

Youth Partnership

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



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Pillar 1: Identity and autonomy **Theme: Belonging**

Teasers

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What are we talking about?

This theme focuses on young people's sense of belonging to the community and society they live in. This covers aspects of equality and inequality (discrimination, **social inclusion and power relations**) as well as the potential ways of improving the conditions of welcoming and **making young people feel 'at home'** through integration and intercultural dialogue. The subjective character of belonging and its relationship with others in the community is of fundamental importance – young people cannot grant themselves the feeling of belonging if those around them do not want them to belong, make them feel unwelcome and put up barriers that make a sense belonging hard or impossible to achieve.

Key issues to be discussed include:

Group belonging

Equality

Inequality

Power relations

Social inclusion

Social cohesion

Integration

Discrimination

Group belonging

Group belonging refers to common habits, characteristics, and ideas may be clear markers of a shared identity.

Young people's identity is often determined by difference: they feel they belong to a group by noticing and highlighting differences with other groups and cultures.

This leads to young people identifying with multiple groups at local, national and international level framed in ethnic, religious, cultural or economic terms.

Group belonging is of great importance in young people's lives, and assuring that young people can identify with a number of groups at local, regional and national level is important in guaranteeing their sense of belonging in the community and/or society.

Source:

Abercrombie, N., Hill, S. and Turner, B. (2006): The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, Penguin Reference.

Equality and inequality

Equality is about ensuring that every young person has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. Equality is underpinned by the belief that everyone should have equal life chances – regardless of differences such as where they were born, what they believe, or the level of their physical ability.

A number of 'equality of opportunity' systems have been designed to help promote equality. Equal opportunities are often implemented through the use of positive action plans to ensure that individuals from traditionally disadvantaged groups receive proper support to compensate for their exclusion, as well as to prevent further discrimination.

Conversely, inequality is a state whereby individuals are denied equal opportunities because of their origin, beliefs and physical or other ability. Inequality can be reinforced through discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation (see below).

Source:

Değirmencioğlu, S (2011): Still some more equal than others? Or opportunities for all? Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.

<http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/-/glossary/E#equality>

Power relations

Power is the ability to influence or control the behaviour of groups of people. Legitimacy of power is crucial - whether power perceived as legitimate by the social structure or not can define if it is seen as just or evil and unfair. The relationship between individuals and groups is defined by the power they wield – and young people in most countries are at the lower end of the power spectrum.

Power relations are essential in shaping social relations, influencing equality, cohesion, marginalization and discrimination. They help understand the processes that produce and sustain poverty and inequality. Power relations approaches recognise that inequality and discrimination can result from the exercise of power - groups can remain poor because of the deliberate actions and inaction of others.

As young people often find themselves outside power structures due to lack of economic and political power, understanding power dynamics is instrumental in addressing their problems and increasing their sense of belonging.

Source:

Hatton, K. (2012) Youth Inclusion and Social Pedagogy: a UK Perspective

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267558206_Youth_Inclusion_and_Social_Pedagogy_a_UK_perspective

Marginalisation

The process whereby young people or youth groups are pushed to the margins of a given society due to a group characteristic: disability, level of education, origin, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or by a structural or power dynamics such as inequality or discrimination (see above). Marginalisation can be the cause of further social problems and undermine the feeling of belonging.

Source:

<http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary#marginalisation>

Social cohesion and social inclusion

Social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation. It characterises interdependence between members of society, shared loyalties and solidarity, common identities and sense of belonging to the same community.

Social Inclusion is the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity.

Sources:

Berger-Schmitt, R. (2000): Social cohesion as an aspect of the quality of societies: Concept and measurement, EU working paper no.14, Mannheim, Centre for Survey Research and Methodology, and Council of Europe: Report of the High Level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st century, Towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe, Strasbourg, 28 January 2008.

Integration

Integration in the context of youth belonging refers to a two-way process by which individuals and groups learnt to live side by side sharing values and norms but also allowing for differences to exist and diversity to flourish.

In its most common use, 'integration' refers to social integration of foreigners, migrants, minorities or of persons living with disabilities on equal terms with the mainstream or majority. In opposition to other approaches to inter-community relations such as assimilation, integration asks not for the abandoning and denying the own culture but implies a conjunction of different cultures. Integration is necessarily a two-way process between minorities and majorities, revoking the situation of exclusion and separation. Integration is a dynamic, continuing process of joining and merging and requires an active contribution from all sides both minority and majority.

Source:

European Commission, DG Integration and Home Affairs, (among other documents: European

Commission: Commission Staff Working Paper accompanying the Communication from the Commission COM(2011) 455 - 20.7.2011: "European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals").

Discrimination

Discrimination means treating a person or particular group of people differently. In a negative sense, discrimination is an action, expression or behaviour that denies participation or human rights groups of people based on prejudice or on a certain perceived or actual group characteristic.

Discrimination may take place on various grounds: age, disability, employment, language, nationality, racial or ethnic, regional or religious background, sex, gender, and gender-identity, sexual orientation. Conversely, reverse or positive discrimination is the policy of favouring members of a disadvantaged group. Examples of positive discrimination include quotas and giving certain groups preference in selection processes, e.g. in employment. The legality and nature of positive discrimination policies varies across countries.

Source:

Law, I. (2007): Discrimination, in Ritzer, G. (ed.): The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

What are the trends and implications for the lives of young people?

To belong is not a personal matter alone, but a social one – 'if one feels rejected or not welcomed by the people who live in that place, his/her sense of belonging would inevitably be spoiled'.¹

Young people's lives in Europe are strongly affected by the **politics of belonging**. This is the process of defining the boundaries of communities, of the conditions for being part of a community and the benefits associated with it, and defining the differences between 'us' and 'them'.² **The absence of this belonging leads to inequality, exclusion, discrimination and marginalization.**

A number of challenges faced by young people relating to belonging arise from the **integration of young people from migrant backgrounds**, and their ability to feel at home in the place that they live in Europe, as well as for the society around them to view them as full members of the community. Rising right-wing populist movements and nationalist policies that define citizenship and belonging on ethnic or racial lines exclude large segments of minority populations.

Other challenges faced by young people relate to **economic insecurity and rising unemployment**,

¹ Jayaweera, H. and Choudhury, T., 2008, *Immigration, faith and cohesion. Immigration and inclusion*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in Antonsich, M., 2010.

² Yurval-Davis, N., 2006, "Belonging and the politics of belonging", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40:3, p. 197-214.

which impact on a young person's ability to achieve a safe and stable material condition, thereby comprising their ability to feel invested in a community. Radical or extremist groups, as well as more 'localised' criminal and social groups and 'gangs', may be attractive to excluded young people but pose a threat to social cohesion.

Policy responses to these challenges include **addressing the root causes of isolation and alienation**, including economic factors or traditional cultural practices that may not be welcoming to new members of a diverse society. Other responses include integration programmes that focus on host communities' interaction with newcomers in addition to programmes targeted at the newcomers themselves, and other initiatives aimed at promoting pluralism and tolerance.

Integration of young people from migrant backgrounds is an increasing challenge due to the increased negative perceptions of the refugee and asylum crisis in Europe and of refugees and immigrants as a source of economic and social tension and threat to European identity:

- The gap between North and South in Europe deepens, raising concerns about intra-European solidarity and leading to hostility against those perceived as 'alien' and 'non-European' (Bertelsmann 2015)
- Sustainable immigration policies are crucial to address demographic issues, and yet the fear of cultural change remains substantial, immigration remains key area of (negative) concern for EU citizens ([Eurobarometer 2016](#))
- More than half of young people in Europe (57%) have the impression that, in their country, the young have been marginalised and excluded from economic and social life by the crisis (57%), making it all the easier to look for and find culprits in foreign and 'alien' groups (Eurobarometer 2016)

The effects of the **global financial and economic crisis** continue to resonate strongly with young people in Europe. Dealing with belonging is an increasing challenge as transitions from child to adulthood have become more complex and individualised since 2008:

- Dependence on others: more and more young people live with their parents ([Pew Research 2016](#))
- Child and youth opportunities decreased since 2008 in most countries ([Bertelsmann 2015](#))
- Inequalities growing: In the EU, unemployment among native-born youth with immigrant parents is almost 50 % higher than among other young people in the EU ([EU Youth Report 2015](#))
- Youth are more exposed to risk of poverty than the general population ([OECD 2015](#))

Questions for discussion:

European youth is trapped in a vicious circle: strong inequalities impact growth and social cohesion; those in turn fuel inequalities. What are the policy responses in your country/community to the issues of:

Perception of immigration, refugee and asylum crisis:

- How do young people in your country/community view immigration and cultural change?
- What are young people's reactions to the refugee and asylum 'crisis', notably in countries/communities not directly affected by it?
- What are the policy responses helping newcomers to feel welcome, and reducing the anxiety of local communities resulting from cultural change?
- How should the youth sector respond to the immigration, refugee and asylum crisis or 'crisis'?

Economic and financial crisis:

- How are young people in your country/community affected by inequality within your country (if applicable)?
- How are young people affected by inequality between the Europe's (and global) South and North?
- What was the impact of the crisis on transitions from youth to adulthood in your country/community?
- What should the youth sector do to address the economic impact on young people's belonging?

What has been done so far in Europe?

Both the Council of Europe and the European Union have been working on youth belonging issues for a long time. One area of belonging work covers intercultural dialogue activities. Intercultural dialogue is promoted both by the CoE and EU through their policies and programmes in the field of youth and in other sectors, such as Education, Multilingualism, Culture and Integration.

In the Council of Europe, intercultural dialogue is understood as an 'open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world' ([White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue 2008](#)). The awareness and understanding brought by intercultural dialogue are seen as means

of reconciliation and tolerance, as well as preventing conflicts and ensuring integration and the cohesion of society.

In the EU, intercultural dialogue is seen as ‘an instrument to assist European citizens, and all those living in the European Union, in acquiring the knowledge and attitudes to enable them to deal with a more open and more complex environment’ ([Decision concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008](#)).

Both the Council of Europe and European Union have long-running programmes and legislative instruments against discrimination. The European Union works towards **improving the knowledge of discrimination** by [raising awareness](#) among EU citizens and residents of their [rights and obligations](#) and also of the benefits of diversity, **support intermediary actors** such as [NGOs](#) to improve their capacity to combat discrimination. **support the development of equality policies** at national level and encourage the [exchange of good practices](#) between EU countries, **achieve change** in the area of anti-discrimination through [anti-discrimination training activities](#) as well as monitor [discrimination of youth in the EU](#).

The Council of Europe addresses discrimination through a number of instruments pertaining to Article 14 of ECHR (prohibition of discrimination, including legal acts as well, educational activities (including those addressing anti-discrimination in [children’s rights](#)) and campaigning ([Council of Europe Anti-Discrimination Campaign](#)))

European institutions and governments have also developed a number of responses to the perceptions of immigration and the refugee/asylum crisis or ‘crisis’. The **European Union** is increasingly concerned with the issues above, having launched its [Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in the Field of Youth](#) and about to launch its [Solidarity Corps](#). The EU is also increased its activities in the field of youth in the context of the migration and refugee crisis and rising social tensions, having prioritized activities tackling [violent radicalisation of young people](#).

The challenges of ‘supporting young people’s transition from education to the labour market, for example by strengthening possibilities to reconcile private and working life’ and also ‘supporting young people’s autonomy and well-being as well as their access to decent living conditions’ were highlighted as issues that should be regarded as priorities for the **Council of Europe** youth policy and action ([Declaration on the Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy – Agenda 2020](#)).

Furthermore, the Council of Europe has increasingly focused on young people’s access to Social Rights in recent years:

- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people’s access to rights](#)
- [Publication Recommendation CM/Rec \(2016\)7 on young people’s access to rights](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#)

Both the CoE and EU have invested considerable resources in **researching** the issue of belonging in the youth context:

- [Youth partnership policy sheet on social inclusion](#)
- [EU - Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society Policy review of research results](#)
- [EU Youth Indicators Dashboard](#)
- [EU Youth Report](#)
- [Council of Europe event - Inclusion through HRE](#)

How is the youth sector tackling this issue (youth work, policy and research)?

The youth sector continuously struggles with appropriate responses to challenges of belonging. There is a number of notable initiatives that address the issues of belonging, including:

United Kingdom – ‘Refuweegee – we are all fae³ somewhere!’

In Glasgow, a group of young people decided to take the matter of refugee welcome and integration into their own hands by providing welcome packs and activities for newly arrived refugees. Refuweegee continues to build links and connections between the local population and refugees.

(Refu -weegee 2017) <https://refuweegee.co.uk/>

³ Sic.