of social work. In this sense, young people are only one of the many target groups of social workers. *The history of youth work in Europe* series[49] shows how the "statutory" base of youth work has emanated from many sources, including social work. For example, in Sweden, "Young people are often understood in relation to different social and psychological problems and described as a group that is very sensitive and vulnerable to the troubles of contemporary society".[50] Consequently, work with young people is summarised in a national youth policy[51] (adopted in 1997 and twice since revised) governing all state efforts directed at young people.

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46. "Adequacy" is a strange legal term; in 1991 a challenge to a municipality's decision to reduce spending on youth work to £1 led to a legal judgment that if the municipality considered that "adequate", then it was. The youth work trade union/professional association then established that "sufficiency" had stronger traction in British law and sought to argue for a "sufficient youth service", one that was funded by 2% of the overall education budget at both national and local levels. This advocacy was anchored by a publication that presented the arithmetic, but it got youth work nowhere. See Bell et. al 1994.
47. The relationship between youth work and youth support services remains contentious in Wales. The intention in revising the act was to strengthen youth work. Legal advice suggested the need to reference youth support services. The two concepts have been a political football ever since.
48. See https://okm.fi/en/legislation-youth.
49. See https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/history-of-youth-work.
50. Andersson 2018.
51. See www.government.se/government-policy/youth-policy/.

1.1.5.2. Youth work frameworks at the local level

As we have noted already, youth work is largely organised at the municipal level in towns and communities. This is where youth centres, clubs and projects for young people are located. Municipal youth work aims to support young people in their immediate living environment, provide leisure and educational programmes and promote their participation in society.

Local youth work is especially significant for five distinct reasons.

1. Local youth work is within reach of most young people's living environment. Its provision – whether building-based, on the street or through mobile services (see above) – takes place close to young people's homes and is easily accessible. This means that the needs and interests of all young people can be better addressed and connected.

2. Due to the closeness of youth work to the situation of young people, local youth work has the opportunity to create a trusting relationship between young people and youth workers. Regular and personal contact as well as joint activities are pivotal in establishing such relationships, empowering young people and offering advice and support where needed.

3. Local youth work provides local activities and projects, close to the living environment and the needs and interests of young people.

4. Local youth work allows young people to become actively involved. Participatory processes such as youth participation committees, youth forums, youth councils or other structural or participatory opportunities for involvement in the planning and implementation of projects promote young people's self-determination, active citizenship and personal responsibility.

5. Local youth work makes an important contribution to the social integration of young people. It offers them a safe space to socialise with their peers, develop social skills and feel at home in a community.

The Europe Goes Local Erasmus+ initiative acknowledged the importance of promoting local youth work and the need for further advocacy for its development,[52] developing in 2019 a European Charter on Local Youth Work.[53] This includes guidelines on developing local youth work. The charter can be used by policy makers as a checklist around which stakeholders can gather and discuss the measures required for the further development of youth work.

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52. Europe Goes Local is a European co-operation project that aims to develop and strengthen local youth work. Europe Goes Local's mission is to strengthen the youth work community of practice at the local level, in line with the European Youth Work Agenda and from the perspective of municipalities and those involved with local youth work. The project is financed by contributions from participating national agencies in the framework of Erasmus+ (Training and Cooperation Activities) and/or the European Solidarity Corps (Networking Activities), available at https://europegoeslocal.eu/home/.

53. See www.europegoeslocal.eu/changemakerskit/introduction/.

1.1.5.3. Youth work frameworks at the regional level

The role of regional-level youth work frameworks varies considerably, depending on the country and regional context. Many regional governments develop strategies based on national laws or frameworks within their jurisdictions. These strategies set out regional priorities and development perspectives and are often supported by funding programmes. In some countries, regional frameworks are developed in the absence of a national youth work strategy. This is often due to the fact that legislative and executive competencies regarding youth work lie at regional rather than national level.

One such example is Austria, which does not have a national youth work strategy. In most Austrian regions, there may also not be a youth work strategy, though youth work is often seen as an essential instrument for the implementation of regional and local youth strategies. The region of Styria has one of the very few Austrian stand-alone youth work strategies. The Strategic Orientation of Children and Youth Work in Styria 2017-2022[54] is built around two key elements: first, defining the visions for and principles of youth work, structured around objectives in six areas and, secondly, formulating how youth work can support young people in pursuing and reaching the set objectives.

Another example is Italy, where the legislative power regarding youth work mainly belongs to the regions and autonomous provinces, in the framework of their laws on youth policies.[55] In Italy, there is no national legislative framework for youth work, but a few different youth work practices exist mainly within the third sector. The youth work practices that attract central government support include centre-based youth work (open-access youth centres and youth information centres), outreach youth work, summer camps and non-formal education provided by volunteers in the Universal Civic Service Programme Framework.

1.1.5.4. Governing youth work at the national level

In many countries, the national level has the task of anchoring the legal and political framework for youth work. It does so through regulation and legislation (see 1.1.5.1) and through financial support. Using regulations and laws, governments provide the legal framework in which youth work operates. Youth laws and youth work laws define the rights and duties of young people and the tasks of youth welfare and youth work. Among other things, they regulate the protection of children and young people, the promotion of their development and their participation in decision-making processes. The role of youth policy and its relationship to youth work policy is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

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54. See https://helixaustria.com.
55. See https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/italy/10-youth-work.

1.1.5.5. Youth work at the European level

Intercultural learning, peace education, human rights education and democracy education have stimulated international learning mobility and youth work co-operation. As a result of globalisation and developments in technology and communications, as well as a recognition of their important contributions to young people's life skills development through funding programmes, international youth work projects have grown in both number and geographical coverage. This goes beyond long-existing youth exchanges as a means for intercultural learning and understanding and the development of professional transnational and European exchange and discourse.[56] In Europe, this can be seen in the increasing (political) attention to youth work over the last 15 years, which is framed not least by the three European Youth Work Conventions (2010,[57] 2015[58] and 2020[59]) and the three accompanying policy documents of the European Union (2010[60] and 2020[61]) and the Council of Europe (2017[62]). From tackling social and societal problems by working with young people, youth work has evolved politically into an independent field of practice with its own methods and discourse and an agenda for enhanced co-operation between the two main European organisations – the European Youth Work Agenda. This also includes a standardised and broadly accepted Europe-wide definition. Youth work, according to the Council of Europe[63] and the European Union,[64] 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.

This definition, building on the discussions from the first two European Youth Work Conventions,[65] is a political endeavour to summarise in reasonably comprehensive conceptual terms the different forms and dimensions of youth work in Europe. It is based on the commonalities of youth work in Europe, without overlooking the fact

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56. In this respect, this manual focuses on European developments. Such exchange and discourse development also takes place in other regions and continents but is not considered in the manual.
57. Council of Europe 2010.
58. Council of Europe 2015a.
59. Council of Europe 2020.
60. European Council 2010.
61. European Council 2020a.
62. Committee of Ministers 2017.
63. Ibid.
64. European Council 2020a.
65. This definition has been developed and adapted but still derives significantly from Peter Lauritzen's perspective on youth work, as articulated in his many conversations and speeches. A written version was eventually produced in 2006, shortly before his untimely death. See Ohana and Rothemund 2008; "Defining youth work" is on p. 369. Lauritzen was the first Educational Adviser, appointed in 1972, at the Council of Europe's European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

that the conceptualisation and understanding of youth work still varies, sometimes quite dramatically, in different parts of Europe. This diversity of youth work in Europe is also reflected in Tomi Kiilakoski's consideration and analysis of youth work practice architectures,[66] updated in 2025, in which at least four different levels of structural recognition and development of youth work in Europe are identified, based on dimensions such as the legal framework, the existence of a professional organisation for youth workers and the forms of education and training for youth workers.

In the current youth (sector) strategies of the European Union and the Council of Europe, youth work is one of three (EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027) and four (Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030) thematic priorities. In fact, it is the only priority the two strategies share and is partially reflected through assigning a stronger focus to youth work within the instrument for the joint co-operation between the two institutions in the field of youth – the Youth Partnership.[67] Having been relatively invisible in previous strategies, youth work is now acknowledged as a catalyst for all other priorities and an area of collaboration and convergence between the two institutions. Following the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on youth work in 2017,[68] and following the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, the European Union adopted a resolution on the framework for establishing a European youth work agenda in 2020,[69] thus cementing youth work as a stand-alone priority with its own policy goals and with an emphasis on complementarity and co-ordination.[70] In 2024, under the Belgian EU Presidency, the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe,[71] which summarised previous European developments and set new goals.

One of the essential resources for the youth sector, available at the European level, is the Youth Wiki – an online platform presenting information on European countries' youth policies.[72] With the declared objective to support evidence-based European co-operation in the field of youth, the Youth Wiki allows the exchange of information and innovative practices, with a network of national correspondents from 33 countries updating the platform constantly with information about the development of youth policies in the respective countries. To support the comparative perspective and to allow a better approach of the youth sector at the European level, the Youth Partnership contributes to the Youth Wiki project by collecting knowledge from countries in eastern and South-East Europe that are Erasmus+ partner countries.[73] Youth work is one of the key policy fields of the Youth Wiki, addressing the legislative framework, matters related to recognition and validation, the development

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66. Kiilakoski 2018.
67. Hofmann-van de Poll and Williamson 2021.
68. Committee of Ministers 2017.
69. European Council 2020a.
70. Evelyn-Rannala, Stojanovic and Kovacic 2022.
71. European Council 2024.
72. See https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/steering-group-on-the-european -youth-work -agenda.
73. See https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/contribution-eu-youth-wiki.

of the community of practice and the current debates that are taking place within the respective participating countries. Additionally, the comparative overviews on quality assurance[74] and digital youth work[75] support policy development and serve the research community by documenting different projects and initiatives.

1.2. Policy

Policy, according to the online Encyclopaedia Britannica, is an officially accepted set of rules or ideas about what should be done, an idea or belief that guides the way a person, government, business or organisation should behave.[76] As such, policy has a wide-ranging and versatile usage, which broadly refers to decisions, guidelines and actions that shape behaviour, guide decision making and achieve specific objectives within various contexts, ranging from government to organisations and communities. It describes "actions which contain goal(s) and the means to achieve them, however well or poorly identified, justified, articulated and formulated".[77]

On this account, policy is a very broad term that can be applied to different areas. Organisational policy, for example, refers to the policy of organisations, relating to, for example, businesses, non-profit organisations or educational institutions. Policy in this case covers both internal operations (for example human resources, finance or ethics) as well as interaction with external stakeholders (for example customer relations).

Government policy, on the other hand, refers to the actions of governments, and beyond that, guidelines or decisions to address certain issues. It includes a wide range of policy fields, which are often related to governmental ministries and departments, such as employment policy, education policy, foreign policy or youth policy.

It is often used interchangeably with public policy, although, in the words of Thomas Dye, the latter has a broader approach: "public policy is anything a government chooses to do or not to do".[78]

For the purposes of this manual, policy for all is understood as formal policy. This refers to policies that are defined by authorised bodies and that usually have a clear application to all those who fall within the scope of the policy. It is also transparent and accessible to the public, as it falls within the public domain; in other words, it is published in laws, government decrees, organisational guidelines or other official documentation. Compliance with the policy may even be required by law, with penalties for non-compliance.

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74. See https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/comparative-overviews/youth-work/quality-assurance/2023.
75. See https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/comparative-overviews/youth-work/digital-youth-work/2023.
76. See Available at www.britannica.com/dictionary/policy.
77. Howlett and Cashore 2014.
78. Dye 1972.

1.2.1. The guiding character of policy

Policy and politics require guidelines to define clear objectives and develop measures to achieve these objectives. Policy serves as a guide for governments, organisations and institutions to make decisions and implement actions that meet the needs of society. This guiding character consists of several elements (see below). The more these elements are reflected in a policy, the higher the acceptance and legitimacy of the policy. But first and foremost, policy provides a clear direction for political measures by defining goals and stating how these goals can be achieved. By doing so, it is directed towards effective use of resources, aiming to achieve the best results. Furthermore, a policy defines who is responsible for decisions and actions, thus creating accountability and transparency. Ultimately, a well-designed policy not only protects the rights and interests of citizens, creating a framework that promotes fairness, justice and equality, but also helps policy makers to make consistent decisions.

1.2.2. Elements of policy

A formulated policy is an important part of the political process. It allows for accountability, fairness and efficiency in governance. To make this possible, a policy usually consists of several parts. First, a policy should formulate its purpose, to explain the reasons, problems and challenges behind the design of the policy. It should also include reference to the scope of the policy. For whom or what is it designed, and to whom or what does it apply? A third element, which is linked to the scope of policy, is that of definitions. To avoid misunderstandings in implementation, it is important to clarify up front what the most important terms mean. For example, what is meant by "youth"? For accountability, clear and measurable objectives are also an important part of policy. They are closely related to elements of evaluation, which are often included in policies, alongside monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms. Finally, the policy should contain elements of responsibility, namely which tasks resulting from the policy, for example implementation, monitoring or compliance, are the responsibility of which actor or stakeholder. A clear and precise policy which includes these elements enhances the chances of implementation and of responsible governmental action.

1.2.3. Policy development

The various elements of a policy show that policy development should be designed as a carefully planned and structured process, including analysis and consultation. In order to make informed decisions about policy design, it is important to collect and consider relevant data, information and best practice. This is often a first step in policy development. Based on research, problems and trends, and thus the need for a policy, are identified. Only when this need is identified can the policy's objectives be defined. Evidence-based policy is an important (albeit sometimes rhetorical) principle of (European) political decision making[79] and as such offers a contrast to

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79.   See https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/home_en.

ideologically based policy making.[80] It goes hand in hand with the involvement of stakeholders in the need assessment, but also in the policy cycle phases afterwards, such as design and implementation of policy. Without involvement of relevant stakeholders, a policy runs the risk of lacking the legitimacy and acceptance needed for its implementation.

Once the principles of a policy have been clarified, the next step is to draft the policy. The draft should involve all relevant stakeholders in a broad consultation process and obtain feedback from relevant advocacy groups. This enables possible concerns, ambiguities or suggestions for improvement to be taken into account when finalising the policy. Finally, the policy can be approved. A strategy for implementation can subsequently be developed on the basis of the policy goals. Therefore, according to Karen Evans (1998),[81] a policy must be considered and reconsidered at three points: when it is first expressed; when it is enacted; and when it is experienced. At each point, such consideration should include relevant stakeholders, including practitioners and target groups.

In addition to this structured process of policy development, there are other theories that describe the development of policy, especially after it has come into force. For youth policy, this is in particular the "youth policy clock", which summarises the dynamics of establishing a youth policy.[82]

Figure 2 – The dynamics – the Ds – of youth policy

The Dynamics – the "D"s

Decision

decentralisation

direction

Development

Can start or stall at any point, but political championship is critical

Delivery

dissent

difficulties

Debate
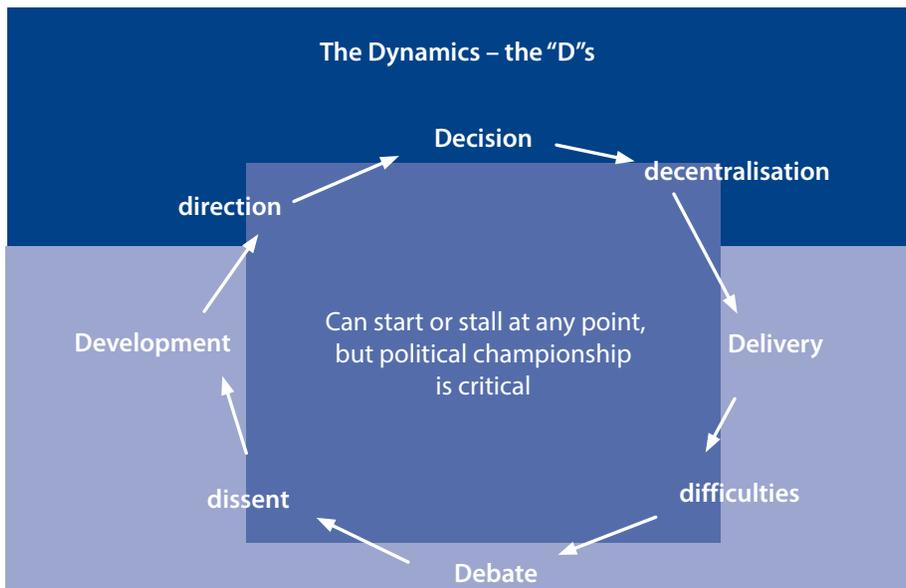
Source: Williamson (2002)

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80. Sutcliffe and Court 2005.
81. Evans 1998.
82. Williamson, Fras and Lavchyan 2021.

Everything starts with the decision (and ratification) in favour of a policy, and thus political support. Delivery, however, is often decentralised. In the process, difficulties often come to light, which, as unintended or unforeseen consequences, instigate a debate on how they can be resolved. The dissent that invariably emerges needs to be addressed if credible policy is to be developed further. Once attended to, a revised sense of direction can be established that will hopefully secure renewed political support and a decision, and the dynamic begins anew.

1.3. Strategy

Originating from the ancient Greek word *strategia*, "strategy" is generally used as a term for the fundamental and planned behaviour with which defined objectives are to be achieved. It describes a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal, usually over a long period.[83] The term is used in all kinds of fields – be it a strategy to win a game or the strategy of a company to increase its sales. In politics, strategy is closely related to policy. A strategy involves identifying the stepping stones for realising a policy vision or policy aspirations. It is not the concrete implementation, but it defines the general scope and radius of action within which a plan is defined to realise a specific goal within a particular time.

While the word "strategy" is often used synonymously with "agenda", "framework" and sometimes even "action plan", in the context of definitional distinctions the latter is usually a more detailed exposition of elements of a strategy and over a shorter time frame. We acknowledge that the interchangeability of terminology is a recipe for considerable confusion! This interchangeable usage can be seen, for example, in European youth policy. Whereas the Council of Europe's 2008 Declaration on youth policy[84] of the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for youth was called "Agenda 2020", its successor, adopted in 2020 by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, was presented as "Youth Sector Strategy 2030".[85] The term "EU Youth Strategy" is a synonym for a "framework for co-operation".[86] Following in the spirit of this European jargon, we will suggest that a strategy is, therefore, a framework document that includes a vision, principles, goals and recommendations for stakeholders and fields of action. Strategy, in political usage, defines political action;[87] it guides the political action of those concerned.

1.3.1. Strategy elements

Strategy is thus a very general concept, which is primarily understood as a way of acting within a certain period towards a specific goal. It often includes the following elements.[88]

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83. See www.britannica.com/dictionary/strategy.
84. Committee of Ministers 2008.
85. Council of Europe 2020a.
86. European Council 2018.
87. König and Wenzelburger 2014.
88. Raschke and Tils 2013.

1. Strategies are success oriented: they are designed to achieve certain goals. The success of a strategy relies on its practicality, ensuring a direct connection between stated goals and actions taken by those involved. Evaluating external influences and contextual factors is crucial in determining the strategy's effectiveness.

2. Strategies are practice-steering instructions for action: they guide and influence by providing direction and purpose to their actions, setting a policy field apart from other areas. Strategies achieve this by formulating goals, means and contextual factors to decide upon possible action geared towards desired outcomes.

3. Strategies are tangible constructs for action: goals and instructions need to be feasible and not too general. Strategies are practical plans requiring achievable goals and instructions. They differ from vague visions by being actionable and time-bound, making them adaptable to societal changes. The strategy development process illustrates how ideas are translated into real-world actions.

1.3.2. Strategy development

A strategy can only exist once it has been developed. Several (conceptual) contributions, especially in management literature, deal with how a strategy should be developed. In general, five steps can be identified:

1. goal setting
2. analysis
3. strategy formulation
4. strategy implementation
5. strategy evaluation.

The first step deals with the strategic goals to be achieved. This can be set out in a vision statement, for example, on which the strategy will be based. The mission and values from which the strategy is derived are also discussed. It must also be determined who will be responsible for achieving the goals and what time frame is envisaged for the strategy. Strategies can be short-term, medium-term or long-term. Once this has been clarified, the environment within which the strategy has to operate is considered: how enabling or obstructive is it likely to be?

The analysis explores the context and the initial situation in which the strategy will be implemented. There is, of course, both an internal and an external context. This means analysing both the strategy's own framework for action (such as organisational structure, financing and capacities) and the external context in which it is intended to take place (including, for example, co-operation partners, adjacent fields of action and the potential for conflict, disruption and obstruction). In business, such exploration has classically been promulgated through a "SWOT" analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

The next step is to write the strategy. It includes a vision and a mission, underpinning values and guiding principles, and the strategic goals that should be achieved. Furthermore, each goal should describe how it can be achieved. Ideally, milestones, benchmarks and indicators complement the goals and actions, as well as budgets or financial plans, so that they can be tracked. A road map or action plan is often included, which describes how to achieve the goals.

The next step is implementation. This means – among other things – that resources need to be secured and implementation roles clarified. Who is doing what, when, how and with what level of resourcing and responsibility? After explaining these aspects of the strategy, they must be presented within the organisation and often to wider stakeholders. These clarifications and task allocations are not necessarily part of the strategy per se but are essential to making it successful. It is also important to keep the entire duration of the strategy in mind. Human and financial resources must be secured to sustain action throughout the strategy. Strategic implementation is not just about "hitting the ground running" (a popular political claim when new policies are being established) but about enabling and ensuring delivery over the time frame of the strategy.

Evaluation follows as a fifth step. As mentioned above, a strategy – just like a policy – must be considered and reconsidered at three points: when it is first expressed, when it is enacted and when it is experienced. The evaluation of implementation concerns the last stage, the experience. Have those targeted by the strategy been reached? How has the strategy been experienced? To what extent has the strategy achieved what it set out to do (and have there been unintended – beneficial or unwanted – consequences)? While there are different ways to evaluate strategies,[89] it is important to identify the best evaluation approach for the strategy defined and to include this evaluation approach in the strategy document before it is finalised and approved. In this way, evaluation becomes an integral part of the implementation process. One problem that often comes to light during evaluation is the "implementation leakage". This means that a strategy, as it cascades from political vision to professional enactment, may encounter resistance, refocusing and amendment during interpretation and implementation so that by the time it reaches the ground, it may have little impact in transforming practice and effecting change. Beyond the gradual "leakage" of strategic plans and practice, there may be active efforts by grass-roots practitioners to deflect and avoid strategic change, though they may also embrace it, thus championing and driving delivery. Where practitioners do deflect strategic change, this has been referred to as street-level bureaucracy, with them being portrayed as street-level bureaucrats standing in the way of political and policy aspirations.[90] Evaluation is critical for reviewing, updating or drafting new evidence-informed strategies.

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89. Irina Lonean (2020) refers to prospective (*ex ante*), process (formative or interim) and retrospective (summative or *ex post*) evaluation.
90. Lipsky 2010.

1.4. Conclusion

For youth work to operate in a coherent way, and to be able to fulfil its potential towards young people, it needs a policy and a strategy. Policy, strategy and youth work are thus interrelated terms and concepts with the goal of supporting the holistic development and empowerment of young people. Youth work provides measures and activities for young people, catering to their interests and needs. A policy provides guidance for decision making as well as resource allocation. Finally, strategy serves as an intermediate, providing a framework for youth work in which the policy is detailed. A co-ordinated approach between policy, strategy and youth work helps to serve the cause of young people, considering their needs, interests and challenges in a holistic way. How youth policy, youth strategy, youth work policy and youth work strategy relate to each other is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Relationships – Youth policy, youth work policy and strategy

Youth work is shaped by youth policy and youth strategy, as well as policies and strategies that are specific to youth work. These policies and strategies guide youth services, including youth work, and support young people in their personal and social development in the various areas of their lives, such as education, vocational training, employment, housing, health and justice. At the same time, youth policies and strategies, and youth work policies and strategies, build upon fundamental human values and principles such as democracy, equality and inclusion. Understanding the connections, but also the differences, between these policies and strategies helps to create policies and strategies that support and empower young people, thus contributing to an active and committed society.

2.1. Youth policy

Youth policy is often thought of as a comprehensive framework designed to address the complex needs and uphold the rights of young people. In theory, it covers a wide range of domains to establish an inclusive and comprehensive approach for actions that promote the all-round growth and development of young people and nurture their active engagement within their communities. In reality, it is often a fragmented mosaic which is frequently contradictory, competing with and at times undermining the rights of young people. Resources are often committed as much (if not more!) to the regulation and control of young people as to their "emancipation" and "empowerment". Overall youth policy, at many levels, may well lack co-ordination and cohesion. In this sense, there may be not one youth policy, but several co-existing youth policies.

Nationally, each country's youth policy (or policies) reflects its unique socio-economic and cultural landscape. Some countries may focus significantly more on, for example, youth participation in society or address educational disparities, while others may prioritise tackling youth unemployment or anti-social behaviour in response to prevailing concerns.

On the European stage, bodies such as the Council of Europe and the European Union have established overarching youth policies that can also provide an indicative framework for member states. These policies highlight critical areas such as access to rights, mobility, promoting peace and security, and citizenship. These have been documented in a reference manual on youth policy from a European perspective.[91]

2.1.1. Defining its scope and objectives

As Howard Williamson once wrote, every country has a youth policy – by design, default or neglect. Sometimes, youth policy is intentionally produced. Occasionally, it does not exist when there are palpable needs and issues facing young people for which there should be a response by the public authorities, and sometimes existing youth policies wither on the vine, with shrinking budgets and a decline in political interest and support. Whatever the circumstances, young people are affected in one way or another, whether through the presence of active policy or its absence.

Youth policy is defined loosely as anything a government chooses to do or not to do with regard to young people.[92] It covers topics relevant to young people, such as education, training, employment, justice, housing, digitalisation, environment, transport, culture and health, and horizontal issues such as volunteering, mobility, youth information, social inclusion and political participation.

According to Hofmann-van de Poll et al. (2022), youth policy consists of three dimensions.[93] Youth sector policy is the first dimension. It consists of youth sector actors who consider themselves as advocates of the needs and interests of young people. In the youth policy manual,[94] the following core themes were mentioned as being at the heart of youth sector policy: participation, information, volunteering, inclusion, access to rights, youth work, mobility and digitalisation.[95]

A second dimension of youth policy includes youth sector policy but goes beyond it as it encompasses all policy fields that make policy directly for young people. One example is labour market policy, which deals with youth unemployment, as in the EU Reinforced Youth Guarantee, for example.[96] It differs from the youth sector dimension as those involved consider themselves predominantly part of another policy field (in this case, employment and labour market policy). This dimension potentially fosters cross-sectoral co-operation in youth policy.

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91. Williamson, Fras and Lavchyan 2021.
92. Ibid.: 13.
93. Hofmann-van de Poll et al. 2022.
94. Williamson, Fras and Lavchyan 2021: 104.
95. These number of themes, aside from volunteering and digitalisation, were the outcome of a review of the ever-increasing number of topics covered by the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy. It was felt that any future support measures provided by the Council of Europe should connect more closely with the core mission of the organisation, namely human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This was referred to, at the time, as the Council of Europe youth (engagement and development) policy framework.
96. European Council 2020b.

The third dimension encompasses the two previous forms of youth policy but goes much further. It defines youth policy as all those measures that affect the lives of young people both intentionally and unintentionally. By defining youth policy broadly in this way, even policy which is not explicitly directed towards young people as a target group could be youth policy, on the basis that it affects young people's lives. An example could be measures related to public transport policy, such as establishing low-cost bus transfers between villages, based on an awareness that high costs unintentionally and adversely affect the mobility of young people. This might arguably be considered a form of youth policy. This dimension of youth policy has the most far-reaching consequences for the definition and content of youth policy.[97]

This form of youth policy is reflected, for example, in the European Union's Youth Goals,[98] which also extend to policy areas such as climate and health. At the same time, the EU Youth Goals are an example of how the three dimensions of youth policy proposed here intersect with one another. In addition to climate and health, labour market policy aimed at young people and classic youth sector policy topics such as mobility and participation are also addressed. The distinction between these three dimensions of youth policy also plays a major role in youth mainstreaming. Depending on which dimension of youth policy is focused on, youth mainstreaming has a different impact, in some sectors arguably bringing to the surface the extent to which young people may be affected or may need to be addressed, when this has been hitherto generally unacknowledged.

Youth policy aims – and claims – to recognise young people as an independent societal group and consider their needs and interests appropriately. The main aims of youth policy, from a current European perspective, are to offer young people the best possible conditions for their personal development and their transition to autonomy (a policy item that indeed has a long tradition, though it was classically referred to as the transition from school to work) and to support them in realising their potential. By doing so, the most significant overarching goal of youth policy, irrespective of its specific themes and aspirations, is to ensure equal opportunities for all young people – to be inclusive through establishing equal access to rights and possibilities.[99] At national level, youth policy may have different aims. The IARD study from 2001[100] analysed the state of young people and youth policy in Europe and identified the following four "youth policy regimes".[101]

▶ Universalistic: young people are a resource to society; youth policy aims to secure their autonomy, independence, development and political participation and targets the entire generation of young people.

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97. Williamson (1993) argued that public policy could be divided into segments (such as education, employment, health, housing or criminal justice) within which young people consumed very different levels of budgetary and professional attention, both positive and negative. Education, for example, is not exclusively focused on young people, while housing and social security policy at the time ignored young people almost entirely.

98. See https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/european-youth-goals_en.

99. Williamson, Fras and Lavchyan 2021: 17.

100. IARD 2001.

101. Wallace and Bendit 2009.

► Community-oriented: young people are seen as a problem to society, and youth policy aims to prevent social problems and strengthen political participation. It is aimed mainly at disadvantaged young people.

► Protective: young people are at risk and treated as a resource and a problem to society. Youth policy aims to ensure integration, the prevention of social issues and encourages political participation. It targets the entire generation of young people but also focuses on disadvantaged young people.

► Centralised: young people are both a problem to society and a resource. Youth policy aims at securing the autonomy, independence, integration and political participation of young people, targeting specific groups of young people.

In most countries, a combination of these regimes exists.

2.1.2. Policy formation methodology

Developing a policy also means the development of a methodology for how such a policy can be formed. A policy formation methodology consists of considerations on who should be involved in policy formation, which methods for policy formation can be used, etc. A methodology for youth policy formation should include research and assessments of the needs and interests of young people. Above all, a methodology for a meaningful participation process, both for young people and other relevant stakeholders, should be developed. Such participation processes ensure the relevance and practicality of a youth policy and increase its acceptance. Relevant stakeholders may include non-governmental (youth) organisations, youth councils, youth work organisations and advocacy groups, but also the private sector and public authorities.

2.1.3. Integral role of institutional entities

Governmental and non-governmental organisations play a vital role in creating, implementing and continually evaluating youth policies. Their responsibilities include ensuring that policies are appropriately funded, effectively executed and consistently revised to adapt to young people's evolving needs. Furthermore, these entities are pivotal to fostering intersectoral collaboration, disseminating successful practices and pooling resources to amplify the reach and impact of youth policies. However, reality shows that even within governmental and non-governmental organisations, factors such as stubbornly siloed practice, spurious rhetorical claims of success and market competition are still often shaping the outcome and impact of youth policies. As Howard Williamson wrote 40 years ago, much-needed "interagency" collaboration within and beyond youth work rested on a precarious equilibrium of institutional, professional and personal relationships.[102]

Youth policy is the foundation for more targeted youth work policies and strategies to be constructed and implemented. A comprehensive understanding of the broad scope and strategic objectives of youth policy is essential for effectively addressing the diverse needs of young people and securing their positive growth and integration into society.

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102. Williamson and Weatherspoon 1985; Williamson 2017.

2.2. Youth work policy

Youth work policy narrows the focus from the broad umbrella of youth policy to specifically address the youth work sector. It outlines the guiding principles, standards and guidelines that frame the delivery of youth work services. This encompasses a variety of programmes, including non-formal education and learning, community engagement initiatives and opportunities for young people's personal and social development. Youth work policy ensures that these services are youth-centred and provided effectively and ethically.

2.2.1. Importance of principles, standards and guidelines

▶ **Principles**: empowerment, voluntary participation and respect for young people's rights and dignity are fundamental to youth work. These and other principles[103] ensure that youth work practices are designed to support young people in realising their potential while respecting their autonomy and choices.

▶ **Standards**: quality standards in youth work policy help maintain high professionalism and effectiveness within the sector. They ensure that youth work services are delivered by trained youth workers who adhere to ethical guidelines and best practices.

▶ **Operational guidelines**: in youth work, operational guidelines provide a structured framework for planning, delivering and evaluating youth work programmes. These guidelines serve as a road map for youth work providers to design programmes tailored to meet the diverse needs of young people and align with the overarching goals and objectives of youth policy. By adhering to these guidelines, youth work providers can ensure that their programmes are effective and have the potential to achieve intended impact and outcomes, namely a contribution to the holistic development of young people.

2.2.2. Focus on non-formal education and learning, and personal development

Youth work policy significantly emphasises non-formal education and learning to engage young people in voluntary, participatory and learner-centred opportunities. These opportunities complement formal education by focusing on developing life skills, critical thinking and social competencies. Additionally, youth work policy advocates initiatives that support young people's personal and social development, facilitating agency and enabling them to navigate challenges, build resilience and make positive contributions to their communities.[104]

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103. The Council of Europe recommendation on youth work mentions youth work being educative, empowering, participative, expressive and inclusive. See Committee of Ministers 2017.

104. Williamson (2015) proposes two succinct definitions of youth work: "facilitating agency" and "developing navigational capacities". For a more recent exposition of youth worker competencies and what might be called a youth work "curriculum", take a look at the ongoing documentation emerging from KEKS, the network of municipal youth work across Europe.

2.2.3. The role of empowerment and a rights-based approach

Empowerment is a core tenet of youth work policy, emphasising the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and critical understanding to influence the communities in which they live and to shape their own lives. To empower young people, youth work is participatory and inclusive. Young people are given the opportunity to design and take responsibility for their own activities and thus learn to assume responsibility. At the same time, youth work is designed to be inclusive; it is aimed at all young people, while at the same time catering to the needs of individuals and groups. Youth work thus offers a safe space in which young people can learn and try things out. It builds bridges between young people and between young people and different parts and phases of their lives. A rights-based approach ensures that youth work practices respect and promotes the human rights of young people, acknowledging their right to participate in decisions that affect them and ensuring their access to opportunities and resources.

2.2.4. Development process and stakeholders involved

The formulation of youth work policy typically involves a wide range of stakeholders, including government and its structures and agencies at all levels, NGOs, youth organisations, youth workers, the private sector and, importantly, young people. This collaborative approach ensures that policy is grounded in the realities of youth work practice and reflects the needs and perspectives of young people. It also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among those involved in youth work, enhancing the effectiveness of policy implementation.

2.3. Youth work strategy

Youth work strategy pertains to the strategic planning and implementation aspects of youth work within the overarching framework provided by youth policy and the more specific directives of youth work policy. It involves setting clear goals, objectives and priorities for youth work based on identified needs, policy guidelines and the aspirations of young people themselves. This strategic approach is crucial for translating policy into practice, ensuring that youth work activities are practical and aligned with broader objectives.

2.3.1. Strategic planning and implementation

Strategic planning in youth work begins with a thorough analysis of the needs of young people and the goals outlined in relevant youth policies. This process includes the following.

- ► **Setting goals and objectives**: establishing clear, achievable goals that are directly linked to the needs of young people and the broader aims of youth policy.
- ► **Resource allocation**: determining the necessary resources (financial, human and material) to achieve these goals and devising strategies for optimal use.

- ► **Programme development**: designing programmes and initiatives tailored to meet the defined objectives, incorporating innovative approaches and best practices in youth work.
- ► **Evaluation mechanisms**: implementing mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to assess the impact of youth work activities and make necessary adjustments.

2.3.2. Action-oriented nature

Youth work strategy is characterised by its practical, action-oriented nature. Unlike policy, which provides the framework and direction, a strategy is concerned with the operational aspects of implementing youth work policy. It deals with how to achieve the desired outcomes and impact, involving detailed planning, budgeting, execution and monitoring of youth work initiatives.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, while youth policy, youth work policy and youth work strategy differ in their level of generality, focus and scope, they are intrinsically connected. Each plays a critical role in the ecosystem of support for young people, with their effectiveness depending on their ability to inform and reinforce one another.

Collaborative development is critical to ensuring that youth policy, youth work policy and youth work strategy remain relevant and effective. The dynamic nature of young people's lives and the societal context requires that policies and strategies be continuously assessed and adapted. Being closest to the ground, youth work strategy offers immediate feedback on the applicability and effectiveness of youth work policy and practice, facilitating timely adjustments. This adaptive process ensures that the support provided to young people remains responsive, effective and aligned with their evolving challenges and opportunities.

The success of youth programmes and services will increasingly depend on understanding and navigating the complex interplay between youth policy, youth work policy and youth work strategy. Together, these frameworks form a comprehensive approach to supporting the holistic development of young people, guiding them towards successful personal development and integration into society and enabling them to contribute positively to their communities. The collaborative, adaptive nature of this approach ensures that youth work remains relevant, purposeful and capable of addressing the complex and evolving challenges young people face. Alongside other youth policy frameworks and interventions, youth work has its part to play.

Chapter 3
So how might it be done?

What you need to think about when starting to formulate a youth work strategy

There are, of course, no magical solutions to strategy development and implementation. There are many obstacles along the way, especially the shifting political complexion of governance (even during the tenure of a government of the same political party), changing priorities and available resources. Some may be anticipated; others are unexpected and must be addressed as they are encountered. Nevertheless, our research and reflection, drawing particularly on the relatively limited empirical examples from across Europe that we have discovered and explored, suggests that there are stepping stones worthy of deliberation that may optimise the chances of the effective transition of a youth work strategy from conceptualisation to development into practice.

This chapter will provide a core thread for that journey, asking the questions that need to be reflected upon, interspersed with words of warning and advice. If we now follow the five phases of a strategy as mentioned in the first chapter (1.3.2.) (goal setting, analysis, strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation) and look at these with regard to youth work, we identify a series of steps that need to be taken to optimise the chances of formulating a good youth work strategy. Before that, however, a sixth phase is added: that of getting started, finding the stakeholders to start the process of informing the construction of a youth work strategy. Having said this, nothing is cast in stone. There is no blueprint but there are many questions and suggestions that merit careful consideration and related action.

3.1. Getting started

The initiative and initial momentum for any strategy may derive from many quarters: political promises or commitment, a group of professionals, a committee established for the purpose, academic argument or, in some cases, political tradition: a new strategy may be required, according to legislation or protocol, every four or five years. Strategies may be anticipated and explicit but can also emerge sometimes almost by accident, as a by-product of wider (youth) policy development or the result of the determination or whim of a solitary individual or committed lobby group. What this momentum for strategy development has in common, however, is that even before a group of particular people come together, there is a reason to think about the need for a youth work strategy as opposed to, or in addition to, a more wide-ranging youth strategy. These reasons can be manifold and are rooted in the respective political nature and social structure of the country, region or municipality.

Whoever starts the thinking about a youth work strategy, two things are imperative.

► First and foremost, in line with the "youth policy clock",[105] the securing of political backing and advocacy at the earliest opportunity, and the sustaining of it throughout the process, is a fundamental need. An embryonic strategy needs a spokesperson from the start, who can bridge the gap between the politics and the professional thinking. Ideally, this is a politician who can enlist officials to provide at least tacit interest and support prior to any kind of public launch, and more explicit and robust support thereafter.

► Second, it is important to quickly broaden what might be called the "field of participation", to enable and ensure that the range of relevant voices across the youth work "community of practice" will be heard: youth representatives, professional associations, municipal provision, the NGO sector, academic teachers and researchers, benefactors and funders, and perhaps others. The stakeholders that comprise the youth work community of practice differ from country to country, from region to region and from community to community. It is, however, important to know and to involve the main youth work stakeholders. Mapping them with a view to further engagement and consultation is a first step towards a youth work strategy.

Together with this mapping of the most important youth work stakeholders, it is crucial that those who are appointed or self-appointed to "lead" on youth work strategy development need to think hard about their representativeness and, if need be, to argue for greater inclusivity, through adopting or co-opting other members.

What this inclusivity looks like depends on the respective organisation of youth work in a country, as well as the reasons why (at least some people think) a youth work strategy is needed. Depending on which goals and visions are defined in the later process for a youth work strategy, the question of the relevant stakeholders must be asked and answered time and again. Is there, for example, sufficient representation from youth work in rural areas or with young people with disabilities? Clearly, it is unlikely that the entire mosaic of the youth work sector will have a seat at this table, but it is important to be sure that no key player is glaringly absent. Not only is their voice essential but their prospective opposition – should they be excluded – is also best anticipated and thereby avoided!

It is also worth considering whether voices and perspectives from beyond the youth work sector need to be included. There may be value in having some representation from the wider youth policy context (from, for example, formal education or youth justice, or from community work) or those with more specialist contributions to make (about, for example, the rural context, bilingual issues, finance and audit, or marketing expertise). Here too, the question of whether the most important stakeholders from other sectors are involved must be asked again and again, depending on the goals and objectives defined later.

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105. Williamson 2002; Williamson, Fras and Lavchyan 2021.

3.2. Goal setting

Once it is clear which stakeholders should be involved in writing a youth work strategy, it is time to proceed to the goal-setting phase. This phase is about defining the vision and objectives of the strategy, as well as agreeing on the division of labour and the time frame – both for writing and for the duration of the strategy.

As we all know, youth work is a constellation of practices that celebrates its diversity (see the Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention).[106] Moreover, it has what Ralph Dahrendorf once called "permeable boundaries": it is not always clear where youth work stops and, for example, arts, sports or cultural work with young people begins. Youth work sometimes claims to have a place in schools (formal education) or to make contributions to provision made for young people in other "youth policy" domains such as health, vocational training, employment or justice. Strategic thinking needs to reflect on how far a youth work strategy is seeking to stretch or reach. This will frame the "constituency" for further consultation and, later down the track (see below), for possible support.

The first step is therefore to define the strategic goals that seek to be achieved through a youth work strategy. Precisely because of the fluidity and flexibility of youth work, there is always a risk that a youth work strategy tries to accommodate too much or, alternatively, to focus too intensely on a very narrow position or set of priorities. A youth work strategy needs to set out the landscape of aspiration for youth work into the future without being so "all singing, all dancing" that it may be dismissed as lacking rationale and plausibility. Yet, conversely, it must not be so tightly constructed that it risks becoming a straitjacket within which only a very limited pathway for youth work policy and practice is foreseen.

In many contexts, there will already be existing (sometimes long-established) youth work practice, with different lines of tradition and development and supported by different funding streams – from local voluntary efforts, through municipal provision, to national and European measures derived from pre-existing NGO and governmental policy and practice. While this "broad church" should not be accommodated uncritically, it is wise to avoid inadvertently excluding particular forms of practice until their potential contribution to any youth work strategy has been properly explored.

At this stage in youth work strategy development, serious questions have to be asked and careful choices have to be made. Nothing should, at first, be ruled out, but equally, not everything can possibly be included. Conversations must move

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106. See https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc.

beyond specific considerations of concrete youth work delivery to reflect also on structures for the training of youth workers (and its content), funding channels and the opportunities and risks presented by prospective – and perhaps, for various reasons, seemingly attractive or convenient – partnerships.

All this needs to be debated with some shared understanding of the principles and purposes of youth work and the prevailing political and economic realities. There is little point in working hard on what might be called "non-starters", but equally there is little point in engaging in too much restrictive self-censorship.

It is, of course, the practical outcomes that any strategic vision and framework seek to secure (see Chapter 4).

Two questions, therefore, are "what" and "why"? It is something of a challenge to provide any definitive list that might help to answer these questions. There are so many variables and possibilities at play (and, indeed, at stake). Youth work priorities, at the level of policy and academic discussion, ebb and flow. They may or may not accord with the views of those closer to the ground. The classic example is the balance – often tension – between open-access (low-threshold) and more targeted provision. But even that is something of a false juxtaposition, because the two conceptualisations of youth work rest at two ends of a continuum and most practice lies somewhere between the two. There is certainly "targeted" work within open provision, and more targeted provision rarely functions in complete isolation from more generic activity.

Some youth work policy and practice has developed incrementally over many years, such as youth information work, though of course technology has changed its course and facilitated its delivery. Other youth work policy and practice is relatively new, such as online youth work, which obviously came into its own during the Covid-19 pandemic, when almost all other forms of in-person youth work were put on hold.

Beyond forms of youth work, there are spatial dimensions: levels and locations. Youth work may be very local or very international, and many points in-between. It classically takes place in communities, but may also be provided in schools, prisons or hospitals. It can be in dedicated spaces (youth centres), but may also be in open space (street-based or detached work) or indeed in space shared with others (community centres).

All of this creates dilemmas, or "trilemmas", as the final chapter of Volume 7 of *The history of youth work in Europe* suggests.[107] The first item in the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention[108] emphasises the need for a "local youth work offer" as the starting point for growing youth work throughout Europe, but quite what this entails is subject to debate and a matter for strategic determination. Not subject to debate is that the local provision (perhaps a centre or bespoke projects of various kinds) is paramount – because young people live essentially local lives – and that it needs to be supported and supplemented by complementary national provision (such as a youth information service) and international opportunities

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107. Williamson and Basarab 2019.

108. See www.youth.ie/articles/the-final-declaration-of-the-3rd-european-youth-work-convention-what-you-need-to-know/.

(such as youth exchanges). Based on the local youth work on offer, complemented by regional, national and international provision, as well as the above-mentioned "trilemmas", the task in this phase is to consider what is necessary; that is, the goals of the strategy must be defined based on realistic problems and wishes. A non-exhaustive list is provided below.

What is wanted/needed?

► Open-access, outreach/detached, school-based projects
► Online engagement
► Advice, guidance
► Targeted groups ("NEET" youth, young people with disabilities)
► Exchanges
► Information
► Other (language)

There is likely to be a need for some restatement of the principles underpinning the promotion and development of youth work: equality, diversity and inclusion. As confirmed in some national statements, and the Council of Europe recommendation on youth work,[109] youth work is educative, participative, empowering, expressive and inclusive.

Beyond a statement of the principles that underpin the purposes of youth work, there is a strong groundswell of opinion that youth work should be guided and governed by an explicit professional code of ethics, though quite what should be contained within such a code has remained a matter of some contention for many years. The case in favour of a code is that youth work should be recognised as a profession; the case against is that, given that the vast majority of youth workers are volunteers or paid practitioners with relatively low-level qualifications, a code of ethics might exclude them from recognition. This does not, indeed should not, preclude consideration of ethical issues such as fairness, autonomy, integrity and the minimisation of harm – the governing principles underpinning the strategy – when setting boundaries and parameters for a youth work strategy.

Once anchored by an agreed set of governing principles, the overarching, strategic questions that follow are then "how" and "who"? Once more, this generates a plethora of possibilities and options. There are invariably expectations that the place and position of youth work within public services needs to be strengthened through governmental action at either national or local level (or both), and though this may often be needed, it is not necessarily the only option available.

Consideration also needs to be given to alternative funding models, delivery partnerships between government bodies and NGOs (and, increasingly in these days

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109. Committee of Ministers 2017.

of CSR, EDI and ESG,[110] private-sector engagement) and the training infrastructure (vocational and academic) that needs to be developed for youth workers. Establishing the desired framework for the growth of youth work will invariably require innovation in thinking about how different participants in and around the youth work sector operate together for mutual benefit, including perhaps (increasingly) the private and not-for-profit sector. As Volume 5 of *The history of youth work in Europe* series suggests, youth work can rather paradoxically strengthen its autonomy by conceding some dependency in relation to the goals and objectives of other policy arenas working with young people.[111]

Accompanying issues that need to be addressed include whether or not new or amended legislation is required, what kind of ministerial oversight and accountability is desirable and the extent to which the status of youth worker should be enshrined within any classification of professional occupations. Each of these issues produces its advantages and disadvantages, to be weighed carefully within the particular context in which the youth work strategy is being formulated. In some contexts, strategies have included the desire to establish a national body for youth work development and implementation, which itself has both strengths and weaknesses.

A final, critical question is "when"? There are times when a window of opportunity opens and the development of a strategy is a matter of some urgency. There are other moments when strategic development is given the luxury of time. But then there can be a risk of losing momentum and "running out of road". Time, in itself, demands some crisp strategic thinking!

Goal setting
1. What are the strategic goals that are to be achieved with the strategy?
2. What are the specific youth work goals that are to be achieved?
3. What are the principles underpinning youth work in general and the strategy in particular?
4. What is the content/focus of the youth work strategy?
5. How and by whom is the strategy going to be designed and implemented?
6. What time frame is given for the development of the strategy and its subsequent implementation?

3.3. Analysis

Once the general framework of a strategy is known, the next step is to make the context of a strategy – and in particular the opportunities for its implementation – clearer. In this phase, it may be helpful to go through the initial "getting started"

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110. CSR: corporate social responsibility; EDI: equality, diversity and inclusion; ESG: environmental, social and governance.
111. Siurala et al. 2016.

questions again and also to reflect on the answers given in the previous phase, checking in particular that all relevant stakeholders are indeed involved.

In this analysis phase, both the internal and external environment in which a strategy is developed and implemented is analysed more closely. The time allocated or anticipated for the construction of a youth work strategy will help to determine the scale and intensity of consultation mechanisms and methods.

In many respects, this step of the journey replicates a typical social sciences research project, similarly influenced by the time and (human and financial) resources available. Through documentary analysis, survey data and perspectives gleaned through semi-structured interviews with key respondents, a steering group or strategy committee can engage in a process of "triangulation" – working out what already exists, what seem to be priority topics, issues and approaches, and what are the main "gaps" that demand particular attention. There may also be specialist small groups formed to advise on strategic development in relation to specific issues, such as online youth work, youth work in rural areas or bilingual provision. These task-and-finish groups may enlist advice and support from those beyond the youth work sector, to learn lessons from wider initiatives that might usefully be applied to youth work.

Attention should also be paid to hearing the voice(s) of young people, in the spirit of youth work's commitment to youth participation, to enable a strategy to be informed by young people's perspectives and to ensure that the strategy is meaningful and relevant to young people. There are, however, two caveats to this principled approach.

First, time must be taken to involve an appropriate diversity of young people, not necessarily just those from existing "representative" structures and forums, especially given the inclusive aspirations of youth work. The voices and views of young people who might not usually be heard in youth councils – young offenders, young people with substance dependencies or young people from the public care system, for example – need amplification if youth work is to reach out to them successfully.

Second, there are often declarations that youth work strategies are "youth-led" but it is probably better to think of them as "youth-informed". They are also informed by expertise in a range of areas of aspirational youth work policy and practice – such as through technology, or within the criminal justice system – that can help the youth work infrastructure to become fit for purpose.

The analysis leads to an often extensive series of wishes, priorities and fields of action on the one hand, which are narrowed down by "realpolitik" on the other. The aim of this phase is to find the exact framework for action within which a strategy can be realistically developed and implemented.

The "shopping list" that derives from the most thorough exploration and consultation possible with the youth work community of practice, and beyond, is very unlikely to be completely fulfilled. Some items may have to be put back on the shelves and deferred for another day. This will disappoint some of those in the field, particularly those who have flagged up their importance, but notwithstanding the imperative of "taking the field with you", there is also the pressure to determine the "art of the possible".

The strategy group has, at some point, to turn its gaze from the field and the professional perspectives elicited from there, to the political environment and the support and advocacy its strategic goals are likely to receive. Youth work is rarely a statutory priority and, even when it may have some level of legislative base, it has to compete politically with other pressures, demands and priorities across the social and educational spectrum, not least social services, child protection, schooling and special needs education. At a municipal level, budgetary allocations for youth work have had to compete with those for parks, libraries, cemeteries, museums, swimming pools, summer concerts and more.

Without, therefore, revealing its hand, a strategy group will have to think carefully and deeply, and where possible consult with "on-side" politicians at both national and local levels, to consider its own red lines and central objectives: how much is it willing to discard (perhaps now, and into the future) and how much is it determined to continue to advocate for? In other words, what is it willing to compromise on and what is it minded to hold fast to? This step of the journey is the time for scrutinising the overall landscape and identifying both supporters and opponents. They will be both within the youth work field and beyond it, and at the political level. There is often a reluctance to admit it, but those in the field who may feel let down by an emergent strategy, for whatever reason, can sometimes embark on a process of further undermining it. It can be wise to try to work out what impact such opposition may have and whether or not there are tactics that may avoid it (co-opting people into the strategic process is one approach). Beyond the youth work field, there may be many grounds for opposition. Some other sectors have their own approaches to what they consider to be youth work and may not relish a youth work strategy that seemingly steps on their toes. Such hostility, if possible, should be defused or neutralised.

Conversely, alliances may be struck with those beyond the youth work community of practice. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has considerably enhanced the perspectives on youth work held by, for example, teachers and psychologists, views that hitherto had been somewhat critical or even dismissive. Over a longer period of time, both faith groups and police services have often been supportive of youth work, for quite different reasons. There may, rightly, be caution in embracing such alliances wholeheartedly, but where there are shared positions, advocacy for youth work from extraneous positions can be very advantageous.

Difficulties in reaching agreement and criticism of any strategy are almost inevitable. Some will maintain that it has not gone far enough and made too many concessions and compromises. Others will allege that it has placed an emphasis on the wrong issues. On release, there will be a catalogue of concerns expressed. The youth work sector is not renowned for holding back; indeed, its major Achilles heel is a remarkable capacity for airing its differences in public!

The strategy group must, however, hold its nerve, having weighed and measured its options and arrived at its final decisions. It has no alternative but to try to anticipate both the conflicts that may arise and the concessions that may be necessary to see its strategic vision through to fruition.

Analysis

1. What are the priority topics, issues and approaches and what are the main "gaps" that demand particular attention?
2. What is the framework for action for the strategy?
3. With whom can youth work co-operate to achieve its goals?
4. Which adjunct fields of action need to be involved?
5. Are there any potential areas of dispute that can be foreseen?

3.4. Strategy formulation

Once the vision, goals and content of a strategy have been developed and agreed, the next step is to write the strategy. This can be done by a drafting group or by an individual organisation or person. At this stage, it is important that the relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to read and comment on an initial version of the strategy before it is presented to the public. Moreover, in terms of acceptance, it is good for a strategy if objections and comments on an initial version are seriously discussed and, if necessary, adapted. In this sense, it is important to have documented the individual steps and decisions in the previous stages of strategy development so that these can be used as explanations here.

As part of the writing process, the question also arises as to what extent benchmarks, indicators or a monitoring system should be set up in order to be able to evaluate the implementation of the strategy at a later date. In vogue for some time now has been a preference for "SMART" targets: those that are specific, measurable, achievable (or attainable), relevant and time-based (or timely or time-bound).

This approach is not, however, cast in stone and it is perhaps useful to bear in mind that "not everything that can be measured is important, and not everything that is important can be measured". It is often argued that this is particularly true of youth work. However, youth work is under increasing pressure to demonstrate its impact and outcomes, and plausible measures of performance should therefore be clearly put in place. There is also wide-ranging contemporary debate about evaluation methodologies for youth work and the "social return" on investing in youth work. It is not for a strategy to determine methodological detail, but some indicative framework for both mid-term and end-point review and evaluation is strongly recommended. Whether or not one signs up for "SMART" targets, it is indisputable that at the forefront of any strategy is the need for sharp communication that avoids generalities and conveys a specific commitment to action through a reflective consideration of the "five Ws" – what, why, who, when and where" – and the "how", with the latter being the burning challenge of implementation (see below).

Strategy formulation

1. Who is going to write the strategy?
2. Who is to be involved in validating the draft strategy?
3. What will a monitoring and evaluation system look like?

3.5. Implementation

Once a strategy is launched (perhaps following consultations on a draft, perhaps not), there is a need for both further advocacy to the likely field of support and the accommodation of prospective critics through contestation and concession. The document needs, first, to enlist some level of political support – ideally across more than one segment of the political spectrum – and then, with that "blessing" (which may be gushing or muted, but it is the peg on which to hang the strategy for the time being), to be promoted in relevant quarters, through perhaps a roadshow or presentation at a youth workers' conference. There may be scope for some amendments in response to further feedback, or the strategy may then be given a formal stamp of political approval.

Such advocacy has to be accompanied, simultaneously, by robust defence of the ideas advanced in the strategy.

Challenging questions continue to flow!

► Why is "x" needed?

► What are the grounds for "open" provision rather than more "targeted" work?

► Why do youth workers need to be "trained" at university level, rather than through "on the job" or vocational education?

► Surely partnerships dilute the distinction and uniqueness of youth work?

► Isn't there a risk of subordinating, perhaps even enslaving youth work to youth crime prevention or "NEET" re-engagement policy targets?

► Why have you mentioned integrating young people with disabilities with mainstream youth work provision and not mentioned youth work campaigning for disability rights?

► Why is not more emphasis placed on local rather than international exchanges?

► What exactly is the balance you envisage between municipal and NGO/voluntary sector provision?

► Have you considered the funding model: public, charitable trust or philanthropic, and private financing?

► Is it a sustainable model?

The list of possible questions can go on, but developing robust responses is certainly good preparation for subsequent political scrutiny and interrogation, and indeed the briefing of political allies.

Presuming (and it can be a significant presumption) that a youth work strategy secures the requisite level of political support, with funding streams attached (or at least promised), a number of intermediary steps may then be taken. Pilot projects or programmes may be rolled out to test the water – to gauge receptivity in the field and to identify any unintended consequences, especially what in policy is known as "perverse behaviour"; when, for example, the easiest routes to meeting targets

are identified by youth work providers, when the objective had been to reach out to more challenging young people. The box is ticked but the strategic aspiration is not realised; it is what is sometimes referred to as "hitting the target but missing the point". These are the difficulties referred to at the bottom of the youth policy clock, which demand attention and debate. Some reappraisal of the strategy, its goals, funding framework and performance measures may well be required.

Beyond the youth work strategy itself, there may be an implementation strategy with its own dedicated budget, to explore further key ideas within the youth work strategy. Experimental youth worker training programmes may be established, to strengthen workforce development. Provisional partnerships may be incentivised, again to test the water, in this case in the context of the relationships between youth work and other services in terms of their efficacy, impact and outcomes. Without at least transitional or intermediary budgets and the prospect of realistic budgets for full roll-out, a strategy is no more than a paper exercise; as one Children's Commissioner in Wales once put it rather caustically, "all flagship and no fleet".

Even without such intermediary measures, an approved youth work strategy may move immediately to deciding upon a more concrete action plan over the shorter term. Operational development in grounded youth work practice, partnerships, and education and training must invariably also be accompanied by sufficient resources for a communications strategy and an evaluation strategy, to inform about "roll-out" and "effective practice". For a variety of both professional and political reasons, some youth work strategies end up being subject to three, four or five-year cycles, where they are reviewed, refreshed and renewed. At times, especially when the political complexion of governments changes (either generationally or in terms of party politics), such continuity and momentum is lost or abandoned. A very different youth work strategy, or none at all, may be introduced.

> **Implementation**
>
> 1. Who is giving political support to the strategy?
> 2. Who can present the strategy to the public?
> 3. What might a "roll-out" of the strategy look like?

3.6. Evaluation

The final phase, and to a certain extent also the first phase before a new strategy comes into being, is the evaluation phase. It can take place at the end of the term of a strategy, or halfway through a strategy ("mid-term"), and usually aims to check how the implementation of a strategy is progressing and what adjustments it needs. In this sense, it can serve to amend an existing strategy and as a precursor to a new strategy.

That scenario, however, is largely for the future. Few countries in Europe have any lengthy experience of youth work strategy development at all, let alone renewal over time.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has drawn heavily, though not exclusively, from experience of close and active involvement in no fewer than seven youth work strategies in the same country since International Youth Year in 1985. They have evolved in very different ways, taken very different lengths of time, enlisted very different levels of political support, often been focused on some very different issues and priorities and have secured very different levels of resourcing. Sometimes they have taken the "field" ("the community of practice") with them; sometimes not. This chapter has sought to identify what might be called the "red threads" that can be detected running through the evolution of any youth work strategy. The chapter has endeavoured to highlight the kinds of questions that demand attention at each stage if the successful formulation of a youth work strategy is to be realised. A youth work strategy starts essentially as the skeleton outline for prospective youth work development and diversification. The next chapter puts flesh on those bones.

Chapter 4
How to go about it

Developing a youth work strategy in Malta – A practical case study

This chapter draws significantly, though not exclusively, from the evolution of youth work in Malta. Youth workers have been trained in Malta, professionally, through a Programme of Youth Studies, since 1994. For many years, graduates of the course were involved, as volunteers, in a range of youth work activities. There was no paid employment in youth work and there was little coherence or planning in the delivery of youth work in Malta. In 2010, the Maltese national youth agency, Agenzija Żgħażagħ, was established. Under the leadership of its Chief Executive Officer, Miriam Teuma, it developed a strategic vision for youth work and secured the political recognition of youth work and the resources for the development of paid employment for youth workers in Malta. Here, Miriam Teuma herself reflects on how a youth work strategy, within the wider youth policy framework that has developed in Malta. Supplementary footnotes have occasionally been added for the purposes of explanation and cross-referencing to other material in this manual, and you might also wish to refer to the website of Agenzija Żgħażagħ (youth.gov.mt).

Typically, a strategy is a plan that results in the optimum use of resources. A good strategy is based on the practical use of time, money and resources to improve the youth service. A youth work strategy can be a written plan specifying how the national government, regional or local authority, or a voluntary organisation, provides youth work services for young people. It might involve changes to staff and volunteers, new buildings, purchasing new equipment or setting up new or further services.

4.1. The youth work strategy – Purposeful, practical and principled[112]

A youth work strategy aims to outline a co-ordinated programme and communicates the purpose and importance of youth work to the broader community. It also aims to define the development and action needed to achieve the objectives of the national youth work policy for the well-being of young people. In Malta, young people's well-being, empowerment and holistic development are central to its youth work strategy. This approach is both cross-sectoral and multi-dimensional, where targeted and mutually supportive programmes and initiatives aim to empower and support young people and is characterised by a number of underlying features. Below are some examples highlighting how they are addressed within youth work.

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112. This section corresponds to section 3.2, "Goal setting", in the previous chapter.

Community engagement – Encouraging youth participation in the community and social projects to promote democracy and civic responsibilities.

Youth voluntary organisation network – Connecting young people with opportunities across Malta, fostering community ties and social responsibility – Programmes that educate young people about mental health issues and promote emotional resilience.

Life skills programme – Providing various life skills in school and out of school to young people aged between 13 and 16.

Entrepreneurship programmes – Encouraging and supporting young entrepreneurs through training and funding opportunities.

Sustainability programmes – Engaging young people in environmental stewardship and sustainable living practices.

Promotion of arts and culture – Encouraging youth participation in artistic and cultural activities.

These support programmes and initiatives are underpinned and reinforced through:

▶ active community engagement – encouraging young people to actively participate in the life of their communities and to promote democracy and civic responsibility;

▶ participation in voluntary youth organisations – promoting and facilitating young people's participation in voluntary youth organisations;

▶ mental health awareness – raising awareness of and responses to mental health issues among young people.

The integration of such features into a youth work strategy nurtures and empowers young people and provides them with the learning and competencies to make a positive contribution to their communities and the wider society, while also leading to a more sustainable future.

By referring to the set national youth work policy outcomes, all those involved in a strategic framework can be empowered to deliver solutions and drive improvement. A youth work strategy looks at the journeys young people make into adulthood and the development milestones that need to be recognised and supported. The emphasis is on recognising that while young people are still developing, they are an important group in the community that should be valued in their own right, given a voice and engaged in meaningful participation. Such a strategy also includes monitoring and evaluating its required effectiveness for a quality youth service. The review and reporting mechanisms should inform the continuing strategic planning process, youth work policy review and priority setting. In Malta, reviews are conducted through a structured approach that includes data collection, analysis and reporting.[113]

The strategy specifies and identifies the level of the services and programmes that must be achieved and maintained over time and acknowledges the ever-changing environments. Any strategy developed requires engaging all relevant partners

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113. See https://youth.gov.mt/, "Internal quality assurance policy".

involved in youth work, depending on the level at which it is set to develop, and requires goals, objectives and plans based on the needs of young people. It considers that while young people can be vulnerable, they have the potential to impact society positively. Malta's youth work strategy focuses, in particular, on listening to the voices of young people and responding accordingly. By focusing on their strengths, capacities and potential, the strategy aims at empowering young people through a wide range of projects, programmes and initiatives that provide opportunities for personal, social and political learning. This approach not only builds confidence, capacity and resilience among young people, but also ensures they are seen as making a valuable contribution to their communities and society. Providing inclusive and high-quality services and programmes that meet the needs and aspirations of all young people, promoting their competencies and learning capacity, and developing their confidence and self-reliance, are central to Malta's strategic vision. A youth work strategy supports individual learning pathways and equips young people with skills for life and work, recognising the values of ambition, diversity, equality and respect. Embracing these values in planning, and delivering such a strategy plan, is expected to strengthen the community's capacity to build a co-operative, safe and advanced society. Such a strategy reflects the radical changes in young people's lives and responds to current challenges by providing clear direction, favourable programmes and effective resources for young people from the earliest years through to adulthood, recognising and providing what young people need in order to thrive and achieve their potential, especially those growing up in adverse circumstances.

One of the fundamental features of any successful youth work strategy is its practical implementation. This is not to ignore the importance of theory and evidence-based research in formulating youth work policy, but rather to consider the practical implications of implementing youth work strategy and its contingencies such as the availability of resources (both human and financial), institutional capacity, critical success factors and time frames. The idea of theory is most helpful when it can inform practical activities, such as by shaping the priorities of youth workers or helping to set up specific methods of evaluating the work itself. By taking a practical approach, it becomes possible to ask broad questions about what kind of difference the work will make to the lives of young people, what will be achieved as opposed to what is proposed and – significantly – who will benefit from this work. This emphasis on practical activity can be summed up in the well-known phrase, "practise what you preach". By focusing on what can be achieved, it becomes much easier to design programmes that consistently work towards fulfilling the needs of young people rather than any other distracting ancillary objectives. Agenzija Żgħażagħ (the Maltese national youth agency) played a pivotal role in translating policy into practice. Through its youth workers and interaction with young people, it developed programmes stemming from the suggestions of young people themselves. For instance, young people in a higher education institution proposed establishing a youth hub on campus to provide a dedicated space for engaging in project-based educational activities during their leisure time, rather than just hanging out in the institution's canteen. This youth work service was evaluated for its success and subsequently replicated in other educational institutions, demonstrating a practical and responsive approach to youth work that directly addressed the needs and preferences of the young people involved.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this process, guiding and underpinning the development and implementation of youth work strategy to ensure a safe, supportive and co-operative environment for both young people and youth workers. Prioritising ethical considerations, such as respect for the integrity and autonomy of each young person; promoting equality, inclusion and social responsibility; safeguarding rights and well-being; and providing opportunities for continuous development and improvement, are fundamental to any successful youth work strategy. Ethical principles can both underpin and help guide the development and implementation of youth work strategies, and while such principles can be a matter of conjecture, they have some underlying features and aspects, as follows.

1. *Respect for integrity and autonomy and promoting participation*

   A primary ethical consideration in youth work practice is respect for the integrity and autonomy of each young person and promotion of their active participation. Recognising young individuals as active agents in their own development, their right to have their voice heard and acted upon, and their capacity for making informed decisions, are essential ethical concerns in youth work strategy, implementation and practice. Youth work strategies, therefore, need to ensure that young people's views, opinions and priorities are listened to and valued and that they have a voice in decision-making processes that have an impact on their lives and futures.

2. *Ensuring equity, rights and inclusion*

   Youth work strategy that prioritises equity, human rights and inclusion can help ensure that all young people, regardless of their sex, ethnicity or socio-economic background have equal opportunities to participate. Barriers to participation, such as socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity or gender, need to be addressed and overcome. Inclusivity also involves mutual respect for cultural and socially diverse backgrounds and the fostering and promotion of understanding and mutual respect.

3. *Safeguarding and protecting young people*

   Safeguarding the well-being and welfare of young people is a fundamental ethical responsibility in youth work. This involves protecting young people from physical, emotional and psychological harm. Youth work strategy also involves implementing and ensuring compliance with safeguarding policies, procedures and requirements, and identifying and managing potential risks. Background checks for both paid staff and volunteers, establishing and implementing codes of conduct, and robust reporting and response systems are crucial for safeguarding and protecting young people. A safe youth work environment is one that respects the integrity, privacy and confidentiality of young people, and that also protects their personal data and information, shared only with their consent or in accordance with established legal provisions.

4. *Youth work and professional practice*

   For youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers, upholding and maintaining high ethical standards of professional practice and integrity are essential. In addition to specified educational and experience requirements, ongoing

training and professional development for youth workers is necessary to help ensure that they have the required competencies to work effectively with and support young people. Ethical practice on the part of youth workers and volunteers also involves self-reflection, accountability and transparency, as well as performance evaluation and feedback, to ensure ongoing personal and professional development.[114]

4.2. Understanding the youth work landscape[115]

An important aspect of youth work strategy development is to bring together research, the experience of young people, their communities and common sense, in a journey that starts by producing a comprehensive map of the youth work provision and culminates in a fresh and inspiring vision with the support of all stakeholders. For instance, think about the process of trying to understand precisely what is out there now: the buildings, the people and the projects that are part and parcel of the existing service. Then, consider the processes of active consultation, engaging with young people, youth workers (paid or volunteers), communities and other stakeholders to define the needs, priorities and issues more closely. Such work will provide an understanding of the resources and assets that can be harnessed to make any changes happen. This work involves an open and honest approach to mapping and evaluating youth work provision (if any). A comprehensive assessment of what is happening enables a structured and interactive form of consultation, which will make the strategy feel owned by everyone involved in its preparation and deliverables.

Once the current situation is understood, it is crucial to identify the target groups and types of youth work provision that the strategy will aim to serve and support. This is a significant step in ensuring that the strategy can meet the diverse needs and requirements of young people in the community. The practical needs and requirements of young people can vary significantly, depending on the area's geographical location and socio-economic characteristics. For example, some areas might have few leisure areas, so the strategy might be tailored to focus on setting up a youth centre, while other areas might experience high rates of anti-social behaviour, where preventive or early intervention programmes may be more suitable. Nevertheless, the strategy should cover the needs of the majority, to ensure maximum effectiveness and social impact. It is also important to consider different sub-groups, for example young people with a migrant background, who may be experiencing additional barriers and challenges such as discrimination and cultural identity, or young people with physical, learning or sensory disabilities, who may be encountering particular issues with access to services and community integration.

Such a detailed and comprehensive analysis will allow the strategy development team to identify all youth groups rigorously and scientifically. It is also equally important to involve young people in the process. When working on the strategy in Malta, we ran a project which we called "Polifest". The project featured 12 events and was co-designed together with nine core youth leaders. Polifest was built on three main

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114. See https://youth.gov.mt/, "Youth work profession code of ethics manual".
115. This section corresponds to section 3.3, "Analysis", in the previous chapter.

pillars: 1. the realities and needs of young people in Malta; 2. the development of policy and strategy; and 3. democratic participation. The core youth leaders were involved in the development of the project, joining forces with youth workers to design and facilitate seminars and workshops and to moderate discussions to develop recommendations for decision makers.

Young people's input can be invaluable for understanding the youth landscape and making the strategy more relevant and receptive. All these processes will enrich the results and provide a holistic view of different youth populations in the community. Each group of young people will require a detailed profile and summary of its key characteristics to illustrate and identify that youth group's specific needs and trends.

In order to successfully plan and establish effective youth work programmes, it is essential to understand the community in which the programmes will operate, as well as comprehend the resources available within that community. The resources in this context include physical, human and social resources, so this assessment is usually referred to as a "community asset mapping" exercise. Asset mapping identifies and categorises the resources available in a community. It may be undertaken at various levels, from broad national/regional assessments to much more focused local assessments.[116]

A workshop involving the different stakeholders can identify the resources available if asked to:

1. identify the range of resources available across the community and the physical locations of those resources;
2. consider how readily accessible those resources are;
3. consider who brings the resources to the community and who uses them;
4. assess how well the resources are known across the community;
5. annotate the resource map with, for example, information about when and how each resource is used;
6. consider the potential for sharing resources, either between different parts of the community or by creating simple, safe environments for young people to meet and socialise.

By involving the stakeholders in active research and encouraging the ownership of creating a "youth work resource map" (see Figure 3), stakeholders will see how such collaborative work can embed and develop youth work. The outcomes of the asset mapping process will inform and evidence the focus of youth work programmes and services and may be used to identify current areas where new youth programmes can be established. The information gained from such exercises is valuable when seeking funding sources for youth work, as it helps to build a comprehensive picture of needs and priorities. This approach is part of a more comprehensive methodology for developing youth work programmes. It is linked with the cyclical processes of "strategic development" and with more day-to-day work. By monitoring and evaluating the use of resources over time, and regularly updating the youth work resource map, it is possible to provide a consistent and needs-led programme.[117]

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116. McPherson, Friesner and Bozman 2020.
117. Eccles and Gootman 2002.

Figure 3 – Youth work resource map

Voluntary Youth Organisations/Youth led Groups

ZAK, Scouts, JCI, FZL, ADZ, MZPN, JEF, MOVIMENT GRAFFITTI, Y4DE (to further map for any youth organisations which have no visibility)

Youth/Students Councils and Associations

National Youth Council KNZ
Student University Council KSU
Pulse
Univeristy Students Associations
ESN/AISEC
SDM
NSTF

Other Voluntary organisations working with youth

SOS Malta
KOPIN
Dinja Wahda
SKOP
Rotary Club
Lions Club
Moviment Azzjoni Socjali
Band Clubs
Festa Committees

YOUTHWORK RESOURCE MAP

The map covers the entire island where youth work resources are being mapped. For Malta, this include all localities from the northern to southern regions and Gozo

Government Ministries Entities/Commissions

Ministries responsible for Education, Youth Voluntary Organisations, Culture, Employment
Commissioner for Children
Commissioner for Mental Health
Commissioner for Voluntary Organisation
Commissioner for Disability
Leap Centres
Local Councils
Agenzija Appogg/Sedqa

Leisure Spaces

Skate Park Msida, Paceville, Bugibba, Kottonera Area, Sliema Seafront Area, Gozo Marsalforn, Splash and fun, parish festas

The Church

Kummissjoni Djocesana Zghazagh Malta and Gozo,
Youth Parish Groups
Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika
Christin Fellowship
MUSEUM Chatechism
Neokatekumeni Groups
Legion of Mary

4.3. Creating a comprehensive youth work framework[118]

To establish an effective and sustainable youth work strategy, it is essential to create a comprehensive framework that outlines goals, objectives, target groups and action plans in a structured and logical manner. As the name suggests, a framework is the strategy's skeleton. It provides general guidelines and a bird's eye view of the strategy. It helps to define the strategy's scope and boundaries – what the strategy is and what it is not. Specific main directions and limitations are set by identifying and formulating the framework. At the same time, a comprehensive framework may provide room for further development and diversification.

Building on the work that came before is essential when creating a framework. A good framework is built on analysing the present youth work policy, the youth work resource map and a thorough risk assessment.

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118. This section corresponds to section 3.2, "Goal setting", in the previous chapter.

A comprehensive youth work framework can help prioritise work areas and facilitate ongoing monitoring and regular evaluation to ensure that targets and objectives are being met. It is also an important vehicle for assessing risk and identifying those factors that are critical for success.

The primary purpose of any monitoring review exercise is to provide evidence for possible strategy updates. The strategy evolves and changes through monitoring and reviewing the framework to reflect the developmental progress and environmental changes. In some instances, policy changes significantly impact the implementation of the strategy. Therefore, policy changes should be carefully examined and reported in the monitoring results. At the same time, the updated framework will have to be appropriately disseminated across different stakeholder groups for consistency in youth work service development and delivery.

Clear goals and measurable objectives are prerequisites for a successful youth work strategy. However, levels of exercise and control over these can vary. Aims and goals are often subject to political change or contingencies. Objectives are often subject to analytical criteria such as SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic and time-bound). This process of setting goals based on a shared vision, and defining SMART objectives to deliver on these goals, is often characterised as a "top-down approach". However, to ensure not only inclusivity but real ownership, mutual responsibility and ultimate effectiveness, young people, youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers need to be involved to ensure a complementary "bottom-up approach".

There is a wide variety of ways and means to agree and establish goals and objectives. These options can range from surveys, focus groups or workshops that question young people and youth workers as to their needs and aspirations. It is also important to consult with the wider community, often through the publication of a consultative paper on the proposed strategic vision, goals and objectives based on initial discussions with young people and youth workers.

The importance of establishing measurable objectives has already been mentioned. A measurable objective includes a clear target and direction. It is something that those involved can see, feel and measure the degree to which it is being reached. Measurable objectives derive from the goals set and serve as stepping stones towards those goals. They focus on the near future and function as a road map. They provide

a clear direction for planning, decision making and accountability and also help in terms of resource allocation and budgeting. A measurable objective must be concrete and specific enough to measure progress towards the goal. Also, a measurable objective should achieve a balance among several criteria in that it should be challenging yet attainable. Once a measurable objective is achieved, it should be celebrated and replaced with another. Input from all those involved is vital in the measurable objective development process. This collaborative exercise strengthens the bond among those involved and creates a sense of team spirit and belonging.

Last but not least, measurable objectives should be consistently reviewed and eventually revised over time. As the surrounding environment and internal system change, objects must remain flexible to alter direction, appropriately manage resources (such as funding and human resources) and adjust the action taken. A measurable objective that outlives its usefulness may lead to wrongly allocated resources. If there is a dramatic change in the situation, for example a change in government policy, it may be necessary to have a more frequent review. However, if particular objectives are achieved significantly earlier than the expected timeline, reflecting on the goals is also an excellent opportunity.

4.4. Designing targeted programmes and initiatives[119]

Creating effective youth programmes and initiatives requires more than just planning. It embodies a harmonious blend of art, science, creativity and logic. This process demands a deep understanding of theories and research findings and the ability to apply this knowledge innovatively and flexibly to address the evolving needs of young people.

Young people are not a homogenous group with identical needs and aspirations, but rather a rainbow of different backgrounds, personal needs and future expectations. This diversity necessitates a strategic vision, goals and objectives that meet the multifarious needs and aspirations of young people. Successful youth work strategy must combine: the individual and the group, the general and the particular, the tailor-made and the non-specific, the average and the exceptional, the quantity and the quality and the usual and the unusual. Malta's youth work strategy provides many examples of such a diverse yet integrated approach.

1. Youth.Inc, an inclusive youth work programme, is based on applied learning and is open to young people aged between 16 and 21 who are defined as NEET (not in education, employment or training). The aim of the programme is to support young people to improve their standard of education and gain more knowledge, values and skills to enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue further education and/or training. The Youth.Inc programme provides three learning opportunities:

    ► access skills for independent living and working life, level 1;

    ► skills for vocational pathways, level 2;

    ► connect – skills and competencies for working life, level 3.

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119. This section broadly corresponds to section 3.4, "Strategy formulation", in the previous chapter.

The programme encourages the active involvement of young people in a non-traditional learning environment. It supports a range of modes of learning, including leisure, cultural and educational activities, with the aim of empowering and motivating young people to become more active participants in their own learning.

2. The Make Head programme targets teens who have just finished compulsory schooling and will be starting post-secondary education in September. The programme aims to give space to allow young people to gain life skills that are considered important for a successful transition to post-secondary education. The activities tackle various themes such as personal well-being, responsibility, initiative and coping skills and also focus on institutional services and facilities, activism, community life and life on campus. Most importantly, Make Head creates the space and the opportunity for young people to bring up and discuss issues that they think are important for them to navigate smoothly from secondary to post-secondary schooling.

Participatory design workshops can ensure the involvement of young people in the design and implementation of their programmes to align them closely with their needs.

It is crucial when designing targeted programmes to think in a sustainable way. This involves securing funding and resources and providing training and support for all involved. This includes the individuals responsible for leading and delivering the programmes and the broader network of partners and organisations that will play a part. Therefore, a comprehensive training and capacity-building plan must be implemented as part of the broader strategy. The vision for training and capacity building is to ensure that everybody involved in delivering youth work objectives will have the chance to develop the skills, knowledge and experience they need. This will not only increase the quality and effectiveness of the actions and programmes to be put in place but also help promote a culture of continuous professional development and improvement. Training and capacity building include team-based exercises and skills development courses, supervision, self-directed and e-learning opportunities and continuous leadership and management coaching for senior-level employees. It is also important that youth workers' capacity is built together with the capacity of young people; for example, programmes that empower youth to take on leadership roles and contribute to their communities ensure a lasting impact. The links below[120] present the policies of the Maltese Youth Agency to enhance the capacity building of youth workers. The supervision process and the training and continuous development policy the agency has adopted are worth exploring. The Award in Youth Leadership[121] is also an example of a programme that young people who are interested in taking up leadership roles are encouraged to follow. These examples show the complementarity in training between youth workers and youth leaders.

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120. See https://youth.gov.mt/, "staff training and development policy", "Youth work continuous professional development (CPD) allowance procedures" and "Reflective supervision policy".
121. See https://youth.gov.mt/, "Award in youth leadership".

4.5. Outlining implementation steps and timelines[122]

Having developed a comprehensive youth work framework and designed targeted programmes and initiatives, the next critical step is to outline the steps necessary and the timeline by which each step will be implemented. In doing so, an action plan for each of the service programmes and initiatives can be aligned to the identified deadlines and brought into the overarching timeline by which the strategic plan is expected to be completed. This will help to create a "living" document that can be updated as work progresses and deadlines change. It is also essential to identify the lead person responsible for ensuring that each action point is completed on time. Several tried-and-tested project-management tools, such as Gantt charts and network diagrams, can be used to plan and manage the implementation. Gantt charts are helpful in planning and scheduling the implementation phase of a strategy and in monitoring progress against the deadlines. They provide a graphic overview of how the project is expected to progress over time and clearly indicate when any particular element of the project is due to commence and finish. This allows the person in charge to look at a complex programme upfront and identify the key tasks that must be undertaken and in what order. It also helps to highlight any areas of possible conflict, for example where one person or team may be working on two different facets of the same overall strategy. This is known as a critical path analysis and is extremely useful in resource allocation and managing expectations about what can realistically be achieved by individual teams.

In Malta, youth workers conduct risk assessments through a structured process. They begin by identifying the scope of the assessment, listing all involved programmes, and considering the characteristics of their target group. They then identify potential hazards, including physical, psychological, social and environmental risks. The risks are evaluated based on their likelihood, severity and the specific vulnerabilities of the young people. Control measures are then implemented to either eliminate or reduce the hazards, with emergency procedures prepared for potential incidents. Finally, the risk assessment is documented, detailing the identified hazards, assessed risks, control measures, and an action plan outlining responsibilities and timelines.

4.6. Allocating resources and budgeting

To ensure the successful implementation of a youth work strategy, the timely allocation of identified and required resources is essential. These resources include human resources (both paid staff and volunteers), physical resources (buildings, equipment and materials) and financial resources (state, EU and private funding). The total cost of delivering the strategy, including direct and indirect costs, need to be identified. Direct costs reflect the delivery of both specific and essential services (staff salaries, utilities and ongoing management, administrative and maintenance costs). Indirect costs are those of a contingent, temporary or one-off nature. Once the total costs have been identified, an annual budget for the implementation of the strategy should be agreed. An annual budget is an essential tool for effectively controlling and monitoring financial expenditure while also ensuring cost effectiveness and value for money.

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122. This section corresponds to section 3.5, "Implementation", in the previous chapter.

4.7. Funding sources and ways to increase funding

Agenzija Żgħażagħ (the Maltese national youth agency), which is responsible for developing and implementing the youth work strategy, is largely state funded, with additional resources accessed through EU funds and on occasion corporate funding. Agenzija Żgħażagħ in turn provides financial and other support to the voluntary youth sector as well as collaborating on cross-sectoral initiatives co-funded by other governmental ministries and entities. Such cross-sectoral partnerships and initiatives can pool resources, align strategic objectives, co-ordinate measures and maximise effect in addressing the needs and aspirations of young people.

In addition, European Union funds, particularly through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, provide additional financial support and learning opportunities for youth organisations, youth workers and young people.

In instances where state support for youth work strategies is limited or constrained there are other potential options such as public-private partnerships, encouraging businesses and the corporate sector to invest creatively in young people, grants from European and international bodies such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the World Bank, and fundraising campaigns and initiatives.

Recording, demonstrating, promoting, publishing and advertising the real and tangible benefits that young people derive from participation in youth work, through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, are also compelling means of securing regular and additional finances and resources. These can also help instil in politicians, policy makers, the corporate sector and civil society a recognition and appreciation of the value of youth work and the benefits that accrue to society as a whole.

4.8. Monitoring and evaluation[123]

It is important to continuously review and evaluate how well the strategy is progressing throughout the development and implementation of a youth work strategy. Progress towards the overall goals of the strategy can often take time to measure, but it is very important to try to get an accurate picture of the difference we are making to young people. That is why there is a strong emphasis on setting up a system of regular monitoring, the results of which are used to inform annual reviews of the strategy.

It is argued that a "realist" evaluation will be most useful for establishing effective and successful youth work strategies. This form of evaluation focuses on causal processes and on verifying that proposed programmes bring about the intended changes in the social reality experienced by young people. Such an approach highlights the need for an evolution from traditional means of delivery to a revitalised, outward-facing service and for the exciting opportunity to deliver real change to the young people, the community and the stakeholders involved. Those engaged in strategic and operational planning for youth work should seek to build an infrastructure through appropriate resources, training and management systems, which can support programmes that seek progressive improvements.

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123. This section corresponds to section 3.6, "Evaluation", in the previous chapter.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are a widely recognised tool for the monitoring process and demonstrate how effectively a measure is meeting its objectives. KPIs also facilitate strategic focus and operational improvement, enhance analytical and decision-making processes, and evaluate the real impact of measures with a view to continuous quality improvement. KPIs are largely contingent on the quality, timeliness and analysis of data, and this requires having both the resources and expertise to utilise them to full effect.

When identifying KPIs, stakeholders should be involved in the process as a starting point, as it allows them to positively impact the work and priorities of the organisation. It can also ensure that the KPIs identifed will be seen as important and help empower staff and shape working practices. If staff can see their work is being measured, but they also have had an opportunity to agree to that measurement, it can help them feel more in control and motivated. KPIs also help managers and leaders to understand how well the work of a particular team or service is driving forward the objectives of the strategy. This is crucial as it allows teams to demonstrate the value of their work and where improvements could be made.

Many possible KPIs could be relevant to a youth work strategy. KPIs depend on the main areas of work covered by the strategy. Some indicators may be outputs or activity-based, such as the number of young people attending a group or the number of activities in place to deliver the strategy. However, when considering service quality measurement, this could often be something that cannot be captured through a data spreadsheet and might need more in-depth and qualitative approaches, such as measurement through satisfaction surveys. For example, data may be collected through a survey to ask both young people and youth workers their opinions on whether they feel the service is safe and welcoming. Using this type of KPI helps ensure that the monitoring is firmly fixed on understanding whether the strategic aim of providing a quality and worthwhile service is being delivered. Satisfaction and engagement levels provide convincing numerical data crucial for funding and furthering efforts to modernise work practices.

Once the evaluation and assessment activities are completed, attention should be given to analysing the results. It may be tempting to just jump into improvement actions, but it is important not to rush into this. A thorough data analysis will provide a clear understanding of what areas need improvement. It may be that the analysis uncovers some areas of good practice, too. The analysis should be a systematic process. Each objective and target should be considered and the areas for improvement should be identified. Make sure to involve stakeholders and be transparent in involving them in the process. Identify areas that need improvement in the provision of youth work, with different groups of young people. This should be a practical exercise to give rise to new improvement or development objectives. These will form the basis of the following action plan. The systematic review of the process will guarantee that all suitable checks and balances are in place and provide the ground for sustainable and quality improvement.

4.9. Challenges and limitations

Developing a successful youth work strategy is built on trusting relationships and a shared motivation to support young people. A key barrier to successful change in youth work is the process of moving people from a familiar and secure routine to something new and different. Whether it is the management of a project or the personal development of an individual young person, as things begin to change, and even before anyone reaches the point of implementing a strategy, it is important to consider how those changes are to be managed thoughtfully. This helps prepare some of the groundwork for bringing people on board with the vision while enabling things to develop in a structured way.

In broad policy terms, the youth work sector is rarely accorded high priority, even within the education/training/family policy sectors in which it is often located. Securing regular and consistent funding can often be challenging. Changes in government policy or cuts in general expenditure can often adversely affect the youth sector. These represent significant challenges not only in developing and implementing youth work strategy but in prioritising funding and resources within the youth work sector. In many places, European funding is used significantly for youth work projects. Such an approach can restrict the development of holistic services that can adapt to the needs of young people and their communities, as "funding-led provision" requires the sector to deliver services based on the priorities of the particular funding body. Youth ministries also deliver services and commission work through arm's-length bodies such as national youth councils, youth organisations or non-government youth work providers, or directly through a youth service within a local area. In these scenarios, funding and direction will filter down from the government level, and organisations must be able to understand and work with wider policy objectives. Maes and Van Hootegem,[124] in their meta-systems model of organisational change, demonstrate how funding arrangements can impact the ability to meet broader objectives through the imposition of external standards and process design. The needs of young people, and the political climate and context in which youth work operates, are subject to continuous change. Accordingly, youth work strategy needs to be both flexible and adaptable to change, and always ready to make use of new and unforeseen opportunities. As well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation, youth work strategy can also benefit from mid-term reviews that take account of both emerging challenges and opportunities.

This may be particularly important during periods of significant change in the lives of young people or in the social, economic or political context in which youth work is delivered. Funding constraints can be an opportunity as much as a disadvantage. Regularly reviewing the strategy enables youth workers and those involved in developing the strategy to take account of new trends and developments which may affect the needs of young people and to reconsider how resources could be used in the light of new priorities or challenges. (This point lies at the heart of "Debate" within the youth policy clock.) It can also help to extend engagement and involvement in the strategy to new stakeholders and draw on a broader range of expertise

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124. Maes and Van Hootegem 2019.

and talents. This may be particularly important if the strategy needs to be adapted significantly to address emerging needs or take advantage of new opportunities for development.[125]

4.10. Conclusion

As outlined in this chapter, the development of a youth work strategy entails a structured and coherent approach to empowering young people through a comprehensive framework that integrates political vision, strategic aims and objectives, financial support, ethical consideration, effective implementation and quality practice, and innovative and inclusive programmes. The historical evolution of youth work in Malta and the establishment of Agenzija Żgħażagħ, has provided the catalyst for an effective, wide-ranging and coherent youth work strategy that promotes, encourages and facilitates the empowerment and holistic development of young people in Malta.

The key components of a youth work strategy are designed to foster and encourage young people's potential and aspirations, while also addressing their needs and concerns by ensuring they have the competencies and character for self-fulfilment and positive contribution to society. Ethical considerations, such as respecting integrity and autonomy, ensuring equity and inclusivity, and safeguarding young people, underscore the commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment. Listening to the voices of young people, their involvement in the decision-making process and the need for continuous monitoring, evaluation and improvement, are essential features of any successful youth work strategy. Finally, sound theories, clear vision and achievable aims and objectives are mere words until they are implemented and given practical effect in the everyday lives of young people.

In conclusion, the Maltese model is just one example of how coherent, dynamic, inclusive and evolving a youth work strategy framework can be. The commitment to ongoing development, effective implementation and quality practice with the proactive involvement of young people and all those who work with and for them ensure that the strategy will remain a robust and effective tool for helping young people to fulfil their potential and meet their aspirations.

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125. Just as "experiential learning" is a central tenet of youth work itself, it applies equally well to youth work strategy development, implementation, review and further development: do, review, learn, apply.

Chapter 5

Approaches, methods and examples

Exercises and instruments supporting youth work strategy processes

In the first four chapters we presented various perspectives on the ideas and issues that contribute to the development and implementation of a youth work strategy, from its initiation to evaluation, providing definitions, forging links and connections, giving examples, suggesting questions for reflection, and presenting explanations for the steps that need to be taken. This chapter takes you one step further, exploring a selection of practical tools, templates, checklists and thematic resources to support the process of developing and implementing youth work strategies.

Youth work ecosystems differ greatly across Europe and various factors may influence policy and strategy development and implementation. As with many levels in strategic thinking and application, one size does not fit all, but it is good to have to hand a selection of ideas for consideration, adaptation and adoption. The tools presented in this chapter provide those initiating such processes with some guidelines to help with their work. We encourage you to explore and try them out.

This chapter focuses on the practical aspects of the work supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of youth work strategies. It includes forms, guidelines, exercises and instruments to be used at the various stages presented in previous chapters and features some of the background resources which can well become a conceptual base for the planning and implementation work.

Strategy process

| Getting started | Goal setting | Analysis | Formulation | Implementation | Evaluation |

5.1. Getting started

5.1.1. Mobilising the youth work community

Getting started is one of the essential stages which is often missing from the classical structure of strategy development work, but often this kick-start needs a clear impetus, a push, an activated need to drive the process. The reasons for developing a strategy can differ, but the process always needs a decision and a lead. The drivers can include: the changing situations and challenges young people face; the emergence of youth life-related issues that need a structured and strategic approach; emerging needs of institutions in terms of legal requirements of policy governance; new regulations and the need to align with them; perhaps the need for alignment with a development goal at local, national or international level; or the need for a co-ordinated youth-oriented response; changed environment and advocacy from the field; or evaluation and research recommendations. Often the need for a strategy is determined by a desire to secure the field, through improved resourcing, developing co-operation and pulling stakeholders together for a greater and more effective and efficient response. It can also be prompted by the need to establish a new direction or architecture, integrating a new approach that encapsulates, among other things, principles, coverage and outreach. One of the important questions is to see who takes up the task, who gets involved, who provides the support for the process.

In order for a strategy to be implemented with the ownership of various stakeholders in place, it is crucial to make sure the development process involves as wide a stakeholder group as possible. Often those in the field are referred to as the youth work community of practice: these are parties who should be invited into the strategy processes to provide expertise in policy, evidence from research and experience of youth work practice. The list below provides a non-exhaustive but important list of those who, in an ideal situation, should be involved in youth work strategy development. It is up to the process owners to find the best strategies and tactics to motivate, engage and facilitate the co-operation and input of all those who might ideally be required or desired to contribute to the process.

The list depends on the context but there is a wide range of people and structures that can be considered. The engagement approach and plan to support the process and mobilise the existing resources should be carefully chosen for each of the participants after a thorough mapping and assessment.

Youth work providers	Youth work educators	Research community	Policy makers
Youth workers	Non-formal educational institutions	Independent researchers	National and regional governments
Educators of youth workers	Formal educational institutions	Research organisations	Youth agencies
Youth information workers	Youth worker trainers	Academic research centres	Consultative bodies on youth adjacent to public authorities
Youth work managers	Adult learning organisations	Think tanks	Local communities and municipalities
Accredited and independent youth work organisations		Policy labs	National youth representative bodies
Trainers			Local and municipal youth services
Youth leaders			Associations of youth workers
Project carriers			European institutions
Young people and youth representation bodies			

The composition of a group can not only kick-start and lead, but also potentially implement and then follow the process. It can have different architectures, but what is essential is to make sure a range of stakeholders are represented. This means in the group you have people with decision-making power, people from practice, people from youth studies and research, young people from representative bodies and young people from particular "categories" (such as those from rural areas or in public care) and groups from other sectors that the strategy work may or will touch, involve or affect. It is always wise to look beyond the usual suspects within the "magic triangle" of youth research, youth policy and youth work practice to those within the "magic polygon" and "pyramids", as Manfred Zentner refers to them in *The history of youth work* series.[126]

Useful resources

▶ Nomenclature on youth worker and other professions delivering youth work, see https://go.coe.int/6AgME.

▶ Youth work communities in Europe: practitioners, arenas and cross-sectoral partnerships; study based on national realities in nine European countries, see https://go.coe.int/lFSfA.

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126. Siurala et al. 2016.

- ► Report on the review of the implementation of Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work five years after adoption, see https://rm.coe.int/cmj-2023-43-final-report-review-on-the-implementation-of-rec-on-youth-/1680af6151.
- ► Ethical standards in youth work and how they support education and career pathways of youth workers, see https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents /42128013/47262613/06_SCRIB.pdf/41cea176-d7fa-3167-a716-11af717b1559.
- ► Visible value. Growing youth work in Europe – Handbook to support reflection and action, see: https://go.coe.int/xQ6GR.
- ► The benefits of youth work, Unite the union, see https://rethinkingimpact. com/resources/.

5.2. Goal setting

5.2.1. Youth work vision and goals: philosophy and underpinning approaches

When starting the formulation of the vision, goals and general principles for the strategy, it is important to have a strong understanding and agreement within the field, and to involve all stakeholders in setting them. Of course, there is not one approach that will be appropriate to all contexts and become a "golden ticket" to be used. The choice and combination of approaches for establishing a youth work strategy is impacted by a number of factors, including the way young people are perceived in society, the basis of youth policy and what a country's main direction of development is likely to be in the coming years. Different combinations of approaches, principles and theories will provide the foundation for a strategy design that underpins planning for more specific interventions.

The Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio[127] defines the principles and values of youth work.

- ► Value-driven: youth work tries to serve the higher purposes of inclusion and social cohesion.
- ► Youth-centric: youth work serves key needs and aspirations of youth, identified by young people themselves.
- ► Voluntary: youth work is not obligatory and relies on the voluntary participation of young people.
- ► Developmental: youth work targets the personal, social and ethical development of young people.
- ► Self-reflective and critical: youth work tries to make sure it is doing its best to live up to its mission.
- ► Relational: youth work seeks authentic communication with young people and to contribute to sustaining viable communities.

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127. See www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio.

The portfolio also suggests that youth work should be enabling, empowering, engaging, emancipatory, educative and enjoyable.[128]

Defining the specific youth work approach, philosophy, orientation, focus and priority is one of the important steps to take when getting started, and conceptualising the approach to the youth work strategy. Understanding of the local context, the situation of young people, their perception by various stakeholders, and aspirations and visions all play a role in defining the approach or a set of approaches as a basis for the strategy and interventions.

The existing approaches are often defined by a country's development priorities and philosophies, methodological and pedagogical approaches to learning and development, priorities of certain developments on the ground, needs of immediate action, etc.

Participatory	Emancipatory	Positive youth development	Holistic development

Preventive and regulatory	Problem-focused	Opportunity-focused

For example:

▶ the participatory approach strives to ensure that young people are part of the dialogue on the ground, the decisions made about and around them, the planning of the youth work strategies and interventions, and their implementation and evaluation. This approach fosters the perception of young people as experts on their own life and gives them space to shape youth work activities for themselves;

▶ positive youth development, opportunity-focused, emancipatory approaches build on the strengths, potential, talents, energy and motivations of young people as a starting point for a methodological approach, and set the space and possibilities for them to develop essential competencies to support their, and their peers', development;

▶ a holistic development approach puts an equal emphasis on comprehensively addressing various aspects of a young person's life in its dynamics, providing guidance related to both personal, social, developmental, health, well-being, personal development needs and issues that young people face by providing support and guidance in those areas;

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128. See www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials.

► approaches with a focus on regulation, reaction and problem orientation look more into mechanisms of working on the existing problematic issues, young people in a difficult life situation (health, substance abuse, learning difficulties, coping strategies, difficult behaviour, etc);

► a proactive, prevention and early-intervention approach is built on detecting potential issues and risks early on and working towards preventing their development by implementing a wide range of measures and developing competencies to help young people develop resilience and strength.

Have a look at section 4.1, "The youth work strategy – purposeful, practical and principled", in Chapter 4, to find out how the work of setting goals and approaches was done in Malta.

Useful resources

► Thinking seriously about youth work and how to prepare people to do it, see https://go.coe.int/XVkdS.

► Council of Europe youth work portfolio, see www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials.

► Defining youth work: exploring the boundaries, continuity and diversity of youth work practice, see www.researchgate.net/publication/327061610_Defining_youth_work_exploring_the_boundaries_continuity_and_diversity_of_youth_work_practice.

► Youth work in eastern Europe: realities, perspectives and inspiring initiatives, see https://go.coe.int/LHmtP.

► Visible value. Growing youth work in Europe – Handbook to support reflection and action, see https://go.coe.int/xQ6GR.

5.3. Analysis

5.3.1. Exploring the field: community asset mapping

The analysis stage of developing a youth work strategy involves several critical actions aimed at understanding the current landscape, identifying needs and setting a strong foundation for strategic planning. These include stakeholder mapping, needs assessment, SWOT and PESTLE,[129] assessments environmental scans, risk assessments, gap analysis and consideration of a theory of change.

These actions and mechanisms help identify the current resources and offers, the missing ones, the existing gaps and opportunities, consolidating the understanding of available assets such as infrastructural ones, but also those related to

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129. Political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental.

human capital and competence. One of these instruments is community assets mapping. After the analysis it helps identify the areas where the strategy will need to put more focus.

In the context of youth work strategy development, community asset mapping has a focus on youth-related services and opportunities, youth-friendly and specialised services and provision. It is important to set up and implement a process where a relevant and wide group of stakeholders can be involved in the exercise.

Community asset mapping can be done in various ways using a wide spectrum of instruments. These range from surveys, questionnaires and interviews, through focus group discussions, participatory mapping, asset walks or tours and asset mapping workshops, to the use of web-based tools. Each of these approaches has a part to play and can be used with different stakeholders in accordance with their particular characteristics. Interviews might work better with experts and public authorities, while mapping workshops might be more interesting and inviting for young people.

Data and knowledge collected and analysed through a good combination of the chosen methods can provide a more comprehensive view of the context of the community. The data collected need to be analysed.[130] This analysis involves organising and synthesising the data to find patterns, trends and relationships among the various assets and resources and to identify what it means for strategic planning and action.[131]

5.3.2. Examples of domains and questions for mapping to inform a youth work strategy

When conducting a community asset mapping exercise it is important to have a clear understanding of what one is looking for – the areas, sectors and segments, domains and aspects of life of a community. It is crucial to identify what is important to know about the community context to understand what exists or is lacking for young people in terms of supporting their well-being and development.

Below are some domains related to youth work which can be important to look into, with sample questions one can ask during focus groups, interviews or mapping workshops. The list of domains and questions will vary based on the strategic vision and will need to be adjusted accordingly.

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130. A facilitator's guide to community asset mapping, N.O.R.D.I.K (Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge) is available at: https://nordikinstitute.com/.
131. Long before the technological resources now available, the YMCA distance learning course for youth workers encouraged youth work students to take a walk round the patch in which they worked, simply to develop an understanding of the provision and infrastructure that surrounded the lives of the young people with whom they worked.

Community asset mapping sample domains and questions

Spaces for youth in the community

What spaces for youth exist in the community?

How accessible are they?

Do they cater for the needs of diverse young people and groups living in the community?

How inclusive and open are they?

Who runs and facilitates these spaces?

Are there enough of these spaces?

What do these spaces offer to young people with various interests, aspirations, priorities, etc?

How are young people supported in their drive to engage in community projects, initiate projects, etc?

What are the dynamics and links between space, young people and local authorities?

Civil society offer

Which NGOs, foundations or associations are actively working with both youth and a wider public in the community?

What are their missions, target audience, main programmes and methodologies of work?

How open, inclusive and outreaching are they?

How are young people involved in their activities and governance?

What volunteering opportunities do these organisations provide?

How are the activities linked to the youth-related policies and approaches in the community?

Learning and development opportunities

What are the different learning opportunities in terms of both formal and non-formal education?

What, how and where can young people learn to develop both professional and transversal skills and abilities?

How do these offers ensure inclusivity and outreach to young people who need reinforced support?

How is information disseminated about these opportunities?

What are the existing programmes and gaps in the educational offer on the ground?

Health and psycho-social support systems

What are the healthcare facilities in the community?

How youth friendly are they?

What programmes and facilities exist to specifically address health-related issues young people face?

How accessible and affordable are those services for young people in various life situations?

What psychological and mental health support for young people exists?

How are young people informed and encouraged to make use of the existing facilities and programmes?

Are there public campaigns supporting healthy lifestyles or awareness programmes?

Are any support groups, hotlines or peer programmes operating in the community for young people?

Employment, employability and career guidance
What structures supporting and offering employment enhancement programmes operate in the community?
Which programmes support employment-related and employability competencies?
What instruments exist to guide young people in the employment field, the transfer from education to job market and career development?
What educational support exists for entrepreneurial activities of young people?
Are there any job fairs, internship opportunities, spaces for employers and potential employees to meet?

Leisure, culture and sports activities
What leisure infrastructure or programmes exist?
How accessible are they for various groups of young people?
Are there leisure activities offered for various interests of young people?
What sports activities and infrastructure exist?
What is the cultural offer for youth in the community?
Are there programmes supporting cultural expression and development?

This list is of course by no means exhaustive. The domains and questions depend on the strategic vision and will need to be adjusted accordingly. One might want to put a stronger focus on what exists, as well as on the gaps and challenges. It is important that this work is also done in a fully participatory way at each of the steps, to ensure outreach, validity, engagement and further ownership of the process and results, strategy development and implementation in general.

Explore the importance of the analysis phase in section 3.3, "Analysis", in Chapter 3, and have a look at how analysis of the field was implemented in Malta in section 4.2, "Understanding the youth work landscape", in Chapter 4.

Useful resources

► Participatory asset mapping toolkit, see https://communityscience.astc.org/resources/participatory-asset-mapping-a-community-research-lab-toolkit/.

► Growing youth work in Europe. A methodology for mapping studies on national youth work eco-systems, see https://go.coe.int/62xwb.

► Insights into developing the youth work environment – A thinking and action kit, see https://go.coe.int/sKsUG.

► Illustrations are also available for use, see https://go.coe.int/U2FCz.

► Visible value. Growing youth work in Europe – Handbook to support reflection and action, see https://go.coe.int/xQ6GR.

► Additionally, youth workers and organisations can use the handbook to enhance their advocacy and volunteering efforts, sharpening their focus and effectiveness, see https://go.coe.int/RsNbD.

5.4.1. Youth strategy formulation: a possible structure

There can be several approaches to formulating and structuring a strategy document. Whether the document is complex or not, in general there are a few points which are common to many a strategy to make it a comprehensive document.[132] The strategy will become one of the main guiding documents for development in the youth work field for three to five years or longer, as well as one of the main communication tools for the youth work community and its stakeholders; therefore, clear, structured and understandable formulation is essential.[133]

Below is an outline with a few questions to inform and facilitate reflection and further formulation of the strategy text itself. In some templates, these points are merged, the questions addressed are changed, adapted to the existing situation and also to the direction of travel the strategy might be prioritising.

1. Executive summary
   – What is the main purpose of this strategy?
   – What are the key goals and objectives?
   – What is the strategic vision and mission?

2. Introduction
   – Why is there a need for a youth work strategy?
   – What is the scope and context of this strategy?
   – How do you define key terms and concepts related to youth work?

3. Vision and mission statements
   – Vision: What is the long-term desired impact on youth?
   – Mission: How will you achieve this vision? What are the primary objectives?

4. Core values and principles
   – What fundamental beliefs and principles will guide this strategy?
   – How will you ensure inclusivity, respect, empowerment and collaboration?

5. Context/situation analysis
   – What is the current situation of young people in your area?
   – What exists, what is missing?
   – What key issues and challenges are facing young people?
   – What data and research support these findings?
   – What feedback have you received from stakeholders?

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132. Ingredients of a strategy: see www.forbes.com/sites/jeroenkraaijenbrink/2019/06/07/the-10-ingredients -that-every-strategy-should-have/?sh=71544b405bf1.
133. The basics of writing a strategic plan: see www.smartsheet.com/how-to-write-strategic-plans#what -to-include-in-a-strategic-plan.

6. Aims and objectives

   – What do you want to achieve? How do you want things to change?

   – What needs to be done to reach the defined aims? What specific steps are to be taken?

7. Beneficiaries and target groups

   – Who is benefitting from the strategy?

   – How will the needs of different groups be taken into account and addressed in the strategy?

8. Strategic priorities and implementation framework

   – What are the priority areas for intervention and development?

   – What detailed action plans will you develop, including timelines, responsibilities and required resources?

   – What examples of potential programmes and initiatives can you include?

9. Stakeholder engagement

   – Who are the main stakeholders and partners in the strategy work? What are their specific roles and your aspirations for their involvement?

   – How will the work with the various actors in the field be facilitated and maintained?

10. Funding and resource mobilisation

   – What are the funding sources and possibilities for resourcing the strategy implementation?

   – How will financial sustainability be ensured?

   – What financial guidelines will be in place to facilitate financial allocation and decisions?

11. Implementation plan

   – What is the detailed plan for rolling out the strategy?

   – What are the phases of implementation and key milestones?

   – Who is responsible for each part of the implementation?

12. Monitoring and evaluation

   – What framework will you use to monitor progress and evaluate impact?

   – How will you track success?

   – How will you collect, analyse and report data?

   – What feedback mechanisms will you use for continuous improvement?

13. Risk assessment and mitigation approach

   – What are potential risks, and the probability of their emergence, that affect the strategy work?

   – What are the approaches and strategies for risk mitigation and management?

14. Outreach, visibility and communication

   – What measures will be taken to ensure awareness of the strategy among all stakeholders?

   – Which instruments and channels will be implemented to ensure sustainable and ongoing communication?

15. Strategy in the wider context

   – What is the role of the strategy in the wider development context of the community?

   – How does the strategy integrate into the ongoing youth policy work and what are the milestones for the coming period?

16. Appendices

   – What supporting documents, data and additional information will you include?

   – What glossary of terms will help clarify key concepts?

> To find out more about examples of goal formulation and elements of the strategies, have a look at section 3.2 , "Goal setting", and 3.4, "Strategy formulation", in Chapter 3. See also section 4.3, "Creating a comprehensive youth work framework", in Chapter 4.

Useful resources

► Strategic planning for non-profits: see https://bloomerang.co/blog/nonprofit-strategic-planning/.

► Strategic planning: how to write a strategic plan that works: see www.clearpointstrategy.com/blog/strategic-planning#toc-2.

5.5. Implementation

5.5.1. Community of practice: ensuring contribution in the strategy implementation

Youth work is a part of the wider policy framework supporting youth development and has developed its own cohesion within and around youth policy, research and practice. Though by no means complete, a youth work "community of practice" has emerged, one that argues for and is sometimes recognised for the importance of the role of youth work in youth development. This community brings together practice, policy and research, expertise, knowledge and decision making to provide a context for the field to grow.

In this section we have tried to identify specific actions each group making up the community of practice can take to support the formulation and implementation of youth work strategy, making sure all the resources are optimised as much as possible. These ideas for action are combined, based on the measures outlined in various documents, tested by practical work, and prompted by analysis and reflection. It does not mean that all of them have to be taken up or that this is an exhaustive list, but this list can become the basis for further reflections on stakeholder engagement in strategy development and implementation, and during the evaluation stages, based on the specific potential for contribution.[134]

Those engaged in different ways with the youth work community of practice can make differential contributions to young people's experiences and opportunities.

Youth work practitioners can do the following:

► develop project and programme ideas to expand youth work provision through innovative projects and programmes catering to the diverse needs and interests of young people;

► develop accreditation standards and programmes to ensure quality youth work and enhance professionalism within the field;

► set advocacy measures and initiate work to advance youth work development goals and ensure support from stakeholders;

► lobby for the inclusion of youth work in youth policies and local development programmes at national and local levels;

► design innovative approaches and instruments for working with young people and developing methodologies for generalist and specialist youth work practices;

► develop youth worker training systems, establishing professional platforms and networks, and foster collaboration among practitioners at local, national and international levels.

Youth work educators can do the following:

► design and implement comprehensive youth worker training schemes and models to enhance the professional competencies of youth workers;

► develop youth worker competence frameworks to guide training programmes and ensure alignment with field standards, emerging needs and current approaches in youth work practice architectures;

► create educational materials, tools and methods to support youth worker training programmes and enhance learning outcomes set for the profession;

► establish links between formal and non-formal educational providers for youth worker training to facilitate seamless integration and holistic learning experiences, supporting sustainable entry into and development in the youth work field.

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134. The list is adapted from Lavchyan, Atanasov and Basarab 2023.

Youth work researchers can to do the following:

- ▶ advocate research focused on youth work and promote its importance in informing policy and practice;
- ▶ conduct and disseminate studies, analysis and forecast relevant to youth work practice, providing valuable insights and evidence-based solutions supporting strategy goal setting, analysis, the vision and mission statement, and the methodological ground for work;
- ▶ explore practice and develop competence frameworks for youth work practitioners, providing guidance for professional development and training initiatives;
- ▶ provide information, key data and knowledge to inform decision-making processes and strategy development;
- ▶ engage in piloting and innovation: pilot new approaches and tools supporting youth work practice, contributing to the advancement and innovation within the field.

Policy makers can do the following:

- ▶ conceptualise and define youth work, put in place a legal basis for its operation, and set out approaches for its development;
- ▶ ensure sustainable financial resources for the youth work strategy implementation;
- ▶ consolidate the efforts and facilitate synergetic work of the stakeholders, providing spaces and opportunities for resource mobilisation;
- ▶ make provisions and necessary arrangements for the inclusivity and outreach of youth work to a wide range of young people;
- ▶ set up spaces to support the professional competency development of various professionals involved in the youth work delivery and administration, set up mechanisms for the recognition of these competencies;
- ▶ establish instruments for ongoing monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement;
- ▶ support in general the recognition of the impact and importance of the field.

See section 3.1, "Getting started", in Chapter 3 for insights into the essentials when starting work on the strategy and securing the involvement of the field.

Useful resources

- ▶ Nomenclature on youth worker and other professions delivering youth work, see https://go.coe.int/6AgME.
- ▶ Youth work communities in Europe: practitioners, arenas and cross-sectoral partnerships. Study based on national realities in nine European countries, see https://go.coe.int/lFSfA.

5.5.2. Ethical code of conduct

Ethics and ethical codes play a vital role in youth work as they provide a reference, a framework for professionals to navigate the complexities that arise when working with young people.[135] These codes serve as a moral compass, guiding youth workers in their practice, values, interactions, decision-making processes and overall conduct, helping them orient and navigate sensitive situations, such as maintaining confidentiality, addressing conflicts of interest and respecting the autonomy and diversity of the young people with whom they work. They also establish clear expectations and standards, requiring youth workers to be accountable and enabling them to be held responsible for their actions and decisions.

One of the important roles of ethical codes is based on the fact that there is naturally a certain power imbalance between the youth workers and the young people they serve. As young people can often have difficult life situations, within a challenging wider social context, rendering them vulnerable and impressionable, certainly on occasions, it becomes essential for youth workers to maintain appropriate boundaries, prioritise the well-being and safety of young people and uphold the quality and standards of professional conduct.

Based on an analysis of ethical codes, codes of conduct from more than 15 countries around Europe and beyond, several considerations that currently feature in many of them are presented below.

Promoting equality, non-discrimination and inclusive practices for all young people.	Empowering young people, respecting their right to make choices and supporting their development towards independence.	Prioritising the best interests, well-being and primary consideration of young people.	Maintaining transparent, honest, truthful and open relationships with young people.
Ensuring confidentiality of information shared by young people, except when disclosure is legally required or to prevent harm.	Maintaining professional boundaries and limiting personal relationships with young people to protect them.	Duty of care, ensuring safety of young people while allowing educational challenges/risks.	Continuing professional development, updating knowledge/skills to work effectively.
Co-operating and partnering with others to secure the best outcomes for young people.	Working within the social contexts impacting young people's lives.	Self-awareness of one's values/beliefs and respectfully approaching differences.	Preventing corruption or advancing self/organisational interests over youth interests.
Upholding integrity and not bringing disrepute to the profession.	Encouraging ethical reflection, debates and discussions.	Promoting socially just practices and challenging oppressive behaviours/policies.	Practising self-care to remain effective in the role.

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135. See Sarah Banks' excellent talk on this subject: available at www.slideshare.net/POYWE/key-note-speech-1 -sarah-banks.

Useful resources

► Ethical standards in youth work and how they support education and the career pathways of youth workers, see https://go.coe.int/qSjvE.

► Youth workers: values and ethics (a podcast), see https://share.transistor.fm/s/4d841640.

► T-Kit 14 – Value-based learning in mobility projects, see https://go.coe.int/iQCFQ.

5.5.3. Quality in youth work: strategic principles, direction and goals

Quality in youth work encompasses a set of principles, standards and practices aimed at ensuring the effectiveness, relevance and ethical conduct of programmes and activities designed to support and empower young people. Quality youth work is founded on principles of inclusivity, participation and positive outcomes for young people. Professionalism and ethical conduct are fundamental aspects of quality youth work.

Quality assurance measures and mechanisms underpin various schemes aimed at promoting high-quality youth work practices, based on a set of principles supporting the work. These can include accreditation schemes such as quality "marks", quality labels, national occupational standards, the certification of training providers and evaluation of youth organisations or youth workers, and awards schemes. All assess various forms and levels of practice against specific standards related to governance, management, programme delivery and impact. These schemes demonstrate a commitment to quality and professionalism, accountability and continuous improvement in youth work practices.

It is essential to develop quality assurance mechanisms and insert them in the strategy documents as guidelines for youth work stakeholders on various levels. This will help set practical measures supporting the work. These frameworks can serve as standards against which the practice can be established and further evaluated. These frameworks can include issues related to structures, policies, infrastructures, conduct, programmes, approaches and the competencies of people involved, etc.

Among others, they can include considerations related to:

► needs-based objectives of programmes;
► clear and specific outcomes;
► the methodological base and data;
► participatory approaches;
► professional competencies of youth workers;
► safety and security considerations (both physical and mental);
► confidentiality and data protection;
► youth worker ethics;
► gender and inclusivity;
► respect and dignity measures;
► internal policies and guidelines;
► cross-sectoral collaboration;

- ► development and learning spaces;
- ► continuity and sustainability of operation.

Developing a youth work quality framework: key steps
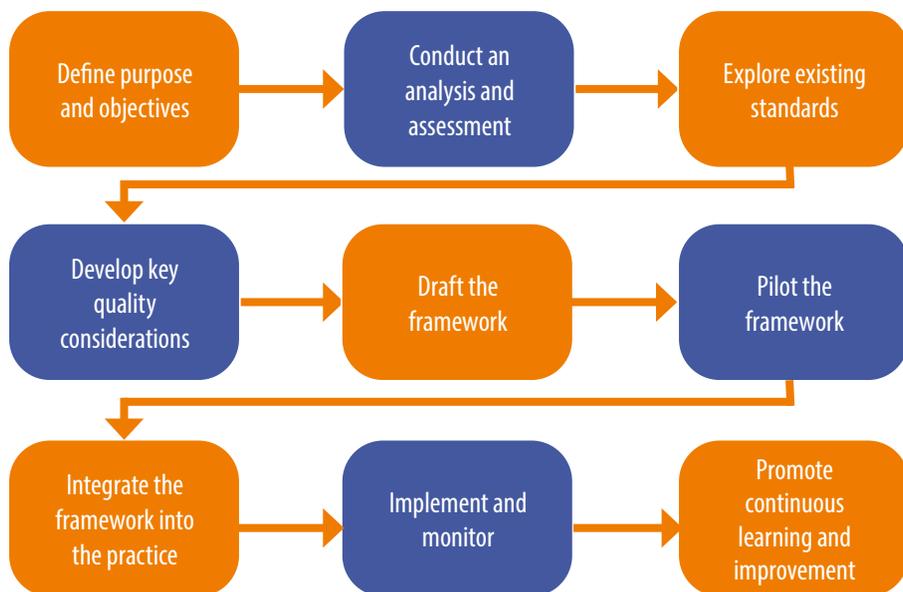
- ► Defining the purpose and objectives: clearly articulating the purpose of the quality framework for your context.
- ► Analysing and assessing: explore the current context and situation where the youth work is conducted. Make a detailed analysis around the existing offer through deep discussions with the people affected and involved.
- ► Exploring standard frameworks: study the good practices related to quality assurance policies and practices, instruments and assessment tools at international level or other countries.
- ► Developing the key quality considerations for your framework: based on the exploration, research and discussions, define the set of considerations and key elements to be included in your framework.
- ► Drafting the framework document: formulate the standards and establish criteria and indicators which can ensure the quality of the practice.
- ► Piloting and testing: try out the framework with one or two organisations or institutions, to check its efficiency and identify any possible pitfalls.
- ► Integrating the framework into practice: develop a support package facilitating the integration and implementation of the quality framework into the work (support explanatory materials, case studies, theoretical materials, professional workshops). Raise awareness of the people involved in the work on the role, value and function of this framework.

- ▶ Implementing and monitoring: make use of the framework and monitor its effect and impact and the quality improvement of the practice. Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan to help in the reflection on its impact.
- ▶ Promoting continuous learning and improvement: encourage ongoing reflection, feedback and professional development among youth work practitioners to enhance the quality and impact of their work over time.

Studies have shown a correlation between the quality of the youth work provided and the outcomes for young people. This is hardly surprising. Poor youth work is unlikely to produce desirable outcomes, whereas proficient practice is unlikely to produce poor outcomes, even if the positive outcomes desired may not always be evident immediately or indeed for a while after young people have engaged with youth work opportunities and experiences. Quality assurance is defined work that needs to be upheld by all the involved parties and it is essential that the defined standards are based on a thorough analysis of the youth work practice architecture and have mechanisms and resources supporting its implementation.

One good example of a quality assurance system and process at a European level is the development of the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres, which encompasses a set of quality standards, informed by the specific nature, goals, pillars, priorities, values, specific areas of work and approaches to youth development and youth policy. Youth centres around Europe can apply for and acquire the quality label. The process itself is supportive of development of the youth centres and can give a boost to improving the practice of applicant youth centres along the way. The quality label also provides training and networking opportunities for the centres holding the label.

Useful resources

- ▶ Youth work essentials: see https://go.coe.int/KLMfa.
- ▶ Promoting quality in youth work practice in Europe: see https://go.coe.int/j5TRv.
- ▶ Tools and practices about recognition of youth work/non-formal learning: see https://go.coe.int/3KYBx.
- ▶ National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for Youth Work: see https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b10560-national-quality-standards-framework-nqsf/.
- ▶ Quality mark: see https://nya.org.uk.
- ▶ A European Charter on Local Youth Work: see https://europegoeslocal.eu/towards-a-european-charter-on-local-youth-work/.
- ▶ The Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres: see www.coe.int/en/web/youth/quality-label-for-youth-centres.
- ▶ Improving youth work – your guide to quality development: see https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47840260-28b3-11e7-ab65-01aa75ed71a1.
- ▶ O"Donovan J. (2020), Promoting quality in youth work practice in Europe: see https://go.coe.int/j5TRv.
- ▶ European Commission: see https://youth.europa.eu/node/31197_en.

5.5.4. Youth worker competencies: frameworks and development

It is hard to overestimate the role of competent youth workers in youth work practice. Any strategy should make sure it addresses youth work competencies and sets priorities and instruments for their development. It is essential that youth worker development is set as a goal with corresponding objectives, standards, support structures and instruments, actions and resources.

The educational and training pathways for youth workers vary greatly across Europe. They are much determined by the existence of a policy and legislation at national level to regulate youth work as a profession, educational and training opportunities in both formal and non-formal systems, the existence of quality frameworks and defined core competencies of youth workers, support and advocacy structures for youth workers and the prospects and infrastructure available for employment and occupational careers.[136] The education on offer for youth workers occupies many points on an education and training continuum, from formally academically validated and professionally endorsed graduate and postgraduate university programmes and vocational education and training courses, to non-formal education and training interventions and opportunities. There are many forms of competence recognition and qualification systems.

When addressing the favourable conditions for making youth worker development sustainable and long-term, research[137] suggests that one can consider eight variables. Within any youth work strategy, it is important to accommodate a strategic approach to workforce development based on these aspects.

Figure 4 – Variables to analyse the strength of the practice architectures supporting youth work

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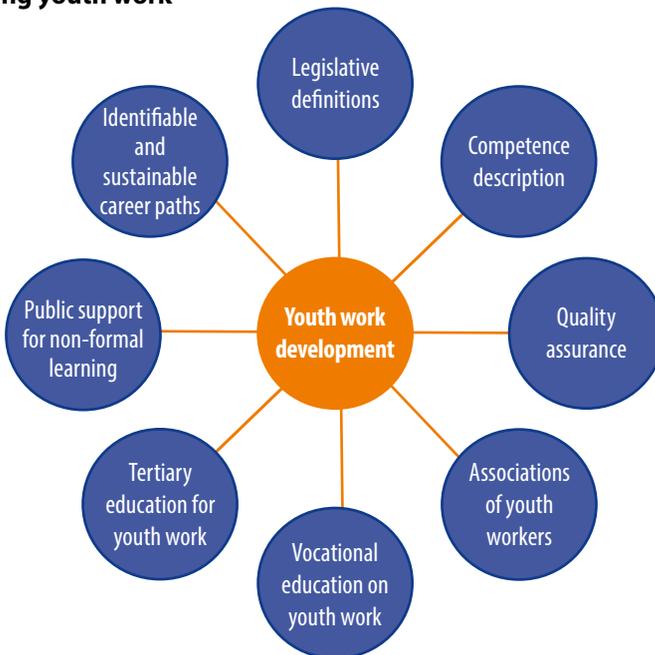
136. Taru, Krzaklewska and Basarab 2020.
137. Kiilakoski 2018.

The choice of a mechanism to be included and focused on in any strategy will need to take into account all the above-mentioned factors to define the best suitable youth worker development instruments.

Competencies and competency development

The question often concerns how to define competencies and how to strategically approach their development. What is the basis of forming a framework? Who defines this in a country? How is it integrated into the strategy and what actions is it connected to? Competence frameworks can define youth worker education content and outcomes, be the basis for curriculum development in both formal and non-formal educational settings, can be defined by or support the development of occupational standards and become part of youth work quality assurance mechanisms, and can act as the catalyst for the development of competence assessment mechanisms and self-assessment instruments.

For the youth work field, in the countries where youth work exists as a profession, the competencies are often set out and described in national-level documents such as occupational standards, qualification frameworks, educational programmes and curriculums. You can find interesting material in the Youth Wiki chapters on youth work. In some other contexts, where the youth work profession does not exist in legal frameworks, the competencies might be set out in youth work strategies, state programmes on youth work, the curriculums of non-formal educational institutions, quality assurance tools, guidelines developed by professional youth work organisations or youth worker associations.

There are several sets of competencies linked to the core of youth work and functions, but certainly these common standard frameworks can and should be complemented with competencies which can be specific to a local context or situation, youth work practice architectures and goals. For example, for youth work in conflict zones or youth work using online tools, the competence areas will be adjusted accordingly. All depends on the way competencies are clustered and seen. One can look into personal, professional and operational aspects, another can focus on the areas/main types of youth work. If there is differentiation between different types of youth workers, then competence frameworks may be adapted, to some extent at least, to define particular competencies for each of those types of youth work engagement, though there will always be core elements that remain the same (otherwise the whole concept of being a youth worker is somewhat in jeopardy!). There is also potential to have differentiated sets of competencies for different levels of practitioner and practice, from beginners to advanced.[138]

In the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio, the competencies are structured around eight key youth work functions that are common in various youth work settings and practices.

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138. Kiilakoski and Basarab 2022.

Competences outlined in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio

Function	Competence
1. Address the needs and aspirations of young people	1.1. Build positive, non-judgmental relationships with young people
	1.2. Understand the social context of young people's lives
	1.3. Involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of youth work using participatory methods
	1.4. Relate to young people as equals
	1.5. Demonstrate openness in discussing young people's personal and emotional issues when raised in the youth work context
2. Provide learning opportunities for young people	2.1. Support young people in identifying their learning needs, wishes and styles, taking any special needs into consideration
	2.2. Create safe, motivating and inclusive learning environments for individuals and groups
	2.3. Use a range of educational methods, including ones that develop creativity and foster motivation for learning
	2.4. Provide young people with appropriate guidance and feedback
	2.5. Inform young people about learning opportunities and support them to use them effectively
3. Support and empower young people to make sense of the society they live in and to engage with it	3.1. Assist young people in identifying and taking responsibility for the role they want to have in their community and society
	3.2. Support young people to identify goals, develop strategies and organise individual and collective action for social change
	3.3. Support young people to develop their critical thinking and understanding about society and power, how social and political systems work and how they can have an influence on them
	3.4. Support the competence and confidence development of young people
4. Promote intercultural competence	4.1. Support young people in acquiring intercultural competencies
	4.2. Promote interaction between young people who come from diverse backgrounds at home and abroad so that they can learn about other countries, cultural contexts, political beliefs, religions, etc.
	4.3. Work creatively on and with conflicts with a view to transforming them constructively
	4.4. Actively include young people from a wide range of backgrounds and identities in youth work activities

Function	Competence
5. Actively practise evaluation to improve youth work	5.1. Involve young people in planning and organising evaluation
	5.2. Plan and apply a range of participatory methods of evaluation
	5.3. Use the results of evaluation for the improvement of their practice
	5.4. Stay up to date on the latest youth research on the situation and needs of young people
6. Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies/ programmes work better for young people	6.1. Actively evaluate teamwork with colleagues and use the results to improve effectiveness
	6.2. Seek and give feedback about teamwork
	6.3. Share relevant information and practices in youth work with colleagues
7. Develop, conduct and manage projects	7.1. Actively involve young people in shaping their organisation's policies and programmes
	7.2. Co-operate with others to shape youth policies
8. Develop, conduct and evaluate projects	8.1. Apply project-management approaches
	8.2. Seek and manage resources
	8.3. Give visibility to projects, write reports and make presentations for a variety of audiences
	8.4. Use information and communication technology tools when necessary

At the European Union level, other frameworks exist. The Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally was developed in the framework of the European Training Strategy (ETS) by the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre.[139] The competence model consists of nine competence areas and includes knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that are interlinked, each one leading and feeding the other. These nine areas are not structured in any hierarchy of importance. They are all seen as aspects of a comprehensive package that is needed to carry out quality youth work at an international level.

139. See www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/tc-rc-nanetworktcs/youthworkers-competence -model/.

Figure 5 – The Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally

Facilitating learning

Designing programmes

Being civically engaged

Managing resources

Assessing and evaluating

Collaborating in teams

Networking and advocacy

Displaying intercultural sensitivity

Communicating meaningfully
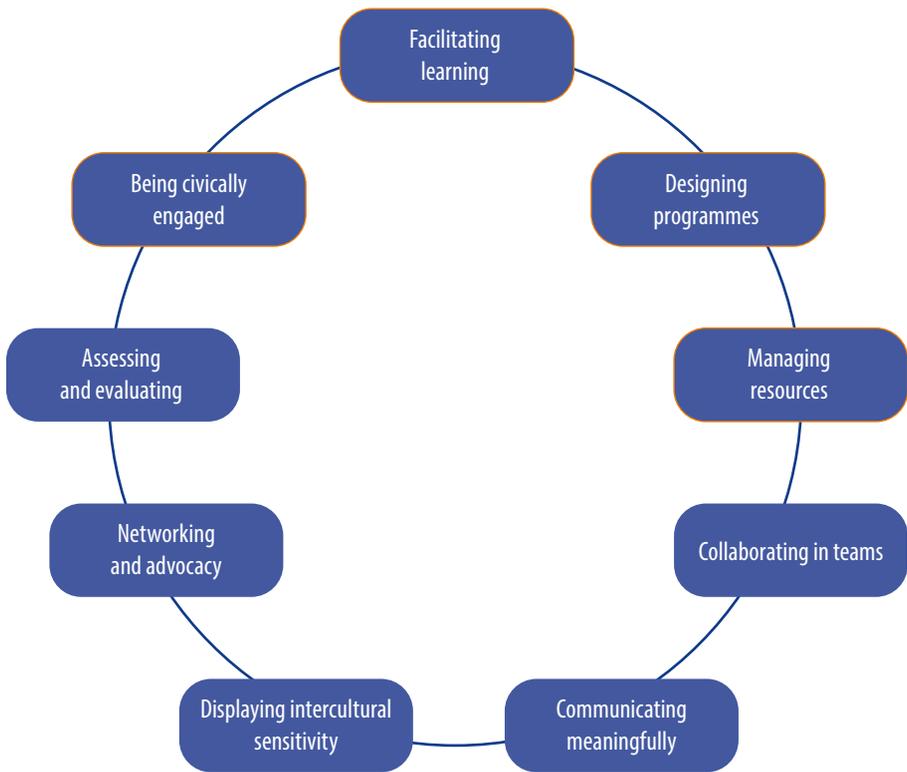
Facilitating learning means establishing dialogue and ensuring co-operation mechanisms with individuals, groups and communities. This means that a youth worker has the attitudes, knowledge and skills to support young people to identify and pursue their learning needs and to then choose, adapt or create methods, methodologies and digital tools in residential and online environments accordingly. Ideally, the youth worker and the young person trust each other. The youth worker actively supports and enhances young people's learning processes, self-responsibility and motivation, and the youth worker empowers young people to improve their personal situation and to stand in solidarity with others to do the same.

Designing programmes involves a good understanding of the different groups and environments that a youth worker works with. This precondition is essential to being able to develop and design programmes – be it with an explicit educational purpose or not. The youth worker applies non-formal learning values and principles in the programmes and responds to the needs and realities of young people, which are more complex in an international context. This competence area includes, implicitly, how designing programmes can involve addressing political, societal, technological and cultural issues in youth work and how it can be opened up to include the wider community.

Managing resources means understanding the values and working culture of youth projects and youth organisations. The youth worker understands the factors that influence such projects and organisations and that these are even more varied in the context of international collaboration and work online. The youth worker identifies leadership styles and assesses the impact they have on the target groups during an activity. They understand what motivates young people to take part in projects, how to nurture this motivation and manage risks accordingly. They consider what is needed to make a stronger impact on the wider community. This competence also includes knowledge of national legislation, data policies and financial resources management, with special attention on the (often greater) number of resources needed to design, prepare and deliver activities of digital youth work.

Collaborating in teams means that the youth worker contributes to teamwork and maintains good working relations with everyone involved with the project. The youth worker motivates and supports colleagues to achieve given objectives. This competence area also includes systemic co-operation and responsibility in an international context.

Communicating meaningfully means building positive relationships with individuals and groups. The youth worker must master interacting well with young people as well as with international partners and can contribute to smooth communication regarding programmes and projects. Communication is one of the key aspects of youth work. This competence area goes beyond simple communication models and pays attention to the notion of asynchronous communication and is aware of the wide range of communication tools available. This area is also about how the youth worker constructively handles emotions, inspiration, intuition, empathy and personalities.

Displaying intercultural sensitivity means the ability to support successful communication and collaboration among people from different cultural contexts and backgrounds. The youth worker must address and deal with attitudes and behaviours behind this intercultural competence in (international) training and youth work and reflect and discuss underlying values. The youth worker approaches "culture" from an identity perspective and understands ambiguity, human rights, solidarity, self-confidence, acceptance versus one's own limits and how geopolitical conflicts influence one's understanding of these aspects. The youth worker takes these intercultural dimensions into account in their work. In the digital environment, this area also means paying particular attention to the issue of representation when producing and using media.

Networking and advocacy involve developing and managing partnerships with other relevant stakeholders. Youth work does not happen in isolation from the rest of the world. Youth workers facilitate networking with others (in their community and outside it) and advocate the value of youth work. They are conscious about (political) values and beliefs at play in youth work and support young people in developing independent political thought.

Assessing and evaluating means the processes used by youth workers for helping and empowering young people, the environment and society to change for the better – supporting the development of collective action and solidarity that stimulate

change and transformation. Youth workers support action that changes policy and practice. This area also means paying attention to the data gathered through online and digital tools.

Being civically engaged means being aware of and taking a principled stance on political and societal issues affecting young people, challenging power dynamics, supporting value-based processes, co-creating with young people and supporting them in their critical civic engagement in their communities, in their societies, in Europe and beyond.

Both frameworks are supported by a self-assessment tool, a living instrument that helps youth workers assess their competencies and set goals for learning and development.

One should bear in mind that these two frameworks are developed by international institutions and focus on international aspects of youth work. Nevertheless, these frameworks have helped a number of member states to set up their own competence frameworks and inform their educational interventions for youth workers.

Useful resources

Youth worker competencies

  ► Most common competences and skills for youth workers in 10 countries: see https://go.coe.int/257PI.
  ► Competence frameworks and competence-based approaches in youth worker education and training in five European countries: see https://go.coe.int/yXoXr.
  ► Visible value – Recognition of youth work online library: see https://go.coe.int/iU19V.

Youth worker education resources

  ► Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers report, Part I: see https://go.coe.int/txdoG.
  ► Youth worker education in Europe – Policies, structures, practices: see https://go.coe.int/rRAqD.
  ► Diversity of practice architectures in Europe: an analytical report based on mapping educational and career paths of youth workers: see https://go.coe.int/f4SmE.

5.5.5. Youth work support structures: associations and networks of youth workers

Youth work and youth worker associations are important elements of the youth work ecosystem and range from professional bodies for youth workers to umbrella groups for youth clubs/centres to training providers and subject-focused groups. They can work on a local, national or international level. They can be alliances, networks or pools of youth worker associations. Local youth work networks may get together for co-supervision or mutual learning and training. National and international

associations may be created and supported by different bodies. In both cases, their creation, support, development and agency can be part of youth work strategies on various levels.

Different types of youth work associations and networks exist, but they can be clustered into a few groups.[140]

National/country-level associations of youth workers	Trade unions for youth workers	Umbrella organisations/federations representing youth clubs/centres
Associations representing broader youth organisations/movements	Subject-specific youth work associations	Training providers for youth workers

5.5.6. Role and objectives of youth worker associations

As with any professional group or umbrella structure, youth worker associations aim to build the capacities of youth workers through training, developing methodologies, advocating favourable policies, facilitating networking and sharing good practices related to youth work in their respective countries/regions.

By focusing on these objectives, youth worker associations can professionalise the field, build capacities, amplify their voice, improve quality standards and create an enabling environment for effective youth work practice. The strategy can assign a specific role to these associations, recognising them as equal partners. For example, these associations, especially where youth work is not recognised at an official level, can be responsible for national youth work training programmes or youth work quality assurance instruments, codes of ethics or, where needed, certification bodies.

As these associations take up advocacy and ecosystem support roles, they can get involved in various types of activities such as the following.

1. Competence development and professional growth

   – Develop youth worker training and development schemes and programmes.

   – Link the research and practice field for knowledge building.

   – Organise long-term or short-term generalist or specialised youth work training programmes.

   – Develop tools and methodologies for the youth work practice with various groups of young people.

   – Offer spaces for professional peer support and learning.

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140. Kiilakoski 2018.

2. Advocacy efforts and campaigns

    – Lobby to support the recognition of the field.

    – Facilitate dialogue within the field with the policy makers.

    – Develop policy and position papers to support relevant causes or react to changes.

    – Co-operate with governments in setting up youth work support instruments.

    – Develop recommendations and models for the field with the relevant bodies.

3. Research and knowledge sharing

    – Conduct and promote research on youth work practices, impact and issues.

    – Facilitate the sharing of best practices, case studies and lessons learned.

    – Publish journals, reports and other knowledge resources.

4. Collaboration and community

    – Create meeting and networking opportunities at national and international levels.

    – Establish, develop and maintain peer support and learning platforms and processes.

    – Develop concepts and implement continuous youth worker support initiatives, awards, festivals and annual events.

5. Ethics and standards

    – Develop and promote a code of ethics and standards for youth work practice.

    – Provide guidance on ethical issues faced by youth workers.

    – Ensure accountability and quality assurance in youth work delivery.

6. Employment support

    – Advocate better employment terms, wages and working conditions.

    – Provide job search support, career counselling and professional development pathways.

7. International collaboration

    – Build linkages and collaborate with international youth work bodies.

    – Facilitate the exchange of knowledge, practices and capacity building across countries.

Currently there are more than 15 countries in Europe where associations for youth workers exist; associations, alliances and guilds at European and international level are gaining momentum (and an Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations in Europe has now been formed).[141] A youth work strategy development process needs to take into account this momentum and find ways to incorporate provisions for these associations to be established and supported sustainably, and to also make sure that they are key stakeholders in youth work policy at all stages.

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141. See www.facebook.com/aywa.youthwork/.

It is important to note that associations or any other umbrella structures, especially at international level, are not very easy to establish, as there are different forms of understanding, standards, practices, levels of field development, potential for growth, recognition, etc. In one country the main role might be the protection of rights; in another, competence development, and in another, policy advocacy. Thus, it is essential to understand the needs and limitations of an associative structure of this kind.

Useful resources

► Youth workers in Europe – Associations, networks and support – Working paper: see https://go.coe.int/WCG9V.
► International Youth Work Trainers Guild: see https://iywt.org/?fbclid= IwAR23ApY5n6j-5NEONDAzUGgwRlNyRoQhH0KCcN3PmqeRa_ikEvpnaanh89Q.
► Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations in Europe: see www.facebook.com/ aywa.youthwork/.

5.5.7. Local youth policy supporting youth work strategy development and implementation

Youth work strategy implementation can be closely linked to the work of the local authorities, municipalities, their strategies and youth work support measures. Structures and individuals involved in local youth policy play a crucial role in enabling the fertile local environment for youth work development within their communities; therefore, including them in the strategy at all stages can ensure support and sustainability on the ground.

The local level is the closest to young people, which means that local policy and practice is very well positioned to address the needs of young people through tailored initiatives that are likely to have most impact in the local environment. Support for youth work is one of these measures that can help young people to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their local context.

Setting up a supportive environment is a multifaceted endeavour, encompassing a wide range of requirements, including defining youth work approaches, facilitating inclusion and access, recognition and capacity building.

There are a number of measures, outlined in strategy documents and put in place by local youth policies and entities involved in youth policy making, to ensure sustainable development and quality work on the ground to support reflection and action, as shown in the table below.[142]

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142. The table is based on Lavchyan, Atanasov and Basarab 2023.

Local youth policy measures supporting youth work development

Building local-level dialogue Setting up a policy mechanism for continuous structured dialogue with those involved in youth work, from practitioners to service providers.	**Youth work recognition** It is essential that the scope of work and the mandate of various entities and individuals involved in local youth work are defined and recognised, giving them clear responsibilities and objectives in developing the youth work ecosystem.	**Consolidation of the local youth work field** Mapping youth work providers and establishing partnerships and collaboration frameworks to identify needs and offer tailored support for quality youth work provision.
Sustainable funding and support Ensure relevant and adequate budgets to sustainably fund the youth work practice, facilitate fundraising from the field with the other actors in the community (private, public, crowdsourcing, etc.)	**Integrating youth work into the community work plans** Include youth work offer, infrastructure, service provision and practitioner professional development into the annual plans and budgets of the community.	**Promoting youth work** Actively promote the field of youth work, formally recognising its contribution to the development and well-being of young people within the local community.
Capacity building Ensuring the capacity development of municipal workers in the field of youth work and its development.	**Facilitating collaborative, cross-sectoral platforms** Provide platforms where local stakeholders, including youth organisations, schools, businesses, services and community groups, can collaborate and support each other's efforts in youth work.	**Ensuring access to youth work** Have instruments and relevant local resources in place to ensure that all young people within the community have access to youth work, ensuring inclusion and outreach to underserved or marginalised groups living in the communities and at risk of exclusion.
Supporting youth organisations Provide financial, structural, infrastructure and institutional support to local youth groups, organisations and youth work providers to help them deliver programmes, in close partnership with local governments, helping to fulfil their own obligations and objectives towards the community in a spirit of social partnership.	**Developing professional pathways** Establish initiatives, frameworks and opportunities for the education, training and professional development of local youth workers and young volunteers involved in youth work activities, tailored to meet the specific needs of the local context.	**Monitoring and evaluation** Implement systems for monitoring, evaluating and assessing the impact of local youth work practices, using data and feedback to continually improve and adapt services.

The European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Changemakers Kit are instruments created in the framework of Europe Goes Local – a European co-operation project (with contributions from national agencies, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes) to develop and strengthen local youth work through ensuring supportive local policies and co-operation.

Among its many objectives, the Council of Europe's "ENTER!" project aims at developing a sustainable youth work offering in the various disadvantaged communities. The projects created and implemented in the framework of the initiative try to involve the youth work community and local governments in a dialogue and joint capacity building to support development in the field. There are several interesting and inspiring projects from Romania,[143] Italy[144] and many more corners of Europe.

5.6. Evaluation and monitoring

5.6.1. Evaluation tools

When it comes to measuring the outcomes in youth work, a lot of issues come into play. A number of studies state that quantifiable evaluation of youth work outcomes for young people risks being partial if there is too great a focus on statistical, numbers-based evaluation. Practitioners comment that often even obtaining data for research, reports and analysis is problematic, as young people feel that the relationship with youth workers, their involvement in youth work and their personal growth are unique and intimate and that quantifying it in numbers, through the completion of dry questionnaires, does not provide good data or a motivation to share perspectives and experiences.

Instead, studies related to youth work apply more interactive methodologies such as interviews and focus groups, using more informal methods of exchange to look at youth work practice, youth workers themselves, the settings in which youth work takes place and other issues relating to youth work contexts. Alternative spaces and processes tend to be set up for evaluation and study purposes.[145] These can include the following.

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143. See https://rm.coe.int/report-training-seminar-enter-covasna-romania-aug-2018/1680939c4d.

144. See https://rm.coe.int/report-training-seminar-enter-turin-italy-dec-2018/1680939c9d.

145. See www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/valuing-and-evaluating-youth-work; and www.youthlink.scot/news/consistent-and-persistent-the-lifelong-impact-of-youth-work/. See also de St Croix and Doherty 2022.

café-style showcase

open conversations with young people

adapted but short and easy questionnaires

storytelling sessions

case studies

social media tools and analysis

creative and artistic methods

audiovisual media

group conversations

peer interviews

personal journey journals

Field researchers aim to develop and use standardised tools for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. However, they should keep two important factors in mind.

1. Field insights disclaimer: researchers should acknowledge that standardised tools may not always capture the full complexity of real-world situations. They should be prepared to adapt their methods based on insights gained directly from the field.

2. Balance between quantitative and qualitative: it is crucial to maintain an appropriate balance between quantitative tools (which provide numerical data) and qualitative tools (which capture more descriptive, contextual information). Neither should be overemphasised at the expense of the other. In simpler terms: researchers should use consistent, well-designed tools to gather both numbers and stories from the field, while remaining flexible and ensuring neither type of data overshadows the other.

In practical terms, the balancing of the qualitative and quantitative methods of research will include putting together the data received from various questionnaires, assessment scales, self-assessments, content analysis, context analysis, focus group discussions, engaged observations, mappings, desk research, expert in-depth interviews, etc. This combination of methods will ensure both understanding of general trends and insights and more in-depth understanding of nuances and specifics.

Most Significant Change (MSC) is an interesting qualitative story-based monitoring and evaluation tool which looks especially into the changes that happen in a person and their life as a result of a structured and facilitated intervention.[146] It provides a possibility to reflect on the way the given intervention, approach or method has steered and impacted change on various levels. Putting together the different stories provides a basis for analysis and assessment of the quality and change the given intervention has evoked.

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146. See www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/most-significant-change-technique-guide-its-use.

At the opposite end of this mainly qualitative method is an instrument called the Social Return on Investment (SROI).[147] This tool looks into change from a long-term perspective and assesses how much the resources invested in a project have created the desired and planned outcomes, giving them a monetary value. This ratio-based analysis helps organisations and structures see the effects of their interventions and make the necessary adjustments for future endeavours.

In recent years, the discourse surrounding social impact planning, measurement and presentation has gained momentum within civil society as well. Donors, social impact investors and organisations providing interventions are interested in analysing, calculating and understanding the long-term impact and value creation of their investments and initiatives. While recognising that not all outcomes of civil society work can be quantified in monetary terms, there is a growing drive to find ways to present the financial benefits of social programmes alongside their social value. This shift reflects a broader trend towards evidence-based decision making and a desire to optimise resource allocation in the social sector.

The MSC and SROI methods represent two ends of the contemporary spectrum of efforts to assess the value of youth work. MSC, popular within youth work, is a qualitative approach that captures the impact through storytelling, though its recognition outside the field may be limited. On the other hand, SROI, respected beyond youth work, is a mixed-method framework that quantifies social value, providing a more universally accepted measure of impact.

> In section 3.6 in Chapter 3 and section 4.7 in Chapter 4 you can find more insights into the role and importance of monitoring and evaluation, examples of setting targets and measuring instruments for youth work strategies.

5.6.2. Evaluation and assessment criteria

One of the instruments which is often used in the evaluation and assessment exercises is the set of six evaluation criteria developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.[148] These criteria support quality, consistent and structured evaluation of various development interventions and are used widely in the youth field as well. They provide frameworks, lenses and dimensions to consider when evaluating an intervention and looking into ways to integrate these considerations in the planning processes. Often they are used to support mid-term and final evaluations of long-term programmes, strategies and work plans. They can become one of the tools outlined in the strategy itself. In addition to serving as a basis to develop evaluation methodologies and plans, they can also serve as dimensions through and against which the gathered and analysed data can be structured and consolidated. The specific questions which will address the youth work strategy assessment and evaluations should be set up for specific contexts to cover the fields of interest. The analysis and discussion of the outcomes of such evaluations should be carefully planned and attended ideally by a joint group of stakeholders to make sure that all the aspects are well reflected.

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147. See https://socialvalueuk.org/resources/a-guide-to-social-return-on-investment-2012/ and https://socialvalueuk.org/resources/sroi-in-community-empowerment-hypothetical-example/.

148. See https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/applying-evaluation-criteria-thoughtfully_543e84ed-en/full-report.html.

The six criteria

Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Impact	Sustainability

Relevance refers to the question of how far the objectives of an intervention respond to the identified, realistically existing needs of the target audience, stakeholders, priorities and policies set out at different levels by different actors in the field, and how far what is done is responsive to the context in which the intervention is made. Relevance also includes aspects of quality of the design of the intervention, its foundation in the theory of change and its adaptability to emerging changes. In the field of youth work strategy, the questions to be addressed would focus on how far the strategy objectives and priorities meet the youth development needs, fit with the overall youth policy and youth work goals and approach, and support and link to the national youth and youth work priorities, etc.

Coherence is linked to the "relevance" considerations and mainly refers to how far the intervention builds on and is linked to other, similar work done in the field. It has both internal and external synergy aspects. Internally, one looks at how the intervention fits with the other interventions of the same institution, whereas the external aspect relates to how consistent and coherent the intervention is with external, international interventions and goals. This aspect of evaluation looks into the role of the intervention as well as a broader effort to address an issue. For the youth work strategy evaluation, the questions could be asked about the role of the strategy and its actions in a broader youth policy, and youth development schemes, at local, national or international levels, or the connection with other initiatives implemented for young people in the given area.

Effectiveness refers to how far an intervention has attained the expected results, often on outcome and output levels. Effectiveness refers to how far the intervention has impactfully, coherently and efficiently achieved the set relevant objectives. The causality of the changes can also be observed when looking into the effectiveness aspect. This aspect is also concerned with the ways of achieving the results, and consideration to different outcomes for different target groups. It is thus essential that the objectives set are as specific as possible for the evaluation to be able to measure the results in the whole chain of outcomes. For youth work strategy interventions, the questions to consider could include the changes steered by the strategy implementation on the life of young people concerned, or factors strengthening or hindering the outcomes.

Efficiency refers to how well the different types of resources have been used in order to deliver to the full extent the expected outcomes of the intervention in a timely and cost-effective manner, and include considerations on operational efficiency, focusing on resource allocation practice. It looks also at aspects of fair, equal distribution of resources. This aspect helps assess whether the results are relevant and justified with the amount of resources used. For the youth work strategy evaluation, the questions could include how efficiently the different types of resources have been planned, used and allocated, and how far support from other contributions has been used in the processes.

Impact refers to the significant changes an intervention has steered on different levels, from personal to global, where relevant. Changes can be positive or negative, intended or unintended. This aspect includes consideration of higher-level changes, transformational changes and results to which the interventions have contributed. The transformational nature of change is understood as "holistic and enduring changes in systems or norms".[149] The impact dimension also includes considerations of changes which can lead to other changes or scalable and replicable results in other similar contexts and interventions. The questions to be asked when looking at this aspect could include the changes in the lives of the young people involved and the potential large-scale impact of the youth work strategy on the systems related to youth.

Sustainability refers to how far the results of the intervention will last, how continuous the benefits of the interventions will be and how systemic the changes will be. This aspect considers the potential of the intervention benefits to continue after the termination of a programme. It also looks at the efforts that have been put in place since the development of the intervention to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the impact, such as local partnership or exit strategies or adaptability to any potential change occurring in the intervention environment. Sustainability evaluations and reflections related to the youth work strategy could look into the conducive environments, risk assessments and mitigation plans supporting the work at its various stages.

Useful resources

▶ *Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union:* see https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/de968c0f-4019-403e-8945-19fd5985b0f5/language-en.

▶ Desk research on indicators of social impact: see https://go.coe.int/mPZOX.

▶ Desk research on social impact tools and resources: see https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/-/desk-research-on-social-impact-tools-and-resources.

▶ The impact of youth work in Europe: a study of five European Countries: see www.researchgate.net/publication/327578922_The_Impact_of_Youth_Work_in_Europe_A_Study_of_Five_European_Countries.

▶ Evaluating participation: a guide for professionals: see https://cp4europe.org/youngminds-eval-guide.

▶ Valuing youth work – Research-informed practical resources for youth workers: reflecting on the value and evaluation of youth work: see https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/valuing-youth-work-research-informed-practical-resources-for-yout.

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149. See www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/543e84ed-en/1/3/4/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/543e84ed-en&_csp_=535d2f2a848b7727d35502d7f36e4885&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#section-d1e4964.

- ► NQS: Monitor and evaluate the quality of youth work strategy and delivery: see www.ukstandards.org.uk/en/nos-finder/CLD%20YW24/monitor-and-evaluate-the-quality-of-youth-work-strategy-and-delivery.
- ► A guide to social return on investment: see https://socialvalueuk.org/resources/a-guide-to-social-return-on-investment-2012/.

5.7. Practices

In the following section, we invite readers to take a closer look at the relationship between youth policy, youth work policy, youth strategies and youth work strategies using specific examples from Europe. To this end, the editorial team, with the support of Europe Goes Local team (with thanks to its co-ordinator, Judit Balogh), identified some municipal practices where stakeholders in the youth sector managed to open dialogue with relevant others and to produce local youth strategies that include an important component around youth work development.

These examples integrate some of the tools and instruments presented above in Chapter 5, elements related to the drafting process, main goals, budgetary commitments and evaluation mechanisms – tangible examples of the approaches depicted throughout this manual through a range of lenses.

In terms of youth work development, current practices suggest that:
- ► a youth work strategy serves as a comprehensive and integrated approach to define, promote and support youth work;
- ► a youth work strategy is also a document that provides the vision and description of youth work, mapping the way for the development and expansion of youth work, engaging the main stakeholders involved, with an emphasis on the youth worker, the principles and quality of youth work, the means of supporting youth work (for example, training, infrastructure, budget), informing an action plan and setting out the contribution, role and impact of youth work on young people and society as a whole.

Of course, each community, depending on the youth work development level, can apply a youth work development strategy according to its development needs. Consequently, when defining youth work, the community of practice highlights the need to focus on the role of youth workers in the implementation process, making sure that the dynamic that comes with continuous changes in the needs and interests of young people serves as a reason to constantly update the strategies.

The reasons why a youth strategy with a focus on youth work development is necessary in communities vary. But the cross-cutting conclusion is that the need for a strategy emerges from the needs and interests of the youth work community of practice in a country and is often designed, implemented and evaluated in co-operation with youth work stakeholders.

Austria

Municipal Department, City of Vienna, Education and Youth, Youth Department

Open child and youth work has existed in the city of Vienna for 74 years. In 1950, as in all other federal provinces, the Provincial Youth Department was established. The City of Vienna – Education and Youth – has been responsible for the promotion, planning, management and control of youth work programmes in Vienna for more than 50 years. The department works directly with over 20 open child and youth work organisations, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services. There are 14 professionals working in the Youth Department, more than 20 associations receive the direct support of the department and around 800 youth workers work with children and young people at these subsidised associations.

Throughout its existence, the department has worked together with other relevant stakeholders – both governmental and non-governmental. In 2019, the first Children and Youth Strategy was adopted by Vienna Municipal Council with the shared vision of further improving the city in the interests of children and young people. Within the strategy, the City of Vienna's Youth Department – Education and Youth – plays a central role: co-ordinating the stakeholders' network, defining the framework and standards and setting the working goals and guidelines for action. The youth workers employed by the organisations that the Youth Department supports also play an essential role in working with other regional and local institutions with responsibilities in the field of youth. The strategy adopted in 2019 marks the development of an approach that enables children and young people to have a greater say in how the City of Vienna develops in the future.

The monitoring and evaluation of the strategy is ensured through funding guidelines, collecting statistical data, well-developed financial plans, definition of objectives and review of the achievement of objectives, mandatory child protection concepts, review of the content and financial concepts before the start of the funding phase and after the end of the funding phase, quality discussions and standardised basic concepts, according to which work is carried out.

The budget for the strategy and its actions are renegotiated annually. For 2023, the budget allocated was €64 346 000.

Lithuania

Elektrėnai region – Elektrėnai culture centre, Elektrėnai open youth centre

At the local level in Elektrėnai, youth work development has been invested in with a particular interest by the local authorities. The development of the youth work strategy has been mainly determined by the need to reach out to young people and bring youth work practice to those places where young people are. At the national level, the youth authorities endorse the development of local youth strategies based on a three-year strategic development plan for one particular youth centre, which includes working directions, priorities and the proposed development of services.

In Elektrėnai, the strategic priorities for the current granting scheme are planned around the support needed for the open youth centre. The youth centre is funded by the municipality but, at the same time, for the development of new services, Elektrėnai Centre submits applications for funding and support to national authorities every second year, receiving grants up to €22 000. This grant covers running costs, including the team development. Currently, a team of eight youth workers provide essential youth work services, including open youth work, mobile youth work and specific activities for work to support the inclusion of young people classified as "NEET" (not in education, employment or training). To develop the strategic plan, the team at the youth centre runs an assessment based on a questionnaire, with over 200 young people answering the questions related to their needs and interests. Based on the outcomes of the questionnaire, a team composed of the director of the culture centre, the municipal youth affairs co-ordinator (a civil servant responsible for youth issues) of the Municipality of Elektrėnai and the eight youth workers were involved in the production of strategic objectives and activities.

The second strategic plan (currently in place) was developed through the same process and enriched with the outcomes of the analysis of national youth work and national youth policy. Several meetings involved young people as well, and the feedback from the working group was permanently included in the proposed strategy.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation, qualitative and quantitative indicators were set. Indicators include the requirements for youth work project funding, including the number of unique service users per year and the number of individual consultation processes. Additionally, the weekly youth workers' team meeting, monthly supervision sessions, annual assessments and personal development plans and annual strategic planning meetings are also included in the work plan.

Portugal

Portimão municipality

The Portuguese municipality of Portimão first outlined a Local Youth Plan in 2018 that was eventually finalised and approved in 2020. It had the aim of defining a local strategy for youth, in several areas of public intervention. The plan – Plano Municipal de Juventude de Portimão 2020-2023 – is one of the main tools for designing specific youth strategy, focused on developing a new culture of youth participation in the local decision-making processes.

The Local Youth Plan was created thanks to the participation and involvement of the municipality, in partnership with other regional entities, who worked together to create the first Algarve Regional Youth Action Plan, called "Algarve 2020: Um Contrato Jovem". Human, technical, financial and consultancy resources were used to develop the youth work strategy.

The Local Youth Plan has been the result of a consultation process, facilitated by the Network Developing Youth Participation at Local Level (DYPALL) in partnership with the municipality. During the plan's design, several parties were involved: student and academic associations; youth associations; non-formal youth groups; sports, cultural, recreational and social associations; members of the local youth council;

youth wings of political parties; schools and universities; local, regional and national organisations, such as the regional delegation of the Portuguese Institute for Youth and Sports and the employment centre; parish councils; and StartUp Portimão.[150] Other organisations related to the youth field were involved. Additionally, students, unemployed young people and young people with fewer opportunities were also part of the process.

The plan is the result of an initial consultation process that took place between June 2018 and November 2019. Stakeholders in the area were invited to be part of a strategic group that followed the process entirely. After these first moments of understanding the process, a questionnaire was sent to all youth workers and professionals with expertise in the area. Through the questionnaire, respondents could indicate both challenges and potential solutions to respond to youth needs in the area. After this first mapping, sessions were organised for different target groups of young people. This contributed to bringing young people closer to the decision-making processes and to the team of the Youth Department of the municipality, as well as ensuring and embedding a youth vision for the plan. Once the interest areas were defined, a youth-friendly questionnaire was launched to understand what the main priorities for local youth were.

This plan is a strategic guidance document for the municipality of Portimão and its youth and reflects a wide range of recommendations and proposals, gathered during the consultation process with young people and professionals who work in the youth field.

Methodologically speaking, 10 areas of intervention were selected and prioritised. The objectives for intervention were created and the resources that needed to be allocated were identified. The plan is being implemented over a 10-year period, between 2020 and 2030. It has two different dimensions: strategic and operational.

► The strategic dimension is related to the main lines of actions, where the strategic axes, objectives and targets to achieve in each priority area were identified.

► The operational dimension defines the actions to be implemented between 2020 and 2030 to achieve the strategic objectives, as well as the operational objectives, the method and the resources to be used and how they will be monitored and evaluated. Each action proposal identifies the organisation responsible for carrying it out and the timetable for implementing these activities and actions.

For the initial phase (2021-2022), three areas of intervention were considered as requiring urgent intervention:

1. supporting the youth associations/organisations, investing in volunteering activities and boosting civil participation;

2. investing in educational and training measures so that school drop out can be tackled;

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150. Programme developed by the Municipality: available at https://startupportimao.pt/index.php/en/.

3. creating employment opportunities, developing entrepreneurial competencies within the youth group, investing in innovation and promoting tourism.

The second phase (2023-2025) builds on the outcomes of the measures and activities developed and implemented in the first phases, while the three main areas of intervention are:

1. improving access to housing for young people;
2. developing opportunities to participate in cultural, leisure and sport activities;
3. promoting a healthier lifestyle, while understanding the causes of risk behaviours.

To identify the above-mentioned areas of intervention, consultation processes with young people and relevant stakeholders were put in place and the conclusions of the consultation process determined the development of the local youth plan. One innovation in the current process is the fact that the co-creation and the implementation of the strategy (local youth plan) are integrating a trans-sectoral work approach, while intersectionality is also a well-defined working principle.

In terms of budgeting, the local municipality did not allocate a specific budget for the creation and implementation of the local youth plan, but several projects and initiatives granted by the municipality are framing the working priorities of the plan.

The measures and instruments created for monitoring and evaluating the strategy were:

▶   meetings with different departments, to evaluate specific strategies and activities, developed in the different areas;
▶   a monitoring framework, detailing all the strategies and activities developed, who was carrying them out, the entities who were mobilised and the specific timeline for each one.

Slovenia

Ljubljana Youth Strategy, City of Ljubljana Youth Office

The role of the local youth strategy of the City of Ljubljana is to boost youth activities and to invest in a systematic approach to developing youth work. The local authorities acknowledged the need to combine, in a single strategy, the efforts and initiatives of the youth sector organisations and groups and to amalgamate resources in order to connect municipal departments and services addressing the pressing issues, needs and interests of young people.

The development process of the youth strategy was led by the Youth Office of the City of Ljubljana in co-operation with other departments and services, the Youth Council of Ljubljana, informal groups of young people, public institutions in the field of social affairs and culture, and local youth organisations.

To develop the current strategy, an initial assessment of the existing sectoral strategies was carried out – strategies in the areas of education, housing, culture, sports and leisure services – while parallel discussions were held with youth organisations to find mechanisms to increase outreach and young people's access to youth services.

The first draft was presented in a public debate where young people could provide feedback and proposals and, at the end of the meeting, a list of 10 key priorities was agreed and advocated by the young people who were part of the event. Later, the 10 key priorities were transferred to the strategy as key goals and measures. The whole process took 11 months (December 2014 to November 2015). A participatory mechanism put in place ensured that the youth perspective was included throughout the process. The key elements of the strategy are as follows.

► The establishment of the Network of Youth Centres in Ljubljana.
► The development of and support for youth work programmes of youth organisations.
► The establishment of a large central youth centre in the centre of the city.
► The allocation of non-profit apartments for young people by the housing fund.

The budgetary commitments of the municipality were attached to the area of youth work development and to investing in the Network of Youth Centres.

To monitor the achievement of the goals and objectives, a mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation process are envisaged.

5.8. Conclusion

The field of youth work has its own development dynamics which are related and linked to a number of contextual changes within the youth field and ecosystem. It is important to note that there are many practical instruments, models, guidelines, manuals and practice compilations created by the field actors to support the very practical and localised work on the ground. Templates and questionnaires for context analysis, needs assessments, policy and strategy development timelines and essential elements are built on a theoretical basis and are applicable in various contexts, certainly with a reflective, thorough adaptation and localisation to the context, dynamics, focus and target groups. The tools presented here are only frameworks and suggestions which can also be a basis for the development of other instruments and frameworks for youth work strategy development.

It is important however, to reiterate that the development dynamics are not driven by youth workers, or youth organisations, alone. A continuous, structured, meaningful dialogue in the field is needed to make sustainable and systemic changes.

Conclusions

Youth work's main function is to help young people in their personal and professional development. Consequently, it plays an essential role in young people's lives. Indeed, different phases of development of youth work – in terms of the recognition of the profession, the establishment of communities of practices, the validation of tools and instruments used – can be identified in Europe. Despite the variety, the essential role defined above will be demonstrated if youth work services are provided in a strategic and sustainable way. And, for this purpose, the development of youth work strategies should become a priority at European, national, regional or local levels.

The end goal of developing youth work strategies is to offer quality youth work services for young people. And, for this purpose, key stakeholders must be aligned to define the vision for youth work. This vision can be then translated into measurable actions, projects and initiatives with a great impact on young people's lives. Relevant stakeholders in the youth field, working on a trans-sector and intersectional approach, are expected to define a clear vision and a strategic direction that would then set the road map for the youth work sector to follow. In this process, it is essential that sufficient resources are allocated efficiently, while budgetary lines assigned to these actions are in place.

The practices presented in the manual also show that setting up the collaboration of various stakeholders to start up the strategy process is complex and challenging, and that it requires a well-executed process to ensure that different expectations and ideas are included in the working process. The working process takes time, effort, patience and negotiation to come up with a common vision. As in every other strategy, the development of the youth work strategy includes the various consensus-building moments, community building processes and the reinforcement of collaboration between different angles of the youth sector. In times of political uncertainty and/or financial constraints, it is essential for the representatives of the youth sector to crystallise a common voice, as politicians would not want to support a divided field.

The desk research and the mapping of practices indicate that time and resource allocation are also key elements of a successful strategy development process. Timing and momentum are important in many contexts, processes have been accelerated when the political scene has manifested a higher interest in supporting the development of youth strategies, for example before elections and political campaigns or when having to complete the objectives of the European Agenda. Adequate and sufficient human and financial resources must be allocated to support the process. Conducting research, organising consultations, setting up working groups, organising rounds of consultation and facilitating communication between stakeholders all appear in the documented practices. Without these resources, it can be challenging to develop a comprehensive and effective strategy that meets the needs and interests of young people and of the youth work sector as a whole.

The development of the youth work strategy should contribute to having youth work measures and services that respond to the needs and interests of young people as well as to the permanent and emerging challenges in young people's lives. Moreover, the strategy should contribute to overall youth well-being and empowerment in the long term. For this purpose, before starting the process, all the stakeholders involved should be aware of all these needs, interests, aspirations and challenges, as well as the social, economic and political factors that influence young people's lives. Prior research processes, identifying existing practices (especially local and regional), peer sharing and learning contexts, at local/national/European levels, and drawing on the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, are all essential to the process.

The manual has been developed as a resource for the representatives of the youth sector interested in the development of a youth work strategy, or in updating and improving existing strategies. It includes both theoretical concepts and essential guidelines for development, but also practical examples and exercises designed to support the steps of the process. The manual may not cover every detailed aspect of strategy development, depending on the particularity of the national or local context. The aim was to provide the foundation for understanding the key principles and practices. Each part addresses the strategy development process from a different angle – albeit within the same six-step frame of reference, but leaves the reader free to consider what elements of theory, practice, case study illustrations and resources they feel they should select in terms of the distinct youth work context in which they operate.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that the youth work strategy, as demonstrated by the theories included and the practices presented, is an ongoing and evolving process that evolves around youth needs, interests and aspirations, which are constantly changing. But by remaining flexible, responsive and open to new ideas and perspectives, youth work strategies are expected to adapt and evolve to meet all these challenges, as the measures, projects and initiatives are constantly adapted to the specificity of local contexts.

Developing a youth work strategy is a worthwhile endeavour that can have a positive impact on young people. By aligning stakeholders around a common vision, working with and for young people in defining the objectives and targets of a strategy and mobilising sufficient resources, in a sustainable and efficient way, while having collaborative processes, youth work strategies can help ensure that young people have access, or improved access, to high-quality, impactful and sustainable youth work programmes and services. Once developed, the youth work strategy should be continuously revisited, renewed and invested with sufficient financial resources for its implementation.

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Youth work plays a modest part in many young people's lives and, arguably, a much more critical part for others. Youth work is about supporting the spaces where young people can have autonomy and develop their voice, and about building bridges for young people to make positive steps to the next part of their lives.

Over the past two decades, a significant resource base for youth work has been established and this manual provides a comprehensive catalogue of accessible material to support reflection and action across the stepping stones that will need to be pursued. The manual thereby moves from theory to action: Why is youth work important? Where does it fit within wider youth policy? How do we strengthen its presence and performance in supporting young people who face an increasingly tough repertoire of challenges in contemporary Europe?

This manual considers how to advocate for youth work, at the local and national levels. It starts by outlining a conceptual understanding of youth work "strategy" within the frameworks of youth work policy and wider policies affecting the lives of young people. It then considers the stepping stones for the development of a youth work strategy – why it is needed, where and how it should start, who to involve, how do you establish and maintain momentum and, eventually, how can you give it teeth and ensure impact and how do you make it happen. Of course, nothing is ever guaranteed, but this manual is designed to give youth work advocacy its best chance. A case study of the emergence of a more professionalised framework for youth work in Malta shows just what can be achieved. Further resources on approaches, methods, instruments and examples are shared in the last chapter.

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