

European Charter on Local Youth Work

A democratic society needs the voices and active participation of young people. In order to fulfil this role, young people need a place where they can set their own agenda. A space where they, together with their peers, can explore, articulate and develop their interests and talents, as well as their ideas for the future. **A space where they get stimulation and support to further develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need in order to reach their full potential as individuals and citizens.** Youth work is this space, and young people¹ are, and must always be, its primary stakeholders.

Youth work is hence a process of learning, not only for young people, but also for society as such. It is a win-win investment, and for a society that strives for inclusion and social cohesion, youth work has an important role to play.



The overarching aims of youth work have been stated in many major policy documents from both the European Union and the Council of Europe². This charter, however, is not a political document. Instead, it transforms these documents into concrete guidelines regarding what is needed in order to establish and maintain quality in local youth work.

The idea of a charter was first launched at the 2nd Youth Work Convention, held in Brussels 2015. In the declaration, it was stated that "The Convention is asking for more awareness of this local level responsibility and to agree with the local and regional authorities on a European Charter for youth work at local level." The motivation was to create a common ground for youth work.

Starting from the declaration 22 Erasmus+ National Agencies in the Youth field together with their partners the InterCity Youth network, the POYWE network, the European Youth Forum and the partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe launched the Erasmus+ strategic cooperation project Europe Goes Local³. The charter is one of the main outcomes of this project. It has been developed through a Europe-wide consultation process, engaging a wide range of stakeholders on all levels, including governments, municipalities, NGOs, youth organisations and councils, umbrella organisations and many more.

It is, thus, created and owned by the European youth work community and concerns everyone, from policy makers to youth workers and young people, who is engaged in youth work and wants to improve it.



The aim of the charter is to contribute to the further development of local youth work. It does this by stating which principles should guide it and how different aspects of it should be designed in order to meet these principles. Hence, the charter constitutes a common European platform for the necessary dialogue on youth work. It is a free-to-use methodological tool, functioning as a check-list around which stakeholders can gather and discuss what measures that might be needed for the further development of youth work, making sure that no aspect or perspective is left out and that youth work provision is carried out in the best and most efficient way. The charter should therefore be considered as a whole and the different bullet points are not listed in order of priority but in order of logic.



Youth work is, however, characterised by its rich diversity, not only in practice but also in how it is organised, governed and financed. Even if the vast majority of youth work has its starting point and takes place at local level, various actors on different levels are responsible for the different issues that are listed in this charter. None of them can meet all of its requirements by themselves, none of them can withdraw from responsibility.

In order to support the discussions on how to apply the charter to different local realities, it is to be accompanied by an on-line, interactive tool-kit that provides different perspectives, explanations, reference documents and examples of good practices related to the different sections and bullet points.

¹ Young people are, however, not a homogenous group. They have different backgrounds, interests and ideas, they might be organised or not and they will, due to these and other differences, have different needs.

² Among these documents are:

- The Council conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people (2013/C 168/03)
- Agenda 2020, Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe
- The Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work (CM/Rec(2017)4)
- Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy COM/2018/269 final

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- ★ to be based on voluntary participation – on young people being active in youth work out of their own will and motivation;
- ★ to be based on and respond to the needs, interests, ideas and experiences of young people as perceived by themselves, thus bringing added value and/or joy in life;
- ★ to be created, organised, planned, prepared, carried out and evaluated together with or by young people;
- ★ to contribute to the personal and social development of young people through non-formal and informal learning;
- ★ to strive to enhance young people's self-determination, autonomy and access to rights;
- ★ to have a holistic perspective on young people and meet them where they are, as capable individuals and primary resources in their own lives and for society as a whole;
- ★ to promote critical thinking and creativity, as well as human rights, democratic values and active citizenship;
- ★ to be actively inclusive and offer equal opportunities to all young people.



★ is developed:

- within the framework of, and in compliance with, the core principles stated above;
- in cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, including young people, having clear roles and mandates and being engaged in all stages of the process;
- on the basis of relevant and updated knowledge on young people's needs, rights and interests as well as on new research and the different forms and methods of youth work that can be used in order to meet aims and objectives;

★ is based on clear and measurable qualitative and quantitative indicators regarding what shall be achieved in relation to young people's participation, influence and learning;

★ allocates resources that are appropriate in relation to aims;

★ contains clear and politically approved local aims and objectives, while respecting the autonomy of local non-governmental organisations;

★ is clearly positioned in relation to and connected with broader youth policy on all levels, from local to European.



- ★ to be set up in dialogue between all relevant stakeholders;
- ★ to transform aims and objectives into coherent strategies and plans;
- ★ to define and establish the preconditions and work processes needed for carrying out quality youth work;
- ★ to continuously exchange information about plans and activities with other local, national and European actors in the field of youth and actively engage in both cross- and intra-sectorial cooperation;
- ★ to counsel and give young people access to a wide range of adapted information regarding their rights as well as their possibilities to take part in different kinds of local, national and international activities;
- ★ to stimulate and support young people:
 - to meet over all kinds of barriers and borders in order to socialise, exchange experiences and ideas, organise, learn from each other and take action;
 - to be active citizens and exercise influence in society, including taking part in political decision-making;
 - to be open to the world and to actively engage in regional, national, European and international mobility and cooperation;
- ★ to articulate, together with young people, learning objectives that they perceive as relevant for their personal and social development;
- ★ to document and make visible young people's non-formal and informal learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, achieved through youth work and to support the validation of achieved competences;
- ★ to provide youth workers with information, education, training and support that is relevant and adapted to local needs and to stimulate and support continuous competence development.



- ★ to act within a clear ethical framework, based on the core principles stated above, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights;
- ★ to be driven by the will to support young people in their personal and social development;
- ★ to create an enabling and trustful environment that is actively inclusive, empowering and socially engaging, creative and safe, fun and serious, playful and planned;
- ★ to see the need for, and seek ways:
 - to engage young people in all stages of the youth work process;
 - to support young people to self-organise;
- ★ to have the competences, i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, necessary for carrying out youth work in accordance with the principles and actions described in this Charter;
- ★ to see youth work as a process of mutual learning and to see the need for constant competence development;
- ★ to be aware of and able to articulate the role and mission of the youth workers, and not to lend themselves to aims and activities that fall outside the realm of the core principles;
- ★ to continuously and critically reflect on how their own actions, as well as local objectives, methods and ways of organising activities comply with the core principles.



- ★ a clear and comprehensive system for documentation and follow up of outcomes, preconditions and work processes in relation to measurable indicators and aims;
- ★ regular and up to date mappings of local realities and needs;
- ★ clear procedures for continuous analysis of and reflection on outcomes in terms of how they relate to preconditions, work processes and activities, and the need for further development;
- ★ clear procedures for continuous updates on new national and international research, trends and methods in the field of youth and youth work;
- ★ common efforts of all stakeholders to cooperate around quality development and adoption of innovations;
- ★ continuous competence development of youth workers based on a clear competency framework in combination with an analysis of local outcomes, needs, strengths and weaknesses.

