

Youth Partnership

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



European Youth Strategies - A reflection and analysis

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Introduction

This paper addresses the two recent European ‘youth strategies’: the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027¹ and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030². Over the past 25 years, there has been a steady evolution in attention to ‘youth policy’ on the part of both the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe; indeed, both recent documents build on earlier strategic initiatives. Although written for different priorities and purposes, each provides a general action plan for the institutions and their member states. Whereas the EU Youth Strategy is concerned primarily with enabling a strong and coherent EU response to the challenges young people are facing, the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy is more focussed on ensuring systemic development within the youth sector. That said, both organisations emphasise the needs and issues facing young people, as the catalyst for the shaping of the strategies.

Both strategies are, therefore, institutional reactions to the situation of young people in Europe. As ever, the ‘social condition’ of young people in Europe is subject to change – over time, between groups and individuals, for a plethora of reasons – but, exceptionally, current circumstances include the Covid-19 pandemic. Talk of the ‘new normal’ has tended to recede, but it is increasingly clear that there will not be a return to former times, a position that is both imposed by the continuing effects of the pandemic and desired by those who seek to ‘build forward better’. Though relatively recent, the two European youth strategies were composed during the ‘old normal’ and now need to be re-appraised in a new light.

In acknowledgment of these caveats and the overarching nature of both strategies, we analyse each strategy in terms of their European relevance rather than individual differences. The aim of this paper is to analyse the convergences and divergences of the two strategies, and their implications for the further development of European youth policy. After an introduction to the two strategies (chapter 1) and related documents (chapter 2), we discuss the differences and consensus between them (chapter 3). We also identify new issues that we believe will become increasingly important in youth policy in the coming years, based on developments over the last two years (chapter 4). Finally, we reflect on our analysis and the strategies, considering whether the strategies stand the test of time (chapter 5). In doing so, our analysis is at least partly concerned with a reflection on the implications arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, which perhaps (or perhaps not) demands a review of the priorities and focus laid out in each of these contemporary European youth strategies, and between the two of them.

¹ EU Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union youth strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01). URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN> (accessed 25 June 2021).

² Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030. Engaging young people with the Council of Europe’s values (CM/Res(2020)2). URL: <https://rm.coe.int/background-document-youth-sector-strategy-2030-english/1680a0bb33> (accessed 25 June 2021).

1. The two documents and their themes – descriptive outline

Both the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (hereafter the EU Youth Strategy) and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 (hereafter the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy) were the products of wide-ranging consultation and discussion, before adoption by their then 28 / 47 member states respectively. Both documents are influenced significantly through contributions and discussions between the member states. The concept of ‘European’ is, therefore, the common denominator between the member states, rather than just indicative of documentation developed and adopted by a single pan-European organisation. Both documents are rhetorically powerful, invoking – beneath their headline thematic priorities (see below) – key concepts and ideas in the youth field, such as participation, mobility, rights and youth work. There is, however, always a need to consider how well anchored such rhetoric may be, within proposed structures and practices that can translate and transfer it into lived realities. Nonetheless, the frameworks proposed within each of the strategies were designed to set the scene for European youth policy over the next decade – the EU strategy through to 2027 and the Council of Europe strategy to 2030.

1.1. The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027

1.1.1. Context of EU Youth Strategy

Although the EU has been active in youth mobility programmes (starting with Erasmus and Youth for Europe) since the late 1980s, the coordination of youth policy between the European Commission and its member states was only established in 2002. As a result of the 2001 European Commission White Paper on Youth³ – with its four themes of participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding of youth – the Commission and the member states agreed upon a framework of cooperation⁴, through what is known as the ‘open method of co-ordination’. It was followed by the European Youth Pact of 2005⁵ and the 2009 Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field⁶. Each of these documents is a diplomatic balancing act between the principle of subsidiarity, the successive (differently named) Units responsible for youth within the European Commission Directorate of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, and other policy fields like employment, education, or health.

³ European Commission (2001), *White Paper – A new impetus for European youth* (COM/2001/0681 final). URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52001DC0681&from=EN> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁴ EU Resolution of the Council and the representatives of the governments regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02). URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2002:168:FULL&from=EN> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵ EU Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on addressing the concerns of young people in Europe — implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship (2005/C 292/03). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42005X1124\(03\)&qid=1620472790291&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42005X1124(03)&qid=1620472790291&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁶ EU Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/C 311/01). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009G1219\(01\)&qid=1620472947400&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009G1219(01)&qid=1620472947400&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

The 2009 Council Resolution, subsequently described as the 'EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018' and concerned with 'Investing and Empowering' young people in the EU, was the predecessor of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. Developed during the 2008 economic crisis, it had a broad scope and cross-sectoral outline with eight fields of action, from health and employability to culture and education. Its narrative was one of young people as a (economic) resource for the EU, with a focus on strengthening their employability and skills. During the lifetime of the 2010-2018 EU Youth Strategy, many other youth policy (or youth-related) initiatives were also launched, such as the EU Youth Guarantee and the European Skills Agenda (see chapter 1.1.4. on other EU youth policy initiatives).

By 2018, when a new EU Youth Strategy was to be negotiated, the EU setting was a different one. While the effects of the financial crisis continued to be felt, especially by young people, other issues came more into focus. Discussions following the 2015 migration crisis, the increasing prominence of right-wing political parties and Brexit, as the United Kingdom departed the European Union, were among the issues that set the tone and context for a new EU Youth Strategy. The present strategy, which was adopted during Austria's Presidency of the EU towards the end of 2018, places emphasis on young people having their own vision of Europe, and young people being a cornerstone of a future democratic Union.

1.1.2. Goals of the EU Youth Strategy

Embedded in the principles of active participation and equal access to opportunities, and against the background of the situation of young people in the EU⁷, the EU Youth Strategy "supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society". These main goals are expressed in four objectives:

- Enable young people to be architects of their own lives
- Encourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens
- Improve policy decisions with regard to their impact on young people across all sectors (i.e., promote a cross-sectoral approach)
- Contribute to the eradication of youth poverty and all forms of discrimination

Five guiding principles frame these objectives: equality and non-discrimination, inclusion, participation, multi-level dimensions, and a dual approach between mainstreaming initiatives across policy areas and specific initiatives in the youth sector.

1.1.3. Priorities of the EU Youth Strategy

In order to implement these principles and objectives, three core areas were named with the keywords Engage, Connect, Empower. In contrast to the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018, where the eight thematic areas address different policy fields, the three core areas of the current EU

⁷ European Commission (2018), *Situation of young people in the European Union. Commission Staff Working Document* (SWD(2018) 169 final). URL: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b6985c0c-743f-11e8-9483-01aa75ed71a1> (accessed 25 June 2021).

Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027 focus on activities within the youth sector. Implicitly, therefore, the EU Youth Strategy contributes not only to a coherent EU youth policy in general, but also to a strengthening of the youth sector in particular. While ‘Engage’ focuses on participation and engagement in society, ‘Connect’ is concerned with the exchange of experience through mobility. In the area of ‘Empower’, activities are to be initiated that encourage young people to take charge of their own lives by equipping them with the necessary resources and tools. Youth work as a catalyst for empowerment plays an important role here, as it is also prominent within the Resolution of the European Council adopted in 2020 on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020/C 415/01⁸).

The three priorities of the EU Youth Strategy are discussed and elaborated politically in several Council Conclusions, for example on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement⁹, opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas¹⁰, and digital youth work¹¹. With Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps (both 2021-2027), there are two youth-specific programmes that financially support activities implemented within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy.

The EU Youth Strategy includes a range of new or updated instruments designed to implement the goals and priorities of the strategy. A newly developed policy indicators dashboard, organised around these instruments, has been established to assess the progress towards the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. The implementation instruments include the Youth Wiki as a source of information on the development of national youth policies¹² and the appointment of an EU Youth Coordinator. The EU Youth Coordinator will act as an interface between the Commission services and young people, while taking on coordinating tasks to develop a cross-cutting approach within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy. The EU Youth Dialogue and new forms of participatory governance, such as the EU Youth Strategy Platform, also aim to involve young people more in the decision-making and implementation processes of the EU Youth Strategy.

1.1.4. Other EU youth policy initiatives

The EU Youth Strategy is embedded within a larger system of youth-centred or youth-related policy instruments, strategies and financial programmes in the EU. It is not possible here to

⁸ EU Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020/C 415/01). URL: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁹ EU Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe (2020/C 415/09). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XG1201\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XG1201(01)&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁰ EU Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas (2020/C 193/03). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XG0609\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XG0609(01)) (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹¹ EU Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Digital Youth Work (2019/C 414/02). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG1210\(01\)&qid=1620466889972&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG1210(01)&qid=1620466889972&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹² EU Website: *Youthwiki. Europe encyclopedia of National Youth Policies*. URL: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki> (accessed 25 June 2021).

present this system in depth. Nevertheless, a few examples serve to illustrate that, within the EU, youth policy is taking place in many sectors outside the youth sector, implicitly contributing to the goals of the EU Youth Strategy.

With the European Pillar of Social Rights and its accompanying Action Plan¹³, the EU provides a framework for fair and well-functioning labour markets as well as social protection and inclusion. Following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in the EU (see chapter 4.1 and 4.2), a focus on measures regarding employment on the one hand and education and training on the other is visible. Within their Recovery Plans, EU member states are designing numerous measures to respond to the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic; the European Pillar of Social Rights may be one of the drivers behind them. There certainly is potential to insert a youth lens into at least some of these plans, such as those relating to housing and transitions.

In the employment sector, probably the best-known example of youth-related policy is the (now reinforced) Youth Guarantee¹⁴, proposed by the Youth Employment Support Unit of the European Commission's Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. It intends to offer all young people under the age of 30, who are unemployed and/or outside education and training, within four months after they leave employment, education or training, a quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship. Its initiatives are funded through the European Social Fund Plus and the NextGenerationEU fund. The NextGenerationEU¹⁵ fund, established as one foundational resource¹⁶ for driving the recovery plan for the EU during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, also includes elements specifically targeted at young people.

Similarly, in the area of education and training, both the new European Skills Agenda¹⁷ and the 2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training¹⁸ (as well as other documents) aim to support both young people and adults in the digital and green transitions and to cushion the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Both build on earlier documents. The EU youth actions in the field of vocational education and training refer explicitly to the EU Youth Guarantee, building a bridge and smoothing the transition from education to the

¹³ EU Website: *European Pillar of Social Rights. Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union*. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁴ EU Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2020/C 372/01). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1104\(01\)&qid=1621859627527&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1104(01)&qid=1621859627527&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁵ EU Website: *Recovery Plan for Europe*. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁶ The European Union has expressed a commitment to deploy more green digital technologies to achieve climate neutrality and accelerate green and digital transitions in priority sectors in Europe, through the use of NextGenerationEU and InvestEU funds – see URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/shaping-europe-digital-future_en (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁷ European Commission (2020), *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22832&langId=en> (accessed 25 June 2021).

¹⁸ EU Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

labour market. The funding of measures in the field of skills and vocational education and training come from the European Social Fund Plus and the Erasmus+ programme.

Some other initiatives that mention or focus on young people are the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027¹⁹, the European Commission's Proposal for a European Child Guarantee²⁰, DG Regio's Youth Manifesto²¹ and the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Youth in external action²². Each of these policy instruments and initiatives implicitly contributes to the EU Youth Strategy goals of both supporting social and civic engagement as well as ensuring young people having the necessary resources to take part in society. However, it should be noted critically that a glance at these documents show little cross-referencing to the EU Youth Strategy. It could be argued conversely, however, that the spirit of the EU Youth Strategy, especially when it comes to participation and democracy, has found its way *into* these documents, even if that is not acknowledged. Thus, there is reasonably compelling evidence that youth as a policy issue is increasingly becoming mainstreamed within the EU, even though the *EU Youth Strategy* is not.

1.2. The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030

1.2.1. Context of Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy

The Council of Europe, through its Youth Directorate (latterly Youth Department) has been working on youth policy development since the mid-1990s. Though its first explicit statement on youth policy - 'The Youth Policy of the Council of Europe' - was not made until a Youth Ministers' Conference in Bucharest in 1998, the Council of Europe had already embarked on an ambitious series of reviews of national youth policies. In part, the objective of those international youth policy reviews, beyond providing support measures for the countries concerned, was to embark on building an understanding – never a blueprint – of elements of 'youth policy' that might prevail in national strategies across Europe and be assisted through the work of the Council of Europe.

The reviews made a partial contribution to thinking about the first explicit Council of Europe Youth Strategy, *Agenda 2020*²³, launched in Kiev in 2008, with its three overarching priorities: human rights, democracy and the rule of law; living together in diverse societies; and the social inclusion of young people. By 2018, however, after 21 international reviews of national

¹⁹ European Commission (2020), *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027* (SWD(2020) 290 final). URL: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/action_plan_on_integration_and_inclusion_2021-2027.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

²⁰ European Commission (2021), *Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee* (SWD(2021)62final). URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23788&langId=en> (accessed 25 June 2021).

²¹ European Commission (2020), *Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Cooperation Policy*. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/youth_manifesto_interreg_en.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

²² EU Council Conclusions on Youth in external action, URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8629-2020-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

²³ The Declaration 'The youth policy of the Council of Europe: AGENDA 2020', presented at the Youth Ministers' Conference in Ukraine in 2000 was agreed unanimously by the youth ministers of the Council of Europe member states. For more information, see URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/agenda-2020> (accessed 25 June 2021).

youth policy²⁴, the scope of ‘youth policy’ under consideration had become almost overwhelming and the focus of the Council of Europe’s work in the youth sector was streamlined to concentrate on six youth policy themes that resonated most closely with the institution’s primary mission of promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The six themes are participation, information, access to rights, youth work, social inclusion, and mobility. These represented the parameters of deliberation when the Council of Europe embarked on developing a youth strategy to follow Agenda 2020.

1.2.2. Goals of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy

The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy was underpinned by an ‘eco-system’ theory of change, one which was guided and governed by the Council of Europe’s foundational values (human rights, democracy and the rule of law) and informed by seven key principles outlining its ‘distinction’: mutual respect and trust, inclusiveness, sustained commitment, participation, equity, transparency and collaboration.

The strategy asserts the need, if young people are to be enabled to uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe’s core values, to invest in young people on three fronts: through strengthening their access to *rights*, deepening understanding and *knowledge* of young people’s condition and circumstances, and broadening the bases for youth *participation*.

1.2.3. Priorities of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy

To those three ends, the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy has established four thematic priorities to advance their realisation.

- Revitalising pluralistic democracy
- Access to rights
- Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies
- Youth work

These thematic priorities are themselves anchored within a range of Council of Europe youth policy commitments to do with young refugees, access to rights, and access for young people from disadvantaged areas to social rights, citizenship and human rights education, discrimination, participation, and non-formal education and learning. All have a significant bearing on post-Covid-19 recovery thinking and building forward better.

The strategy’s priorities therefore already have strong roots, grounded in well-established and widely recognised lines of development, though also responsive to new challenges facing young people in Europe. For example, there is explicit reference to shrinking civic space and the democratic deficit, both the erosion of youth rights and the prospect of new rights (not least to do with the climate emergency). The third thematic priority accommodates multiple

²⁴ See Howard Williamson’s synthesis reports ‘Supporting Young People in Europe’ Vols 1-3, 2002, 2008, 2017. Available at the website of the Council of Europe, URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/national-youth-policy-reviews> (accessed 25 June 2021).

connections between people and the issues facing them, including the appreciation of diversity and the need for social inclusion and global solidarity, once more particularly in relation to environmental degradation but also in terms of technological development. Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic are acutely pertinent here. Across the work of the Council of Europe youth sector, there is now greater prominence and profile afforded to youth work, and its development is the fourth strategic priority, particularly with regard to quality and recognition, and in support of the values of the Council of Europe, especially through bolstering citizenship and human rights education and furthering the emergence of digital citizenship and intercultural education.

1.3. European states

For those European states that are member states of both the European Union and the Council of Europe, the two strategies are likely to be perceived as complementary and mutually reinforcing. Within such an analysis, it must be acknowledged that the character of individual European states differs considerably, for example regarding demographic, socio-economic and governance conditions. Similarly, young people in Europe experience very different individual lives, and even when the circumstances they are facing may appear to be similar, the way they (can) cope with them is often not. It is well established that families, peers and neighbourhoods affect the life course of young people in myriad ways. Thus, just as it is not possible to speak of 'Europe' as one singular entity, it is also a truism that it is not possible to speak of 'youth' as a homogeneous group. At the same time, it has to be accepted that such differences can clearly only be noted generally rather than considered in any detail within broad strategies such as the EU Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy.

A brief look at the Future National Activity Planner²⁵, though this only relates to those states that are members in both institutions, shows that national youth policy priorities of European states in 2019, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, were particularly focused on participation, inclusion, quality employment and quality learning. To a lesser extent, mental health and the situation of rural youth were also identified as priorities.

Today, throughout Europe, countries are still dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Exit routes, notwithstanding vaccination rollouts, remain somewhat elusive. Recovery plans are generally still being worked out. All European states, within and beyond the European Union, are also reflecting on the suitability of the balance of issues and priorities currently struck within their national youth policies. Certainly, more countries are now paying increased attention to the following:

²⁵ EU Website: Published Results: FNAP. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/FNAP> (accessed 25 June 2021).

- Mental health
- Youth participation in decision-making
- Unemployment and employability
- Social inclusion
- Youth sector capacity-building

These are only the policy areas that were most frequently mentioned at the March 2021 European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) meeting of the Council of Europe. There is no doubt that European priorities, such as the EU digital and green 'twin transitions', the access to rights policy of the Council of Europe, as well as the issue of learning mobility (very much a shared priority of the EU and the Council of Europe) are also on the agenda of the European states. However, a cursory glance at the debate shows that these topics are currently being discussed as cross-cutting issues in the context of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, rather than being mentioned and dealt with as stand-alone topics in their own right. An open question, therefore, to which the forthcoming Future National Activity Planner 2021 may provide an answer, is to what extent national priorities have been revised since the onset of the pandemic.

2. Related literature

The aim of this paper is to provide - particularly in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences – an interpretation of the two strategies that may contribute to a perspective for their implementation. In our view, this is not possible without considering wider academic and policy literature of relevance to the European youth field. This literature goes beyond what the Council of Europe, in its strategy, calls its ‘main aquis in the field of youth policy’ (referred to in general terms, above) and the European Union’s sequence of Council Conclusions and wider policy instruments relating to the youth field (also referred to in general terms, above).

We have in mind, using the policy challenge of youth unemployment by way of example, some more ‘classical’ pre-Covid publications by institutions such as Eurofound (2016) on the diversity of NEETs²⁶ and by recent academic literature such as Hans-Uwe Otto et al. (2017) on empowering young people and the capability approach²⁷, Bjørn Hvinden et al. (2019) on youth unemployment and job insecurity²⁸, and Jacqueline O’Reilly et al. (2019) on transition of youth labor²⁹, together with more recent Covid-19 related analyses of the topic.

A range of topics might be considered in this way, covering established youth policy areas such as education, health, housing, youth work and mobility, as well as areas of inquiry often more contained within academic youth research studies, such as migration, far-right activism, the impact of technology on youth culture and relationships, transnational gangs, social movements, and the circumstances of specific ‘vulnerable groups’, as well as more theoretical formulations such as ‘silences’ and ‘power’ in youth research.

Similarly, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact, there has been a deluge of commentary and analysis at every level of political governance, for example the impact on young people (cf. ILO et al. 2020³⁰; OECD 2020³¹; Association for Young People’s Health

²⁶ Eurofound (2016), *Exploring the diversity of NEETs*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. URL: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2016/labour-market-social-policies/exploring-the-diversity-of-neets> (accessed 25 June 2021).

²⁷ Otto, H.-U., Egdell, V., Bonvin, J.-M. & Atzmüller, R. (2017), *Empowering Young People in Disempowering Times: Fighting Inequality through Capability Oriented Policy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

²⁸ Hvinden, B., Hyggen, C., Schoyen, M.A. & Sirovátka, T. (2019) *Youth Unemployment and Job Insecurity in Europe: Problems, Risk Factors and Policies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing; Hvinden, B., O’Reilly, J., Schoyen, M.A. & Hyggen, C. (2019) *Negotiating Early Job Insecurity: Well-Being, Scarring and Resilience of European Youth*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

²⁹ O’Reilly, J., Leschke, J., Ortlieb, R., Seeleib-Kaiser, M. & Villa, P. (2019), *Youth Labor in Transition: inequalities, mobility and policies in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁰ International Labour Organization, European Youth Forum, United Nations Human Rights Office, UN Major Group on Children and Youth, AIESEC (2020), *Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being*. Report. URL: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS_753026/lang-en/index.htm (accessed 25 June 2021).

³¹ OECD (2020), *Youth and COVID-19. Response, Recovery and Resilience*. Report. URL: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134356-ud5kox3g26&title=Youth-and-COVID-19-Response-Recovery-and-Resilience (accessed 25 June 2021).

2021³²), on the youth sector (cf. RAY-COR³³; Youth Partnership 2020³⁴; YouthLink 2020³⁵) and on youth work and youth policy responses (cf. BJR 2020³⁶; Welsh Government 2020³⁷). A range of academic literature – mostly country studies – shed light on different facets of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people's lives (cf. Blom et al. 2020³⁸; Orgilés et al. 2020³⁹; Ranta et al. 2020⁴⁰) and on the life and work of youth workers (cf. Batsleer et al. 2020⁴¹).

Finally, from an academic and sociological point of view, it is important not only to consider mainstream perspectives on young people and youth policy. The diversity that exists in European countries, both politically and socially, must also be borne in mind. Academic literature dealing with the epistemologies of global South (cf. Bessant and Watts 2014⁴²), feminist and/or intersectional perspectives complement and enrich the youth policy and youth sociology debate⁴³.

These are only examples of the extensive literature related to youth, youth policy and youth work that cannot be mentioned here in its entirety, but which should be kept in mind in further analysis and discussions on any revisions to the strategies in the light of the current situation.

³² Hagell, A. (2021), *Summarising what we know so far about the impact of Covid-19 on young people*. London: Association for Young People's Health. URL: <https://www.youngpeopleshealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Impact-of-Covid-19-on-young-people-briefing.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

³³ Böhler J., Karsten, A. & Pitschmann, A. (2020), *The impact of the corona pandemic on youth work in Europe*. RAY-COR Policy Brief. URL: https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAY-COR_Policy-Brief-September_20200915.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

³⁴ Youth Partnership (2020), *Effects of Covid-19 across youth work and youth activities. Summary of the survey launched by the CMJ working group on responses to Covid-19*. URL: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/CMJ+survey+PEYR+final.pdf/3bae8038-2744-c280-6cae-08d670b8489e> (accessed 25 June 2021).

³⁵ National agency for youth work Scotland YouthLink (2020), *The Covid-19 Crisis. Impact on Youth Work and Young People. A survey of Scotland's Youth Work Sector Leaders*. URL: <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4511/survey-report-final.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

³⁶ Bayerischer Jugendring Website (2020, updated 2021), *Hinweise zum Umgang mit Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2)*. URL: <https://www.bjr.de/service/umgang-mit-corona-virus-sars-cov-2.html> (accessed 25 June 2021).

³⁷ Welsh Government Website (2020, updated 2021), *Youth work services guidance: coronavirus*. URL: <https://gov.wales/youth-work-services-guidance-coronavirus> (accessed 25 June 2021).

³⁸ Blom, A. G., Cornesse, C., Friedel, S., Krieger, U., Fikel, M., Rettig, T., Wenz, A., Axenfeld, J., Möhring, K., Naumann, E., Reifenscheid, M., Lehrer, R. & Juhl, S. (2020), High Frequency and High Quality Survey Data Collection: The Mannheim Corona Study. In: *Survey Research Methods* 14 (2), pp. 171–178. DOI: 10.18148/SRM/2020.V14I2.7735.

³⁹ Orgilés, M., Morales, A., Delvecchio, E., Mazzeschi, C. & Espada, J. P. (2020), *Immediate psychological effects of the COVID-19 quarantine in youth from Italy and Spain*. DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/5bpfz.

⁴⁰ Ranta, M., Silinskas, G. & Wilska, T.-A. (2020), Young adults' personal concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland: an issue for social concern. In: *IJSSP* 40 (9/10), pp. 1201–1219. DOI: 10.1108/IJSSP-07-2020-0267.

⁴¹ Batsleer, J., Beever, E., de St. Croix, T., Jones, K., McVeigh, G., Smith, C. & Amin, H. (2020), Youth Work in a Time of Covid – July and August diaries: We Are Seeing the Value of Youth Work. In: *Youth and Policy Online Journal*. URL: <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/youth-work-in-a-time-of-covid2/> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁴² Bessant, J. & Watts, R. (2014) 'Cruel optimism': a southern theory perspective on the European Union's Youth Strategy, 2008–2012, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 19:sup1, pp. 125-140. DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2013.833957.

⁴³ This argument was reflected upon at the World Forum of the International Sociological Association 2021 by Geoffrey Pleyers, Vice-President for Research at the International Sociological Association.

3. Connecting points and practical implications – reflective analysis of divergences and convergences within the strategies

The two European youth strategies should not be compared, or contrasted, in any simplistic way. Their parent institutions have quite different reach, roles and responsibilities across Europe and, inevitably, their youth strategies reflect different objectives, both within and beyond the youth sector. The Council of Europe is a relatively small intergovernmental organisation, and its Youth Sector Strategy sets the course for what it wants to achieve within its own programmes over the next ten years. One focus is on working with youth organisations, youth associations and ministries as multipliers to implement the goals of the Youth Sector Strategy. It has modest direct financial support through the European Youth Foundation but is otherwise largely reliant on the human resources that can be leveraged through its extensive ‘community of practice’. The EU, on the other hand, is a large supranational organisation that has its own financial programmes and aims directly at improving the situation of young people in Europe. In addition to working with multipliers and service providers such as the National Agencies for Erasmus+, the EU also reaches young people directly through its financial programmes. Furthermore, both strategies have different reporting mechanisms. While the EU relies on a well-defined monitoring system based on regular reporting obligations of member states (e.g. Future National Activity Planner, EU Youth Report, Youth Wiki), policy interests and priorities of Council of Europe member states are discussed in the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), composed of its Advisory Council on Youth (AC) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ).

Nevertheless, in recent years, notwithstanding some palpable differences that still exist (and which we note below), there are also some striking convergences and similarities. This shared agenda is more than rhetorical aspiration and has indeed, notably in the field of youth work, been strengthened further since the publication of the strategies. The cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe through the Youth Partnership⁴⁴, especially around youth work and youth research, has assisted this development.

3.1. The common core between the two strategies

The strategies have a common basis in terms of content, which can be identified through five themes: values-based European culture, opportunity-oriented approach, participation, inclusion, and youth work.

⁴⁴ Formally described as the EU-Council of Europe partnership in the field of youth, but commonly known as the Youth Partnership.

3.1.1. Values-based European culture

Both strategies place firm emphasis on the importance of young people for the future of Europe, explicitly through cementing their attachment and commitment to a *values-based* European culture. This has always been the central platform of the work in the youth field by the Council of Europe. And while the Council of Europe admits to having to re-position itself in contemporary Europe, “its values and its mission remain as pertinent and paramount as ever, to be sustained, promoted and renewed through its impact on the next generation”. In the EU, young people have long been accorded a crucial role in “meeting the many (...) challenges and opportunities facing the European Union”⁴⁵. In the present EU Youth Strategy, the role of a values-based European culture, as defined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union⁴⁶, has been highlighted. The EU Youth Strategy seeks to “encourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change inspired by *EU values and a European identity*” (emphasis added).

3.1.2. Opportunity-oriented approach

National youth policies in many countries have often been shaped significantly by a ‘problem-oriented’ approach, endeavouring to tackle a range of problematic issues either caused or experienced by young people (see Wallace & Bendit 2009; Chevalier 2019⁴⁷). In contrast, both current European youth strategies subscribe to a committed ‘opportunity-focused’ approach, though whereas the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy conveys the need for the youth sector to *extend* opportunities to young people, the EU Youth Strategy is concerned with equipping young people with the resources to *seize* opportunities that are available to them. Such differences may be more than just terminological and semantic and are related to the respective focus of the strategies.

3.1.3. Participation and democratic governance

A major concern in contemporary Europe is a perfect storm that combines the alleged decline in political participation by young people, the growth of populism in several member states, and the ‘shrinking civic space’ for alternative forms of association and protest. Both youth strategies address this concern. The first thematic priority of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy is ‘Revitalising pluralistic democracy’ through both reasserting its “established portfolio of work on youth participation in decision-making and active citizenship” as well as addressing emergent challenges around the shrinking space for civil society. The EU Youth Strategy is emphatic that “engaging young people has to be a cornerstone of the future EU youth policy cooperation”, thus aiming towards “a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people”. With the EU Youth Dialogue as an instrument of

⁴⁵ see footnote 6.

⁴⁶ EU Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012/C 326/01). URL: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c382f65d-618a-4c72-9135-1e68087499fa.0006.02/DOC_1&format=PDF (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁴⁷ Wallace, C. & Bendit, R. (2009), Youth Policies in Europe: Towards a Classification of Different Tendencies in Youth Policies in the European Union. In: *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 10(3), pp. 441-458; Chevalier, T. (2019), Young people, between policy and politics. In: *French Politics*, 17, pp. 92-109. DOI: 10.1057/s41253-018-0076-7.

the EU Youth Strategy, young people's engagement and political participation within the EU and society at large is advanced.

Within both strategies, participatory governance is viewed as a key instrument for overseeing their implementation and effectiveness, sustaining a "high-level co-management system, where decisions are made jointly by representatives of youth organisations and governments" (Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy) and acknowledging young people as experts of their own lives (EU Youth Strategy). The European Youth Goals, developed by young people as their vision for Europe, function as a reference in both the EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Council Documents (see chapter 3.2.2. on the role of youth goals in the EU Youth Strategy). Participatory governance by young people is thus considered to legitimise the implementation and outcomes of youth policies. At the same time, it increases visibility and acknowledgement of youth policies among young people as stakeholders in the strategies.

3.1.4. Inclusion

Both strategies emphasise the importance of the (social) inclusion of young people, closely linking inclusion and countering discrimination. Inclusion is one of the five guiding principles of the EU Youth Strategy, where the EU emphasises that the different needs, backgrounds, life situation and interests of young people should lead to different (inclusive) activities and policies. Special attention is given to young people "with fewer opportunities and/or those whose voices may be overlooked". The Council of Europe takes a slightly different view on inclusion, pointing out the relationship between inclusion and the exercise of democratic citizenship. Similarly, inclusion is one of the cornerstones of youth work as conceptualised within the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work⁴⁸ and the recent Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention⁴⁹.

3.1.5. Youth work

'Youth work', both conceptually and practically, was relatively invisible in previous European youth strategies. Two professional European Youth Work Conventions, in 2010 and 2015, have helped to put youth work on the European youth policy map. Each Convention led to political acknowledgement of its value, first through an EU Resolution on youth work in 2010⁵⁰ and then through a Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work in 2017⁵¹. As a result of these developments, youth work has risen to prominence as a key theme within the EU youth strategy (notably in relation to 'Empower') and is an explicit thematic priority with the Council of Europe strategy. In both strategies, youth work is mentioned as a catalyst for all

⁴⁸ Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work and explanatory memorandum (CM/Rec(2017)4). URL: <https://rm.coe.int/cmrec-2017-4-and-explanatory-memorandum-youth-work-web/16808ff0d1> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁴⁹ 3rd European Youth Work Convention (2020), *Final Declaration: Signposts for the Future*. Bonn, 7-10 December 2020. URL: https://www.eywc2020.eu/downloads/doctrine/WebforumVeranstaltungenWebsiteBundle:Media-file-54/EN_3rd%20EYWC_final%20Declaration.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵⁰ EU Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on youth work (2010/C 327/01). URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A42010Y1204%2801%29> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵¹ see FN 48.

priority fields. Rather than being considered as a horizontal issue, both EU and Council of Europe member states agreed upon identifying youth work as a stand-alone priority in order to emphasise its importance and the growing need for its wider recognition. Both strategies, following the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work, included advocacy for a European Youth Work Agenda, a commitment bolstered during Germany's Presidency of the European Union in 2020, under which a Resolution on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda was adopted. Shortly afterwards, a 3rd European Youth Work Convention paved the way for a 'Bonn process' to take forward the implementation of the Agenda.

Youth work is, arguably, the most important thematic area for cooperation by the two institutions, as it is the only issue where there is a stated intent of collaboration and convergence between them. In addition to their current involvement in the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, the cross-references to processes and documents, especially in the framework of the Youth Partnership, should also be mentioned here. For example, the work of the Expert group convened by the Youth Partnership on researching education and career paths of youth workers⁵² played an important role in the EU Council Conclusions on the education and training of youth workers (2019)⁵³. Similar thematic and institutional overlaps took place in 2018 and 2019 in initiatives on youth work, migration and refugees⁵⁴.

3.2. Differences between the two strategies

Despite these common directions in the two strategies, there are also some striking differences. These include the rationale behind each strategy, the role of the European Youth Goals, new situations and challenges, and learning.

3.2.1. The rationale behind each strategy

The two strategies have *different drivers*. This should not be a surprise given the quite different provenance and contemporary objectives of their 'parent' institutions. The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy has at its heart the question of youth rights and the imperative of democratic renewal at a time of what has come to be known as 'shrinking civic space' for young people. In contrast, though democratic engagement is not unimportant to

⁵² Youth Partnership Expert group on researching education and career paths of youth workers (2017-2019). URL: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/expert-group-researching-education-career-paths-youth-workers> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵³ EU Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on education and training of youth workers (2019/C 412/03). URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52019XG1209%2801%29&qid=1620485032248> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵⁴ EU Council conclusions on the role of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters (2018/C 441/03). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG1207\(02\)&qid=1620485219510&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG1207(02)&qid=1620485219510&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021); Pisani, M., Basarab, T., Bello, B. & Laine, S. (eds) (2018), *Between insecurity and hope. Reflections on youth work with young refugees*. Strasbourg Cedex: Council of Europe publishing. URL: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/between-insecurity-and-hope> (accessed 25 June 2021).

the European Union, its Youth Strategy is more focused on addressing the challenges young people are facing, supporting them in the youth phase and the various transitions accompanying this stage of life. This difference is also clear from the name of the strategies: while the Council of Europe strategy takes a systemic approach with a ‘youth sector strategy’, the EU chooses a target group approach, speaking of a ‘youth strategy’.

3.2.2. The voice of young people in European youth policy

Both strategies refer to the interests of young people as being a basis for youth policy. However, the way these interests are integrated in youth policy is rather different. The Council of Europe youth policy agenda is embedded within a *co-management* structure that has been in place since the 1990s. Often described as ‘pioneering’, co-management combines the voice of young Europeans and that of member states. Through the Advisory Council of Youth, young people raise and advance issues on equal terms with public authorities responsible for youth affairs. Current examples are the focus on rural youth, democracy and artificial intelligence, and climate change.

The EU does not have a co-management structure. Rather, it relies on the 11 European Youth Goals⁵⁵, composed during the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue of the European Union, as representing the vision of young people for Europe. It is noted that these were “widely welcomed by Ministers in the following EU Youth Council policy debate” and, though they do not constitute legally binding goals, it is suggested that, within their respective competences, both member states and the European Commission should draw their inspiration from the European Youth Goals and endeavour, wherever possible, to include this vision “in all related policies and agendas”. The political importance of the Youth Goals for EU youth policy is illustrated by the fact that the Council Conclusions adopted since their launch regularly refer to them. Reporting mechanisms, such as the Future National Activity Planner, also ask about the relevance of the youth goals for national policy priorities. Thus, though ‘only’ an Annex within the EU Youth Strategy, the European Youth Goals have a far-reaching impact on EU youth policy.

3.2.3. New situations and challenges

Very little is said in either strategy about the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the lives of young people or the governance of the internet, though the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy does observe that “Young people are also affected by major global issues such as dealing with *newly* emerging technologies including artificial intelligence...” (emphasis original) and asserts that it is “alert to the impact of technology, artificial intelligence and the digital space”. Similarly, the EU Youth Strategy notes that technological change is one of several drivers for uncertainties young people face about their future. At the same time, it is remarked that “this generation is [...] especially skilled in using Information and Communication Technologies and social media”. The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly positioned such technologies and the digital space centre stage, for multiple reasons, posing both opportunities and threats for young people that were hardly foreseen when the strategies were produced.

⁵⁵ Youth Goals Website. URL: <https://youth-goals.eu/> (accessed 25 June 2021).

In contrast, the climate crisis has been prominent for some years, yet it, too, gets relatively little attention in the strategies. Despite this issue being widely broadcast for some time, it is referred to as being a ‘new’ challenge or emerging issue. Once more, the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy alludes to it, in the context of young people’s lives being concerned with “creating pathways to sustainable development”, and states that it is “attentive to environmental threats and environmental degradation”. In various passages, climate change, along with artificial intelligence and internet governance, is mentioned as one of the new situations and challenges to which appropriate responses need to be found. In the EU, the so-called ‘twin transitions’ of digitalisation and climate change are now political priorities of the new European Commission under President Ursula von der Leyen. Adopted prior to the instalment of the new European Commission, the EU Youth Strategy does not mention sustainability or climate change. However, the environment is the focus of #10 of the European Youth Goals (see chapter 3.2.2. on the role of youth goals in the EU Youth Strategy), where it is stated forcefully that “Becoming sustainable is not a choice, it is an obligation”. Similarly, young people define climate change and environmental degradation as a top priority for the EU in a recent Eurobarometer (March 2019), the regular public opinion survey on behalf of the European Commission, ahead of inequality, employment, health, and human rights.

3.2.4. Learning

Both strategies address what is now increasingly referred to, globally (see Williamson 2019⁵⁶), as ‘non-formal education and learning’. This, in the EU context, is portrayed as non-formal and informal learning⁵⁷, while the Council of Europe talks about specific non-formal education and learning approaches that promote its values. Both strategies discuss this specifically and explicitly in relation to the practice of ‘youth work’, which has become more prominent at a European level since agreeing its ‘common ground’ through the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention⁵⁸. However, there are differences in their approach as well. In the EU Youth Strategy, there is a focus on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through youth work as a way of being beneficial to young people with few or no formal qualifications, thus improving their employability. Similarly, the validation and recognition of skills gained in the context of non-formal and informal learning through solidarity and volunteering activities are important. Beyond recognition, the EU strategy also expresses the wish to focus on quality and innovation in youth work. The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy takes a slightly different approach, focussing on the extension of access and attractiveness of non-formal education and learning provision and opportunities.

⁵⁶ Williamson, H. (2019), *What is Non-Formal Education*. Video for the World Non-Formal Education Forum, Rio de Janeiro, 9-11 December 2019. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUT2KqIMAGA> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵⁷ EU Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01) (2012/C 398/01). URL: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN) (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵⁸ 2nd European Youth Work Convention (2015), *Final Declaration: Making a world of Difference*, Brussels, 27-30 April 2015. URL: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85 (accessed 25 June 2021).

4. Emergent issues and arguments

Although, following the statutes of the Council of Europe and the EU, European states are based on similar values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, they simultaneously have different modes of governance, different ways of living, different ways of organising society and, subsequently, different views on young people and how young people contribute to society. This of course has implications for the two strategies, their implementation both at a European level and in the European states, and for issues that are now emerging and need those states' urgent attention. Regardless of the specificities of member states, there are several issues that are emerging throughout Europe and threading through the lives of young people, irrespective of where they live.

Having analysed both the common threads and differences between the two strategies, we now therefore turn towards issues and arguments that influence the context and interpretation of the strategies. Obviously, the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact is currently one of the major issues young people and youth policy is having to deal with. It coincided with other challenges, such as threats to democracy, global economic shifts, and the climate emergency. The pandemic may not only have compounded these challenging contexts but also suggested positive changes for addressing them – e.g., different political alignments, new ways of working, new respect for different occupational sectors, more environmental awareness through cleaner skies, and no commuting to the big cities. Thus, emergent issues and arguments focus on the empirical change in the context of young people's lives, the empirical change in the lives of young people, the (re-)definition of the youth sector, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

4.1. Empirical change in the context of young people's lives

Both strategies refer to the challenges young people are facing today. In the Council of Europe strategy's Background Document an Appendix commented briefly on the technological, demographic, personal, social, civic and political contexts. Within the main text of the Background Document, it paid particular attention to the complexities and interdependencies that impede young people's access to their human rights. These include references to the following issues:

- Poverty, (poor) health and well-being
- Quality education, training, and employment
- Non-formal education and youth work
- Technology, artificial intelligence
- Pathways to sustainable development
- (Lack of) trust in democratic structures and decision-making processes
- The (re-)emergence of populism and nationalism
- New platforms for participation and expression

These issues clearly capture both impediments to successful futures for young people and new prospects for overcoming them. As the conclusion to the section suggests, "Addressing

these challenges requires effective youth policies, the democratic decision-making of young people at all levels, as well as resources for quality youth work”.

Similarly, the EU Youth Strategy refers to the uncertainties young people face, “as a result of globalisation and climate change, technological change, demographic and socioeconomic trends, populism, discrimination, social exclusion and fake news” and with “yet unknown effects on jobs, skills or the way our democracies work”. According to the EU Youth Strategy, these uncertainties may lead to a situation in which young people turn their backs on the EU and democracy, a situation that the EU “cannot afford”. Therefore, “by involving and empowering all young people, youth policy can contribute to successfully meeting the vision of a continent where young people can seize opportunities and relate to European values”.

There is no doubt that recent years have heralded significant political, economic, social and cultural change in Europe, threaded through by wider technological and demographic transformation. On a broad canvas, Europe has witnessed a rise in populism, authoritarianism and shrinking civic space. Brexit (the United Kingdom withdrawing from the European Union) has finally taken place, following a 2016 referendum in favour of leaving. The economic competitiveness of Europe is threatened both by the USA and China. Social inequality has largely worsened, fomenting hostilities towards those of migrant backgrounds and opposition to further immigration. Borders have been strengthened. The generational contract has allegedly been broken, with older generations growing old in relatively comfortable circumstances while young people face uncertainties and anxieties on a range of fronts, of which employment and environment are prominent. Albeit in another context, this situation has been depicted as a zeitgeist that encapsulates ‘past expectations, present realities and unpredictable futures’⁵⁹. There has been incessant concern and debate about the role of social media and the impact of ‘fake news’, producing academic and policy interest in young people’s ‘navigational capacities’ and resilience in such circumstances.

Most significant of all, however, has been the Covid-19 pandemic that, in effect, not only exacerbated a sense of threat and uncertainty across the globe but also closed down virtually all opportunity and possibility for young people. Repeated lockdowns have immediately curtailed learning pathways in schools and universities, reduced peer contacts, put an end to almost all mobility and imposed restrictions on civil rights. Prospectively, compensation for ‘learning loss’ is likely to be limited and employment opportunities look bleak. The deleterious effects of the pandemic on young people’s lives are imminent.

4.2. Empirical change in the lives of young people

Since the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in Europe (in March 2020), young people have been recurrently identified as a group that has suffered extensively and disproportionately from

⁵⁹ See Wyn, J. Cahill, H., Woodman, D., Cuervo, H., Leccardi, C. & Chesters, J. (eds.) (2020), *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*, Singapore: Springer.

the pandemic impact (ILO et al. 2020⁶⁰; Eurofound 2020⁶¹). During the Global Youth Summit 2021, five major themes were identified as contributing to young people's 'disruption' throughout the world:

- Education and learning
- Mental health
- Career prospects
- Safety and isolation
- Personal development

These headings broadly encapsulate the conclusions of local, national and transnational studies of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on young people – its effect on their futures in education and work, heightened anxieties in lockdown conditions that feel like being locked up, both more distant and closer relationships with friends and family physically and virtually, and the need to find new forms of engagement and responsibility (see, for example, Beatfreeks 2020⁶²).

4.2.1. Education and learning

Young people who are still in education have suffered from what has come to be known as 'learning loss', as lockdowns have compelled them to be educated online at home (cf. Andrew et al. 2020⁶³; OECD 2020⁶⁴). Some, of course, have been enabled to retreat into their comfort zone of consoles and screens, but their capacity to sustain their learning has been highly contingent on the quality of the educational provision made for them, their devices, connectivity, motivation, privacy, and support.

4.2.2. Mental health

Young people have also been affected and afflicted by social isolation and a corresponding and perhaps correlated increase in mental health problems, including anxiety and depression (cf. Moxon et al. 2021⁶⁵; ILO et al. 2020⁶⁶; Loades 2020⁶⁷). The Beatfreeks platform's National

⁶⁰ see footnote 30.

⁶¹ Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19*. Report. COVID-19 series, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. URL: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁶² Beatfreeks National Youth Trends (2020), *Take the Temperature: A national youth trends report understanding the impact of coronavirus on young people in the UK*. URL: <https://www.beatfreeksyouthtrends.com/take-the-temperature> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁶³ Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Costa-Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., Phimister, A. & Sevilla, A. (2020): *Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning*. Report. The Institute for Fiscal Studies. URL: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/35632/1/BN288-Learning-during-the-lockdown-1.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁶⁴ see footnote 31.

⁶⁵ Moxon, D., Bacalso, C. and Serban, A. (2021), *Beyond the pandemic: The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe*, Brussels: European Youth Forum.

⁶⁶ see footnote 30.

⁶⁷ Loades, M.E., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., Linney, C., McManus, M.N., Borwick, C. & Crawley, E. (2020), *Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness*

Youth Trends project found that young people counter the oppressive mental health situation they find themselves in due to the lockdown with a trend towards self-care⁶⁸, meaning that young people find ways, individually, of looking after themselves (e.g., developing home hobbies, outdoor interests) and, collectively, looking after each other (e.g., plenty of online contact, team games online). Similar approaches are known from those who became drug dependent in the past and who were also often capable of self-medication⁶⁹. We should not, however, over-romanticise such possibilities; the consequences of the pandemic for mental ill health have yet to be fully determined.

4.2.3. Career prospects

Not only have future labour market prospects probably contracted and become even more uncertain, but those sectors of the economy worst affected through the Covid-19 pandemic (hospitality, leisure, retail, and recreation) are those that have traditionally employed a significant proportion of young people. Youth unemployment has therefore rocketed: according to the International Labour Organisation, one in six young people in employment before the pandemic has lost their job (ILO et al. 2020⁷⁰). Similarly, evidence points out the negative influence of the pandemic on young people's career prospects, for example due to disrupting career progression (cf. Costa Dias et al. 2020⁷¹). Little is known about other consequences that particularly affect young people, as new entrants to the labour market. One thinks, for example, of early career networking and (at least partial) lack of learning opportunities due to telework and distance working relations.

4.2.4. Safety and isolation

Though there is limited official data specifically to do with the effects on safety of young people during the Covid-19 pandemic, research has already established some tendencies. These tendencies consider both the safety of young people as well as how they deal with lockdown-related isolation.

Evidence suggests that rates of domestic abuse increase significantly in economic downturns. One early report⁷² during the pandemic suggested an almost 70% increase in child abuse, sexual exploitation, and child neglect, though this is across the age range of childhood (namely 0-18). Young people have sometimes been isolated in households where parents have experienced wider pressures and there has been no respite through being cared for by grandparents or wider relatives. Parents themselves may have struggled more with their own

on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. In: *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009.

⁶⁸ see footnote 62.

⁶⁹ See Parker, H., Aldridge, J. and Egginton, R. (eds) (2001), *UK Drugs Unlimited: new research and policy lessons on illicit drug use*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁷⁰ see footnote 30.

⁷¹ Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R. and Norris Keiller, A. (2020), *COVID-19 and the career prospects of young people*. IFS Briefing Note BN299. URL: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN299-COVID-19-and-the-career-prospects-of-young-people-1.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁷² Kooth (2020), *Week 14: How Covid-19 is affecting the mental health of children and young people in the BAME Community*. Data Insights Report. London: Kooth. URL: https://xenzone.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BAME_infographic_June-2020_WEB-v2.pdf (accessed 25 June 2021).

mental health problems or addictions; there has been considerable evidence of increased use of alcohol. Young people with long-term health conditions have become even more isolated, given their need for ‘shielding’.

But all young people, for whom peer contact and networks are very important (admittedly both positively and sometimes negatively), have been denied contact with social groups and the activities that take place within those contexts. And where young people have faced acute problems, it has often been difficult to access timely and appropriate services.

Such isolation may sometimes have been beneficial. Some young people have flourished through having more time with their families. Some have felt a sense of relief through escaping bullying, labelling and discrimination, which they were experiencing in the wider world. Some may have risen to the new challenges they faced and found solutions that enhanced their growth and development. For the most part, however, the pandemic has proved to be a dispiriting and sometimes traumatic experience for many young people.

4.2.5. Personal development

The essence of a great deal of youth policy is concerned with the personal development of young people – to equip them with the ‘competencies’ (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and critical thinking) to manage their personal, occupational, social and civic lives effectively. That is certainly at the heart of the diversity of youth work practice. National youth policy, through youth welfare services, is additionally focused on creating a safe and inclusive environment in which young people can grow up. This also includes (but is not limited to) preventative and regulatory measures around risk behaviour (e.g., crime, health risk behaviour, substance misuse).

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically extinguished a huge range of structured and spontaneous opportunities and experiences at local, national and transnational levels that have, in the past, contributed to young people’s personal development. Volunteering opportunities have generally diminished, not only through enforced lockdown, but also on account of a greater reluctance to associate with strangers; international exchange and volunteering programmes have inevitably dried up.

It is highly probable that those already facing disadvantage and exclusion on account of poverty, rurality, disability and other factors are also those most likely to lack the technology, connectivity and privacy that can make home-based communication for learning, working and socialising more acceptable and manageable. Similarly, research points out that the negative impact of the pandemic may be gender biased, affecting young women more than young men (cf. ILO et al. 2020⁷³; Ranta et al 2020⁷⁴; Residori et al 2020⁷⁵).

⁷³ see footnote 30.

⁷⁴ see footnote 40.

⁷⁵ Residori, C., Sozio, M.E., Schomaker, L. & Samuel, R. (2020), *YAC - Young People and COVID-19. Preliminary Results of a Representative Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults in Luxembourg*. Esch-sur-Alzette: University of Luxembourg. URL: <https://www.jugend-in-luxemburg.lu/yac-plus-preliminary-results/> (accessed 5 May 2021).

It is critical to note, therefore, that the pandemic has not produced uniform ill-effects on young people. There is some evidence, too, that some (a few) young people have flourished during the Covid-19 pandemic, as they have seized opportunities for entrepreneurship and re-balanced their learning and earning lives.

Data are still relatively thin on the ground, despite the proliferation of reports on the impact of the pandemic on young people. At its most general, though, it does seem clear that the crisis has produced an exacerbated youth divide. Where young people have had some outdoor space, parents are not struggling economically or in other ways, digital access is strong, learning has been maintained, and some level of peer association has remained possible and positive online, they will perhaps have managed lockdowns reasonably well and may 'recover' relatively soon. Where they have been stuck indoors, in overcrowded housing and households, in families that have been under pressure in a variety of ways, with poor internet connectivity and inadequate devices for learning and social contact, the impact on young people will be deeper and more protracted and it will take much longer to recover.

4.3. Youth policy related issues

Apart from the empirical changes in the context of the lives of young people and in the lives of young people themselves, there are also societal issues and discussions that form a framework in which youth policy is designed and implemented. Whereas topics like gender equality and gender inclusion are mentioned implicitly and explicitly as cross-cutting issues, the important issue of intergenerational justice seems to be neglected in both strategies. The enormous debts incurred as part of dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, both by European states and by the European Commission, will need to be serviced, and that burden will fall significantly upon the young. The debate on intergenerational justice and honouring a 'social contract' is gaining momentum and should not be neglected in discussions on the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy.

4.4. The (re-)definition of the youth sector

The 'youth sector' can be difficult to define precisely but it broadly includes a spectrum of youth-related activity, including *practice* by youth organisations, projects involving young people, building and street-based work, youth participation, digital engagement, *policy* that affects young people's lives through governments and NGOs, and *research* on young people, youth policy and youth work.

This sector has experienced the Covid-19 pandemic in very different ways. Though now referred to as a 'community of practice', following the thinking of Etienne Wenger⁷⁶ that particularly informed the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy and the later deliberations of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, it is a community of practice that has both reaped dividends on account of the crisis as well as suffered dramatically. On these extremes

⁷⁶ Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

lie the digital and online experts, exponents and practitioners on the one side, which has proliferated exponentially, and transnational exchange and activity on the other, which has, with few exceptions, almost ground to a halt.

There has been impressive creativity in some areas of the youth sector, both sustaining existing practice in new ways and establishing new partnerships with allied professions (particularly those in formal education and mental health). Outdoor activities – from solitary ‘counselling’ walks in the park, front door conversations, and group work in the woods or on the beach – have proliferated alongside digital communication that has endeavoured to sustain both individual and collective personal development. The National Agencies for the Erasmus + programme can look forward to substantially increased budgets in the next round of EU funding. In contrast, however, research has already drawn attention to the precarious futures for many youth NGOs, freelance youth workers, and those involved in centre-based and international youth work, as funding streams from both the state and philanthropic sectors have withered on the vine (cf. Eurodesk 2021⁷⁷; RAY-COR⁷⁸; O’Donovan and Zentner 2020⁷⁹).

Thus, the European youth work sector is getting different signals. On the one hand, the youth sector in general and youth work in particular has experienced a continuing lack of understanding and recognition of the importance of its work for young people. In some states, it took time before youth work was thought to be relevant to any organised response to the pandemic (in relation, for example, to schooling, health care or community resilience). Youth centres were shut down on the basis that they could not be visited and so were not needed. On the other hand, in some states (and on different levels) there is certainly now more prominence for at least some parts of the youth sector, on account of the pandemic. This is, in part, because of stronger recognition and awareness of ‘youth work’ prior to the pandemic, but it is also because youth work – where it has been permitted to (and youth workers were often *not* designated as essential workers) – has adjusted its working methods in response to the crisis, becoming more visible in the process. Youth work has not only accelerated its use of digital practice but has also supported young people through ‘doorstep conversations’ and outdoor walks, thus contributing to the health and well-being of those individuals. Those are additional foundation stones on which the two strategies now need to make sure they build.

4.5. Cross-sectoral cooperation

Although the youth sector is an important – perhaps, arguably, even the most important – sector implementing youth policy, it is by no means the only sector. The EU Youth Strategy refers repeatedly to youth mainstreaming and a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy (that should be “further pursued as a fundamental basis”), thus encouraging cooperation with

⁷⁷ Eurodesk (2021), *Survey Results 2021: COVID-19 Impact on the Eurodesk Network*. URL: <https://eurodesk.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/COVID-19-Membership-Survey-2021.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁷⁸ See footnote 33.

⁷⁹ O’Donovan, J. & Zentner, M. (2020), *Towards a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector*. Report. URL: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/Covid-19_+Final+report.pdf/ea70ba51-c6cc-f63a-e0cc-3526057e0b2d (accessed 25 June 2021).

other sectors like formal education, employment, and health (see chapter 1.1.4. on Other EU youth policy initiatives).

As argued before, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic raised increasing awareness regarding the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation. In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, it would make sense to initiate or continue a discussion on the forms, possibilities and challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation. This applies to the design of youth policy as well as to its concrete implementation, for example in youth work. The work of Nico et al.⁸⁰, published prior to the pandemic, should be regarded as a first step in this direction.

Further steps could be taken through a critical analysis of what, more precisely, constitutes 'youth policy'. Contrary to the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018, the current EU Youth Strategy has a rather narrow focus on youth sector issues, rather than on youth policy issues. This narrow focus is supported by youth sector stakeholders who, in the consultations prior to the current EU Youth Strategy, suggested to focus on the core goals of the sector. As mentioned in chapter 1.1.4. on other EU youth policy initiatives, the ideas of the EU Youth Strategy, such as youth participation in the design and implementation of youth related policy, can be found in other EU youth related policy initiatives as well. But the EU Youth Strategy as a document seems to be a stand-alone policy. It would be worth discussing to what extent its clear and explicit focus on youth sector issues rather than on youth policy issues contributes to this.

The paramount focus on the youth sector in the EU Youth Strategy is logical, insofar that there are other departments of the European Commission working on wider policy issues (cf. employment, health) and including young people in their deliberations and decisions. Therefore, on the one hand, the focus on the youth sector strengthens the EU Youth Strategy, as it has a narrow field of operation, offering the possibility of focused actions. On the other hand, however, such a narrow focus may weaken the EU Youth Strategy, as it is directed at very specific aspects of young people's lives (and thus on a narrow vein of youth policy), rather than taking all areas of youth policy within its orbit.

On this account, the EU Youth Strategy denies itself the opportunity to act as an umbrella for an EU youth policy within the European Union, with all its different facets and fields of action. Despite its advocacy of cross-sectoral approaches to youth policy, which is explicitly one of the principles articulated in the strategy, it nevertheless runs the risk of limiting itself to being a niche strategy. This could undermine the holistic approach to youth policy that has been increasingly apparent in EU youth policy over the last decade. Up to today, there is no formulated youth policy in the EU that connects the different youth related initiatives under one roof. In the sense of a truly cross-sectoral youth policy, it would make sense to consider how the different youth-related initiatives can be connected and complement each other. Such a joint view of youth policy by the different Directorates-General is not visible in the initiatives so far. This could be a task for the new EU Youth Coordinator⁸¹. Against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, which have revealed the close connection between policy issues such as education, employment, health, democracy and

⁸⁰ Nico, M. & Taru, M. (eds.) (2017), *Needles in Haystacks. Finding a way forward for cross-sectoral youth policy*. Youth Knowledge Book 21. Strasbourg Cedex: Council of Europe Publishing.

⁸¹ Biliana Sirakova was appointed as the first EU Youth Co-ordinator by EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel on 1st June 2021.

youth work, the question arises more critically as to whether the narrow conceptualisation for youth enshrined within the EU Youth Strategy should be reconsidered.

5. Reflections and conclusions: do the strategies stand the test of time?

All (policy) strategies are, to some extent, rhetorical, in that they can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They have to offer a stable framework for the upcoming years, whereas at the same time prove enough flexibility to answer to emerging crises. Although the current focus of most policy attention is on the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact, five years ago European states dealt with migration issues, and in five years, another urgent issue may be emerging.

Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, both the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 were largely capturing some key issues for youth policy over the next decade. We have noted, however, that there were also issues that were conspicuous largely through their absence. Other issues were put in the spotlight during the Covid-19 pandemic: portrayed as the ‘wicked witches’ in presentation of the final Declaration at the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (mental health, unemployment, discrimination/intersectionality, climate crisis, and disinformation and media) they now need sharper focus, orientation and action in the light of recent change, new inequalities and new challenges. The member states of the European Union and the Council of Europe already appear to be grasping this nettle; the European youth strategies need to ensure that they are working in tune.

The OECD has suggested that, to ‘build back better’ after the Covid-19 pandemic for all generations, governments should consider policy development in the following areas:

- Applying a youth and intergenerational lens
- Updating national youth strategies in collaboration with youth stakeholders
- Strengthening disaggregated data to track inequalities more precisely
- Monitoring the distributional effects of rule-making and public resource allocation
- Promoting age diversity in public consultations and state institutions
- Leveraging young people’s current mobilisation in mitigating the crisis
- Aligning short-term responses with investment in longer-term objectives
- Providing targeted policies and services for the most vulnerable youth populations⁸²

There is plenty within this menu of ideas that can be read across, or read back, to the European youth strategies, with the intent, across Europe, to ‘build forward better’. Implicit in many of these recommendations are central elements of the strategies, such as participation, inclusion, democratic voice, rights, and strengthening engagement by, and support for, those with ‘fewer opportunities’.

The second OECD-recommendation, however, does advocate the updating of national youth strategies – in collaboration with youth stakeholders – in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The same might be argued for the European strategies. Some previously missing items, such as climate and technology, might need to have a more prominent place in deliberations; some

⁸² see footnote 31.

existing items, such as the revitalisation of democracy or youth work, may need re-appraisal and re-alignment in the light of the experience and effects of the pandemic. Clearly, no youth strategy can do everything. Some elements of the existing strategies may need to be consigned more to the edge, to make way for elements that need to be introduced or strengthened. Both strategies have the provision for such flexibility in the light of changing circumstances. Early consultation with both representative and categorical groups of young people, and indeed different parts of the youth sector, is a matter of some urgency.

The strategies are the frameworks within which action is taken. It is now up to the individual parts that make youth policy both together and separately - policy, practice and research in the youth sector and in other sectors - to (re)address both the missing issues and the existing issues in a holistic perspective.

It would now be the task of politics to set a (complementary) framework within which these priorities can be discussed, ideas about them implemented and financed. This includes setting up policy initiatives and aligning existing and new financial programmes within these policy initiatives. The focus placed in the Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation, as well as the new orientation of the Erasmus+ and ESF+ programmes along the lines of the EU Youth Strategy, is a first step in this direction. With regard to the EU Recovery Plans, however, a word of caution has to be expressed. It would be advisable to understand the call to use the funds 'structurally' as not only socio-economic but also as social, cultural, and intergenerational responsibilities. In this way, youth policy issues that go beyond education and employability could be given a place in these plans. This would be an important step towards the continuation and (further) development of the youth sector.

For practice, one task could be to ensure that those working with young people remain focused on those groups of young people who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. This may mean re-calibrating their everyday work not just in terms of targeting, but also in determining thematic priorities and working practices, particularly in sustaining some level of online methodologies while no longer having to see them as the only option available.

For research, several other tasks may develop from this. Although inevitably pandemic-related, this cannot and need not be the (sole) focus of research. Specific topics such as mental health issues of young people and indeed of youth workers (given the many new and unexpected challenges, expectations and collaborations they have had to deal with) will need inquiry, review and evaluation. More general research on the development of European youth work and the evolution of youth policy, as Europe and its constituent states seek to build forward better with young people already proclaimed to be priorities for attention and support, will also be required.

The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly changed things, but we do not yet know how much, although there are already evident winners and losers amongst young people. Subsequently, young people with social, economic and cultural disadvantages need disproportionate help, intervention and support. This has already been reflected in the reinforced Youth Guarantee, which claims its new dimensions are six-fold – extending the age range to 30; becoming more inclusive through catering better for the 'hard-to-reach'; focusing on prevention; linking to

quality frameworks; preparing young people for ‘twin transitions’ (to the labour market and the digital age); and improving post-placement support.

Care must, however, be exercised. The proposal to rethink the prioritisation of strategies does not mean neglecting existing issues. Old rhetoric and aspiration – around, for example, social inclusion and participation – remains pivotal, but may have to be reconsidered and even redefined in the context of new realities. There may need to be new ways of doing the old, as well as simply embracing the new. There may also need to be old ways of doing the new; not everything can be best seen or done through a digital lens, even if that was the only option during the pandemic. So, while there may be new challenges on the horizon, consideration of old practice methodologies must not be side-lined.

Perhaps the most critical revision of both strategies relates to the connections they need to forge at a strategic level. Due to the pandemic, EU and Council of Europe youth policy focused on sustaining the youth policy sector. This focus is justified under the circumstances. Nevertheless, it raises the question of what the two organisations - and the Youth Partnership as their cooperation structure - should define as the boundaries of youth policy on the one hand, and to reveal some cross-sectoral initiatives on the other. The EU Youth Strategy must not be left beached in splendid isolation from other Directorates of the Commission as they, too, seek to foment their Covid-19 pandemic recovery programmes and build back better. The Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy must not rest on its laurels of distinction in its approaches to non-formal education and learning in order to enable and ensure that young people continue to promote its values. It needs to attach that distinction to a broad-based education and learning package, joined together with formal education, as it seeks to address the challenge of ‘learning loss’. In other words, without losing its sense of its own priorities, each current European ‘youth’ strategy needs to reflect on how states are currently formulating their recovery plans. With regard to EU member states, not least through the bases on which they request funding through the NextGenerationEU and EU Structural Funds, both of which are concerned with structural reforms. Many of these are likely to relate to and have an impact on young people. The European youth strategies need to ensure both that a youth agenda is suitably and proportionately embedded in such proposals and that their own framework is appropriately connected to the broader emergent challenges to be addressed in the European context in which young people are having to face their futures.

In summary, we suggest discussing following issues as a starting point for reflections on the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030:

- To what extent can both strategies support the youth sector in coping with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How can a stronger symbiosis between the strategies and relevant organisations be realised in pursuance of the 'common core' (see chapter 3.1. on the common core)?
 - And what role could the Youth Partnership play in this?
- How does the holistic, cross-sectoral approach of youth policy relate to the sectoral approach taken in the current strategies?
- To what extent are the ‘digital’ and the ‘climate change’ agendas **the** emergent youth policy issues, and how do they relate to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people and the youth sector?

- Where can European youth (sector) strategies start to improve the situation of young people and the youth sector if, in view of the debate about 'shrinking spaces' (a debate that already existed before the Covid 19 pandemic and gained importance during the pandemic), evidence points to the fact that spaces for youth work, and thus spaces for young people themselves, are being increasingly restricted?
- How do European and national youth strategies relate to each other?

These are some tentative provisional thoughts for reflection and elaboration by colleagues in the youth sector. We hope they provide sufficient provocation.

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