▶ SYMPOSIUM FINAL REPORT

NAVIGATING TRANSITIONS

Adapting policy to young people's changing realities

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SYMPOSIUM FINAL REPORT

EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH

Youth Partnership

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

EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Key messages

Recent challenges to young people and their transitions

- Increased **youth poverty**;
- **Unemployment, precarious labour** and decreased possibilities to gain work experience;
- **Delayed transitions to independent living**, home ownership and family formation;
- The **non-economic implications** of Covid-19 are underestimated and insufficiently reflected in recovery plans:
  - > **sociability loss**;
  - > **strengthened gender norms**;
  - > **fractured emancipatory routes** outside family;
  - > **silent anger**, increased **stress** and **poor health** outcomes;
- Risk of overlooking the **increased vulnerabilities** experienced by specific groups;
- **Crisis of voice and representation** for the most disadvantaged young people;
- **War-torn transitions**.

Recent challenges to youth organisations

- The **rediscovery of the local** space and the relevance of community engagement, probably with more enduring implications for mobility;
- Post-Covid-19, a high sense of **exhaustion**;
- Labour market implications counterproductive to the sector (**brain drain** from the NGO sector and from some regions);
- **Mission drift** from advocacy and watchdog roles to service provision and Covid-19 topics;
- Solution-driven interventions as responses to **donors' agendas**;
- Uncertainty on the role of **digital youth work** in the future;
- Youth organisations' mixed capacity to react to the challenges posed by **artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation**.

Ways forward and proposals for a renewed approach

- **Revise the grand narratives** on what transition means, from the bottom up. It may be that young people prioritise **alternative versions of adulthood**;
- Advocate for **youth-informed and rights-based provision of services**;
- **Civic participation is part of young people's vision of transition**;
- Participation requires **physical spaces** that are public, free, accessible and youth-friendly;
- **Make other sectors aware they do youth policy**. Young people claim a say in climate, urban planning, refugee and asylum, AI and digital governance, agriculture and energy policies. Policy makers in other sectors must engage meaningfully with young people and their organisations;
- Involve the youth sector in debates on **AI and digitalisation**;
- Enlarge the scope of **recovery agendas** in ways that acknowledge the role of youth work;
- Mind the **trade-offs of service provision** in youth work, at the expense of advocacy and watchdog activities;
- **Reach the hard-to-reach** and address the crisis of representation in ways that avoid privilege and tokenism in youth policy making and youth work;
- Name and address **youth poverty** as **an issue in its own right**;
- Bring **gender** closer to the centre of youth policy making;
- Consider good **mental health and well-being as outcomes in themselves**;
- Advocate for **jobs of quality**;
- **Beware of tech-solutionism**;
- Engage with young people's relationship with **wars and conflicts**;
- Support young people from **Ukraine** and the **young activists in Russia and Belarus**;
- **Develop the knowledge base** and **evaluate** what is being done;
- Keep an eye on **new relationships with mobility** in the aftermath of Covid-19;
- Remain open to **unanticipated effects of Covid-19**.

Focus policies and recovery programmes on:

- Decreasing youth poverty, unemployment, precarious labour;
- Supporting the outreach and the representation of most disadvantaged;
- Investing in reducing delayed transitions to independent living, home ownership, family formation and fractured emancipatory routes outside family;
- Bringing gender closer to the centre of youth policy-making;
- Monitoring the impact of war, health, and other crises on young people.

YOUTH WORK

POLICY-MAKING

HELP

GENDER INTERSECTIONALITY
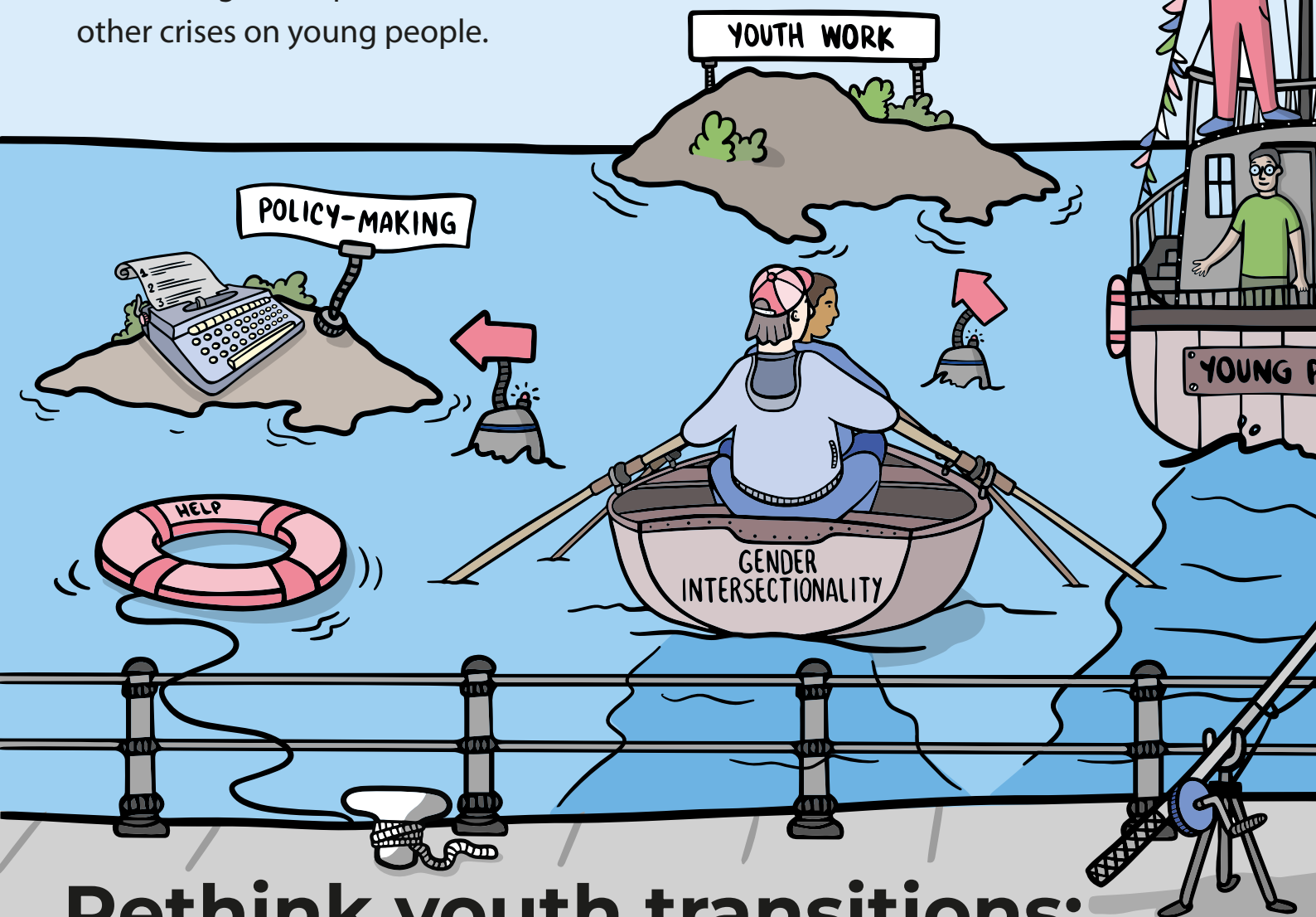
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Rethink youth transitions:

- Revise grand narratives on youth transitions with young people involved;
- Channel youth participation in other policies;
- Make other sectors aware they do youth policy; young people claim a say in climate, urban planning, refugee and asylum, AI and digital governance, agriculture and energy policies.

- Encourage policy-makers in other sectors to engage meaningfully with young people and their organisations;
- Involve the youth sector in debates on AI and digitalisation;
- Enlarge the scope of recovery agendas in ways that acknowledge the role of youth work.

Executive summary

The **symposium "Navigating Transitions: adapting policy to young people's changing realities"** (21-23 June 2022) was the main event of the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership[1] in the framework of the European Year of Youth. It took place in Tirana (Albania), the European Youth Capital 2022. The event brought together 105 participants from 35 countries to reflect on   what paradigm shift is needed in youth research, youth policy and youth work to support young people's aspirations   (EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2022a).

The rationale of the symposium was to explore whether and how youth transitions are being reconfigured in post-pandemic Europe and how the youth sector can best respond to these transformations. A cross-cutting logic was that, after two years of lockdown measures, mid-2022 would be a good time for the youth sector to reflect, draw learning and, where necessary, adapt policies to the new realities. The symposium encouraged dialogue and reflection among European youth field stakeholders on what is needed in youth research, policy and youth work to support young people as they go through transitions in changing realities.

The event included keynote speeches, inputs from policy makers, researchers and young people, workshops, participant-led sessions and a   vision wall   integrating learning and ideas on change. As a flagship event of the Youth Partnership, the symposium gave young people the space to express their aspirations and formulate their proposals for the revitalisation of democracy. Actions in solidarity with young people from Ukraine ran throughout the symposium, with a solidarity wall and participants coming from the Kremenchuk Youth Centre.

The symposium opened conversations on a wide range of topics, including:
> the observed impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people and youth organisations
> political, social and economic impacts on transitions, access to services and rights (employment, education, health, housing)
> regional particularities of youth transitions (in Eastern Europe and South-East Europe)
> the impact of digital technology and AI on young people's transitions.

These are all instrumental themes for policy making, and they reflect the broader ambition of the Youth Partnership in relation to both more traditional areas and emerging topics.

Discussions examined the understanding of transitions in relation to the

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[1] hereinafter, "the Youth Partnership".

conventional markers of adulthood (finishing school, stable employment, housing, marriage and parenthood), as the enabling circumstances for these processes are no longer tenable. Participants called for stronger youth ownership over the definition of problems and potential solutions in ways that replace internalised narratives about what youth problems are or organisations' drift towards the funding priorities of the moment. They were also in favour of revising the definition of youth policy and argued that other policy fields not traditionally associated with youth (i.e., climate, AI, urbanism, transport) do have implications for young people. **"Making other sectors aware they do youth policy"** emerged as a powerful message.

A cross-cutting concern was related to the absence or inadequacy of non-formal learning and youth work as reflected in EU member states' recovery agendas. Participants noted with concern **the narrow understanding of the social losses** incurred by young people during the pandemic – an area youth work can address and which falls within its mission. In addition, the recovery agenda priorities were considered insufficiently tailored to the advocacy and watchdog mission of many youth organisations (especially small, grass-roots NGOs), who saw themselves in the situation of **trading previous advocacy and watchdog roles for service provision**. Participants warned against the trade-offs involved in such shifts and called for a critical reflection on **mission drift** among youth organisations, with **long-term implications for the identity of the youth sector and for democracy**.

Discussions reflected concerns related to **privilege, representation, creaming[2] and tokenism in youth work and youth policy making**. They called for proactive interventions that are culturally competent in engaging several under-represented groups. Participants warned against the risks of diluting the notion of disadvantage given the increased overall vulnerability of the general youth population after two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. In relation to employment, the symposium made a case for recalibrating the discourse on job creation with a more nuanced **analysis of the quality of jobs** that are made available and of the **actual inclusiveness of the support measures** offered.

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[2] The tendency to choose the young people that are more compliant and who do not pose major challenges when carrying out activities.

Many discussions focused on **precariousness and poverty** (including in-work poverty and insufficient affordable housing). Several measures for young people were discussed in relation to their actual capacity to provide meaningful solutions. A major criticism in relation to the employment and training guarantees was that they were channelled to employers and risked being opportunistically used for financial gains at the expense of social goals. Social protection measures were criticised for often being obsolete, autocratic and unable to bring young people out of poverty. Universal basic income regardless of young people's educational or employment status was also mentioned.

A cross-cutting theme that arose was that **civic spaces are threatened by illiberal trends**. Participants claimed physical spaces for participation and stronger support for struggling activist organisations. The young people present demanded more nuanced conversations on the employment regime of youth workers, in view of brain drain and increased precarity in the sector. They also called for building the capacity of youth workers to engage in non-clinical interventions aimed at mental well-being outcomes.

The symposium demonstrated that young people have complex relationships with war (as victims, fighters, survivors, refugees, concerned observers, peace activists or humanitarian aid volunteers). There was a strong expectation for youth work to engage with the implications of war in young people's lives. Participants considered it important to maintain solidarity with youth organisations facing very difficult circumstances in Ukraine and with activists in Russia and Belarus.

This document is based on the proposals from participants and contributors, on the detailed notes taken during the symposium, on the eight workshop summaries provided by rapporteurs,[3] on the feedback from participants and from the Youth Partnership Secretariat. The report does not claim representativeness of the views expressed during the symposium. Omissions are inherent. Nonetheless, we hope it channels the main messages and informs important conversations on how young people can be better supported through today's changing realities.

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[3] Aleksandra Djurovic, Alonso Escamilla, Andreas Heinen, Frederike Hofmann-van de Poll, László Milutinovits, Marie-Claire McAleer, Mila Lukić and Neringa Tumenaite.
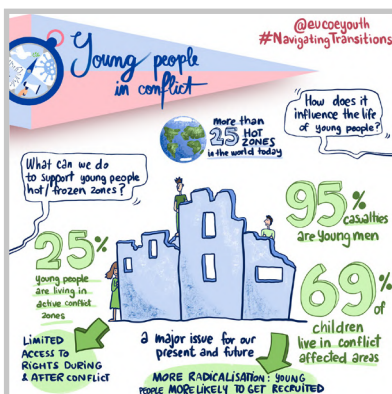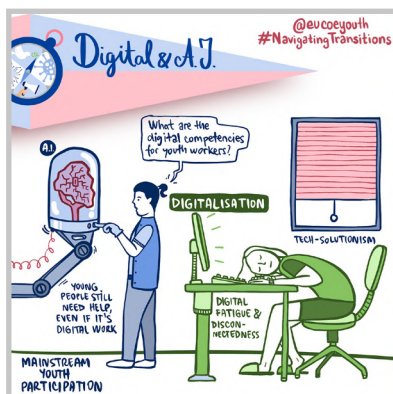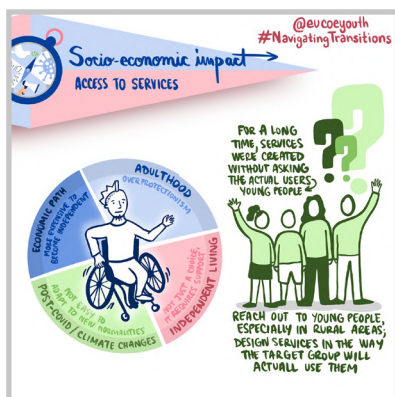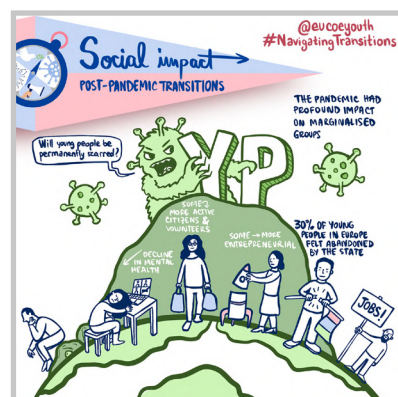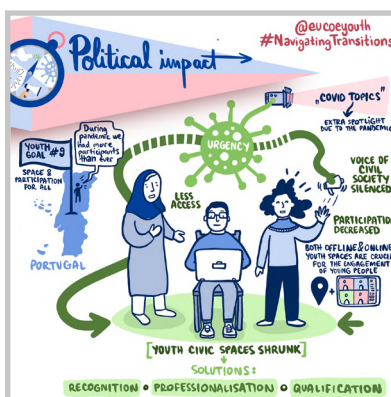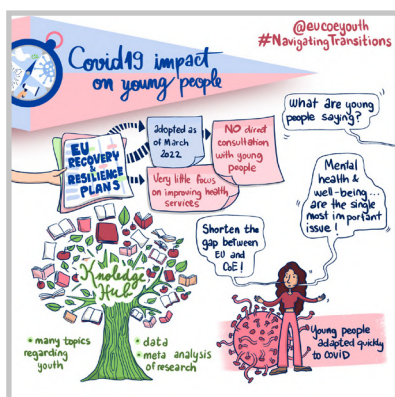
Part 1: Symposium context

The socio-political context of the symposium was loaded with unprecedented challenges. The event took place after two years of lockdown measures and epidemiological restrictions and as the Russian war in Ukraine was entering its fifth month. The Covid-19 pandemic had had significant implications for the ways young people lived, the ways they were seen and supported and the way transitions were (re)conceptualised. The management of the pandemic deepened pre-existing divisions, created new gaps, demanded adaptation and encouraged new responses. The Russian invasion of Ukraine added a new layer of complexity. At the time of the symposium, two thirds of Ukraine's children had been displaced (UNICEF 2022). The war imposed a burden on the young men and women who were faced with the trauma of war and with the strains of abuse, displacement and increased care for their dependents.

The year 2022 was one of increased disillusion and anxiety over the possible reversal of democratic progress and the emergence of illiberal tendencies. Young European people remained close to transnational activism engaging with environmental issues, wealth inequality, racism, decolonisation, gender and peace. However, many activist youth organisations faced difficulties in continuing their advocacy and watchdog roles. Also, dilemmas about certain forms of assembly moving away from democratic values (such as young people's involvement in extreme right-wing parties) were to be integrated in a critical analysis of "youth participation". Increasingly, young people became aware of theopportunities offered by digitalisation and AI (access to information, social connectivity, learning opportunities) and their risks (data protection issues, cyberbullying, online grooming, increased manipulation and propaganda). At the time of the symposium, warning signs of recession were entering public concern. The overall context was shaped by high expectations towards policy makers and towards young people themselves.

The theoretical context of the symposium was marked by a timely interest in revisiting the meanings of youth transitions in today's Europe, after two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Young people embark on multiple and overlapping transitions that are linked with education, work, housing, family formation and citizenship. However, destinations are "moving targets": uncertain, diffuse, less achievable to many or, indeed, restructured and contested. Traditionally interpreted as phases of preparation for adulthood and the passage to independence, youth transitions are loaded with new theoretical questions. What strategies have young people developed to deal with new circumstances, in particular, with new uncertainties in relation to the labour market, within education and in relation to learning mobility (Krzaklewska et al. 2022)? Are the conventional markers of adulthood (finishing school, stable employment,

independent residence, marriage and parenthood, cf. Pitti 2022) still reliable, given the structural constraints shaping young people's lives? Can transitions be reimagined in ways that acknowledge "in-betweenness" and/or "liminality" as their key features (Pitti 2022)? As we witness the failure of conventional ways of moving from youth to adulthood, is the current youth policy-making process still pertinent? What resources and structural changes are needed in the ways youth policy initiatives are designed?

Against this background, the symposium provided space for reflection on the main transformations and for envisioning ways of change. Its timing and content built upon and reflected well the concerns and recent developments from the partner institutions. The symposium was a key contribution to the European Year of Youth, which aimed to highlight the potential of green and digital transitions, to foster youth engagement and to promote opportunities for young people in a green, digital and inclusive world. It responded to the need to honour, support and engage with young people from a post-pandemic perspective.
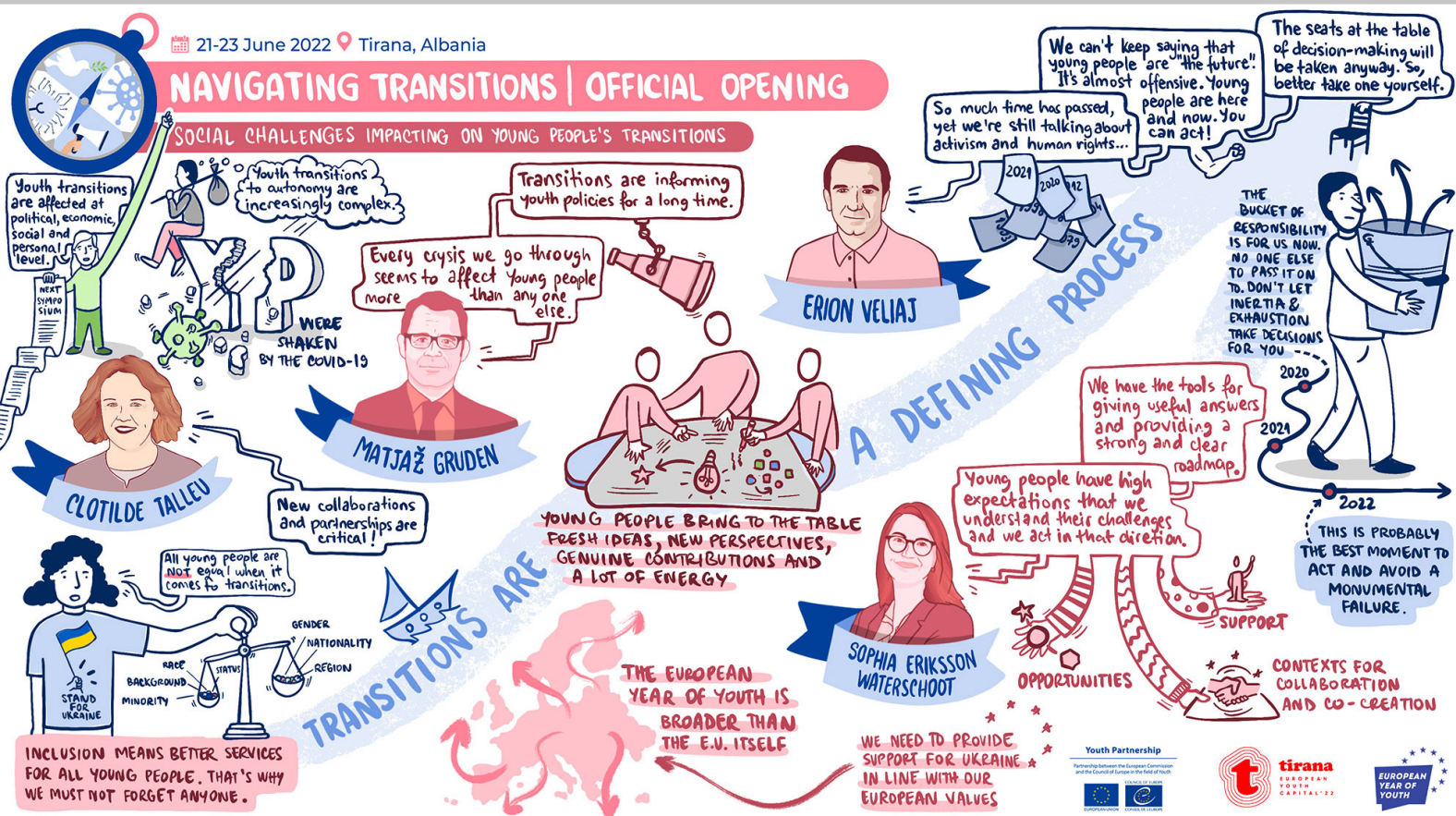
The symposium built upon the findings of the surveys and research of the two partner institutions on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the youth sector and the policy responses. These included, among others, the European Parliament Youth Survey 2021 and the Flash Eurobarometer "Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth". Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, Director of the European Commission's Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture presented the

main findings. They indicated high expectations from young people in relation to climate, inclusion, health and social inequalities. As an interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 was approaching, the symposium provided a necessary platform for better understanding young people's needs, for re-thinking the existing tools and for further adapting the strategy. In 2022, the European Union celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Erasmus programme, with a renewed and stronger commitment for social inclusion as "Europe needs all of its youth" (EC 2022). A renewed Council Recommendation to further support opportunities for mobility and volunteering (2022/C 157/01) was also in implementation, in the post-pandemic context, as discussed by Babis Papaioannou, Policy Officer, DG Education and Culture.

The symposium took place in the year the Council of Europe celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Youth Sector, an ideal time for restating the unique value of the co-management governance and the four priorities of its Youth sector strategy 2030: revitalising pluralistic democracy; young people's access to rights; living together in peaceful and inclusive societies; youth work. In mid-2022, the Democracy Here |Democracy Now campaign was marked with a youth action week, bringing together over 400 young people. It aimed to strengthen mutual trust between young people and democratic institutions and processes. Matjaz Gruden, Director of the Directorate of Democratic Participation, Clementina Barbaro, Head of Youth Policy Division, Spyros Papadatos, Advisory Council on Youth and Katrin Olt, Bureau Member of the European Steering Committee for Youth contextualised the symposium in relation to Council of Europe activities and priorities and brought perspectives of member states and of youth civil society.

In recent years, alongside the traditional themes – participation, social inclusion, youth policy and youth work – the Youth Partnership has gathered important expertise on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people and the youth sector in its Covid-19 Youth Knowledge Hub. The symposium built on the relevant strands of the Youth Partnership's earlier work and integrated its more recent knowledge base on the impact of the pandemic, young people's transitions and various challenges to their autonomy, such as housing, employment, precarity and sustainability. As stated by Clotilde Talleu, Manager of the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, the symposium was part of its commitment towards ensuring synergies and facilitating dialogue with young people, youth workers and policy makers.

Part 2: Aims, structure, participants and approach

The **symposium** responded to the need for a fresh assessment of what civic involvement means to young people. It was the first event of scale organised by the Youth Partnership after two years of lockdown and restriction measures. It provided a long-awaited opportunity for participants to identify and debate the recent challenges faced by young people; to explore policy responses; to discuss with policy makers the recent developments; and to advance a series of key messages to those responsible for supporting youth transitions. The symposium used a sector-led approach. Its organisation was supported by 14 steering group members who guided the Youth Partnership in designing the objectives, overall concept, expected outputs, themes, format, methods and the call for participants. The steering group met twice: in February 2022 (online) and in a smaller composition in April (in Tirana). The programme was delivered and documented with the support of around 20 experts (see Appendix 1).
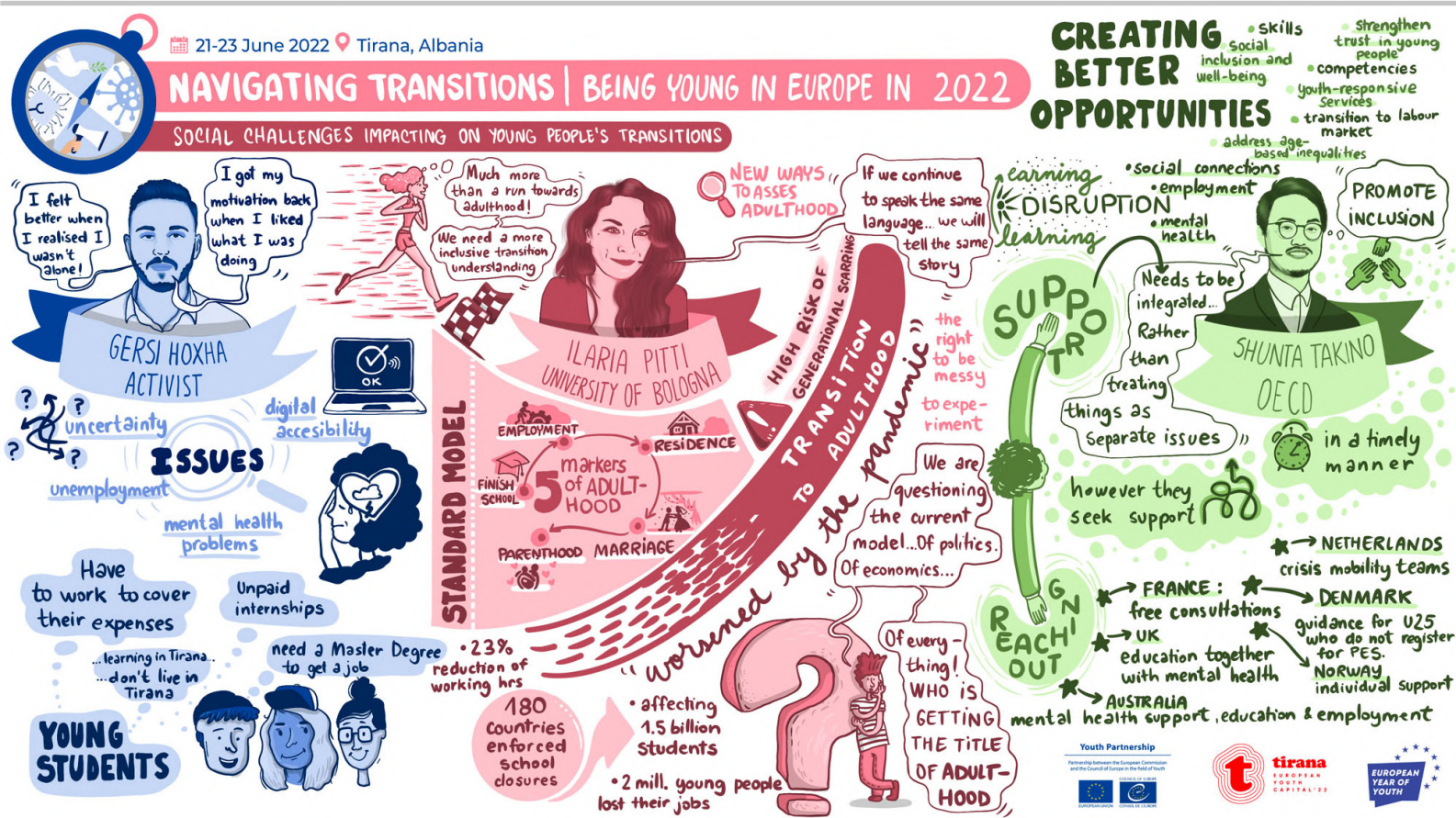
Quality plenary contributions were balanced with interactive discussions. Erion Veliaj, Mayor of Tirana and former Minister of Social Welfare and Youth of Albania opened conversations on young people's relationship with politics. Representative members of the two partner institutions and Katrin Olt from the Ministry of

Education and Research of Estonia, European Steering Committee for Youth Bureau member, responded and engaged in conversations with participants at various moments of the symposium. Gersi Hohxa, youth activist and Young European Ambassador from Tirana outlined some of the main challenges experienced by young people in Albania. Te Rrapi ("the old village tree" in Albanian), was a fully participant-led good practice-sharing and peer-learning session. The event was enriched by two visually creative spaces: a "solidarity wall" to express solidarity with young people from Ukraine and a "vision wall" for how policies should adapt to support transitions.
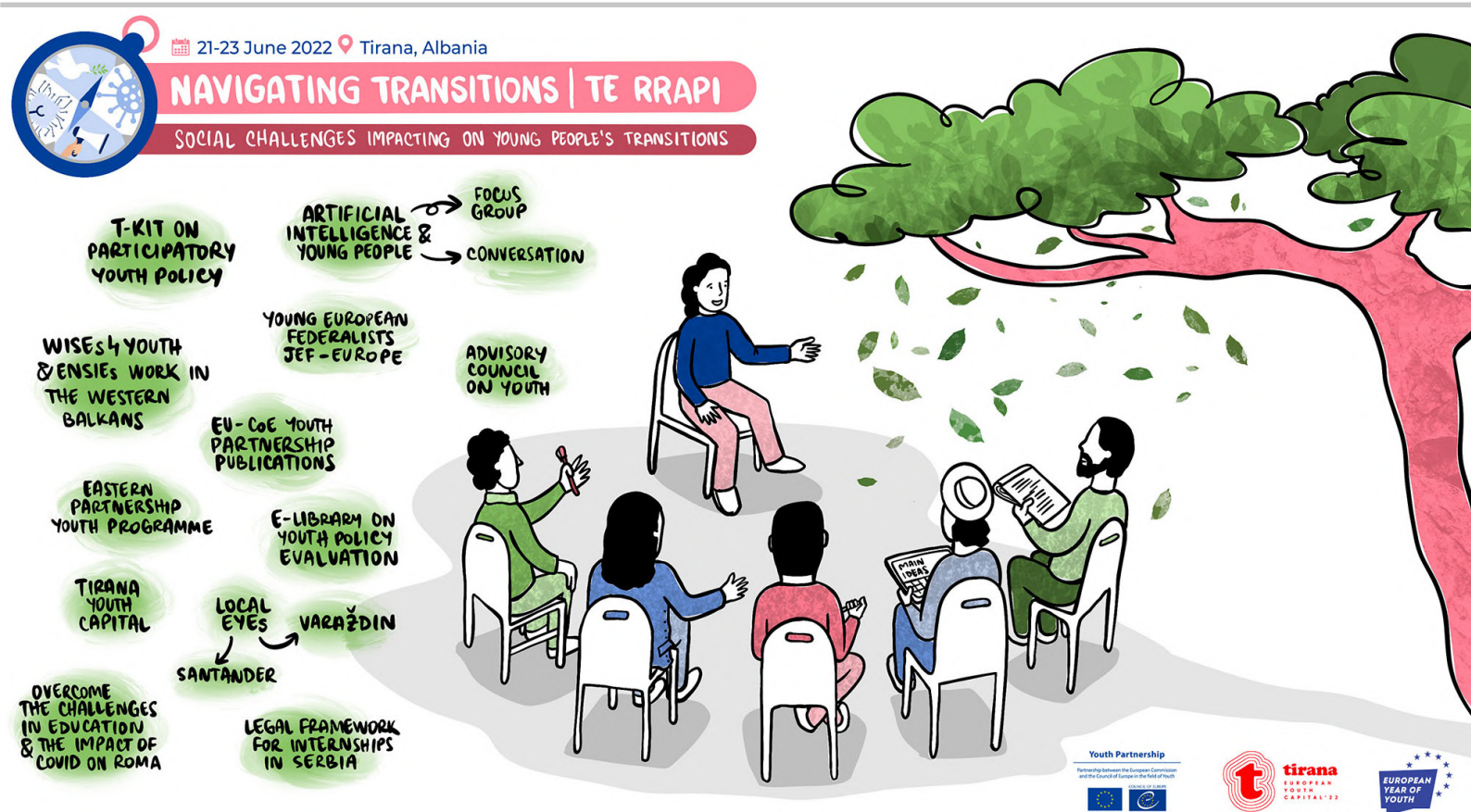
Overview of the programme

	21/06	22/06	23/03
Morning		• Official opening • Keynote inputs	• Testimonies &inspirational inputs • Workshops: developing policy messages
Afternoon	Registration & welcome session	• Eight parallel workshops • Participant-led sessions • Flash-mob in solidarity with young people affected by conflict	• Plenary exchange with policy makers • Summarising outcomes • Closing session.

A number of **studies, reports and analytical papers** prepared by the Youth Partnership and invited partners set out key concepts, introduced the themes and informed the symposium workshop discussions (for more details, see the dedicated **website**).

The symposium gathered 105 participants from 35 countries: engaged young people, members from civil society organisations, national, regional and European policy makers, youth workers and researchers. The number of people and their diverse profiles reflected the organisers' commitment and great efforts in mobilizing participants at a time of competing priorities in the youth sector due to postponed European and national events. The event welcomed participants from Ukraine, who faced major travel disruptions and security risks. Participants (Appendix 1) were selected through an open call and direct invitations.
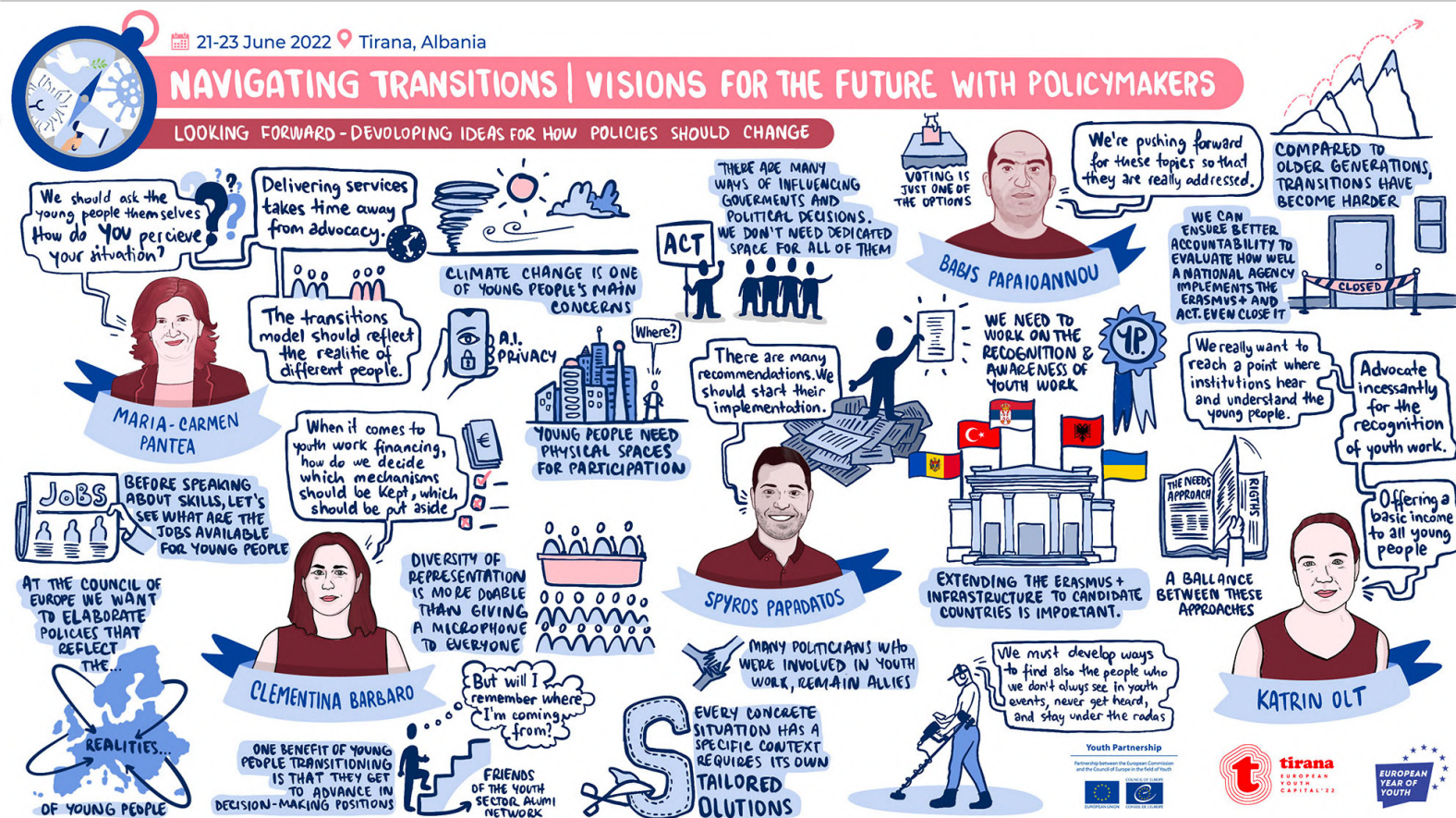
Part 3: Content and issues raised

Overall impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people and their transitions

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people and the youth sector was both a cross-cutting issue and a topic in its own right. Many changes in youth transitions represented continuations of earlier trends, such as higher unemployment and under-employment[4], economic instability, in-work poverty and devaluation of educational achievements (Furlong et al. 2003; Chisholm and Hurrelmann 1995; Roberts 2018).

While the Covid-19 pandemic had strong (and well-discussed) implications for the lives of young people, its impact may still unfold with probable long-term effects that may not yet be visible. Participants agreed that it is important to have a discussion and to generate hypotheses about the effect(s) of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, it may be worthwhile to remain open to further implications as yet not present or sufficiently examined. Symposium participants called for increased awareness of the diversity of young people in terms of geography, location, gender, class, education, employment status and personal circumstances. Key presenters (Ilaria Pitti and Howard Williamson) called for awareness of the risk of reproducing learned narratives that either celebrate young people's resilience or victimise[5] their situation during Covid-19.

One of the specificities of youth – as a period of the life cycle – is intense sociability, the importance of relationships outside the family circle, which are crucial levers for young people's identity building. The pandemic entailed limitations on young people's sociability, an aspect insufficiently acknowledged and documented. The strong focus on the learning loses during school closures led to underestimating the social implication.

A cross-cutting finding was that young people face protracted transitions, often under the spectrum of precarity, with insufficient conditions to experiment and fail in a safe environment. The pandemic fractured young people's emancipatory routes, including the possibilities to experience independent living. The expanded horizons of possibilities brought about by education were replaced by the more conventional routes available in the close family and community. This process led to the perpetuation (even the strengthening) of social class inequalities. Thus, transitions model needs to be made more inclusive of a diversity of groups and pathways. They must move away from perpetuating the standard representation,

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[4] Working fewer hours than preferred, in jobs that are inadequate with respect to education/training or payment.
[5] See the concepts of the "Covid-19/lockdown generation" (ILO 2021) and the "lost", "threatened", "betrayed" and "condemned" generation (Pitti 2022a).

which was used for the development of the model, based on a white, middle-class young male typology.

Statistics presented during the symposium showed that as many as two million young Europeans (aged 15-29) lost their jobs in 2020 (Eurostat 2021). Young people were easily displaceable and overrepresented in service-oriented and precarious labour market segments. Young people were also less well-protected by job and income support and other welfare schemes, especially when working part-time. There were differences within the youth population, however. Young people from socially vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, young people in non-standard employment and young women were up to twice as likely to become unemployed during this period (Moxon et al 2021).

There were disproportionate implications of the pandemic on young people. However, some signs of depreciation in transitions to adulthood were pre-existing. Nevertheless, the pandemic increased previous trends towards precarious work, for instance from unpaid internships (still a practice in some companies), to the high number of low- and middle-skilled jobs required in the emerging AI industry. The implications discussed were manyfold: from delayed transitions to independent living, home ownership and family formation, to silent anger, increased levels of stress and, ultimately, poor health outcomes. Uncertainty over the future and a poor sense of belonging were also associated with weak civic engagement and low political trust.

María Rodríguez Alcázar from the European Youth Forum argued that policy responses to young people's situation during Covid-19 were delayed, given competing health priorities for other groups. A third of young people in Europe felt left out by the state during the pandemic (Fundamental Rights Agency 2022). The pandemic worsened inequalities and had a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged groups. Housing, fair employment, access and support to young people living in precarious conditions or experiencing multiple disadvantages (in the workshops on social and economic rights) emerged as main concerns.

Participants argued that young people not organised or not previously involved in youth work were affected much more strongly by the pandemic and the restrictive measures imposed. Youth workers argued that their organisations' capacity to support new groups during the pandemic was mixed, with the digital divide and

social disadvantages ranking high. Several examples of good practice were reported from the Lisbon Youth Centre, which during the pandemic was able to reach groups of young people without previous experiences in the field and draw them closer to youth work.

Discussions highlighted that young woman were more affected than older women and young men during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans. Their transitions were more difficult given increased caring responsibilities, their overrepresentation in sectors at the forefront of the Covid-19 response, or which were the hardest hit. The lockdown measures strengthened gender norms in more traditional communities: the emancipatory routes outside families were fractured and the cohabitation with the elderly reinforced patriarchal norms. Youth workers at the symposium spoke with concern about the economic strains placed on girls and young women, including Roma and Travellers[6] and called, among others, for freely accessible tampons and pads in youth centres and schools to address period poverty.

The legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic has been significant for young people's lives, especially in relation to social independence, causing social isolation, feelings of anxiety and (perceived) deficits in social skills. Participants highlighted the risk of overlooking the increased vulnerabilities experienced by specific groups, such as young people fleeing war, those with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth, Roma and Travellers, young people leaving care and those living in rural areas. Several disadvantaged groups, such as young people facing homelessness, are at risk of remaining invisible. It was argued that homelessness policies are not tailored to the needs of young people and are insufficient to prevent and end the problem. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation. Because of limited accessibility of shelters and couch-surfing options, some were forced to sleep on the streets, face fines due to lockdown regulations or stay with abusive families.

The particularities of transitions to adulthood for young people with disabilities were discussed at length. The hidden costs of disability and dependence on personal assistance (transportation, accommodation) were analysed. Participants called for more consolidated policy responses that are rights-based and tailored to the specific situations of these groups. The main message was that now, when the young population by and large experiences higher vulnerability, the risk of overlooking the "hard-to-reach" is higher, unless policies have a built-in awareness of the multiple disadvantages and unless proactive interventions are in place. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have highlighted the value of early interventions (Takino 2022).

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[6] The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

Overall impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth organisations

Consensus emerged around the idea that youth workers demonstrated extraordinary commitment to young people; they were creative and innovative in their approaches throughout the pandemic. The discovery of the local space and the relevance of community engagement shaped the more general understanding of participation, probably with more enduring implications for mobility. State and public-sector communication with young people during the pandemic tended to be normative and one-dimensional. While NGOs sought more interactive approaches in supporting young people, shortcomings in opening up dialogue online were evident.

Even if the NGO sector was proactive and creative in engaging with young people, its over-reliance on temporary or irregular funding hampered its capacity. The employment regime of youth workers emerged as an important topic with pertinent dilemmas on their volunteering and employment status. The pandemic highlighted the diverse contexts of youth work. In some parts of Europe, where youth work has an established legacy, is grounded in volunteering and enjoys stable funding, the pandemic enabled a very positive social and political recognition of its role. Yet, in some countries with an emerging youth work community and frail volunteering cultures, including in Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans, dependence on state funding was key, with all the connected challenges.

Post-pandemic, there was a strong sense of exhaustion among youth workers. The labour market implications are increasingly counterproductive, with a considerable brain drain from the NGO sector being reported, due to closure/postponement of project implementation and reallocation of funds. Digital fatigue and poor social interaction are additional risk factors to this process. Migration away from Eastern Partnership countries, from Western Balkans and several European Union countries poses continuity challenges for organisations.

Participants shared their concern that the recovery agendas tend to downplay the role of non-formal learning and youth work, which alongside formal education make important contributions to young people's social lives. In addition, the priorities of recovery agendas were considered insufficiently tailored to the advocacy and watchdog mission of many youth organisations. Organisational survival was sometimes at stake, while mission drift made many organisations change their priorities towards service provision or other state-driven agendas. It was noted that once such moves within the sector are made, it is hard to recuperate the previous activist agendas as a new ethos is gaining prominence.

As the war in Ukraine continues, more youth organisations without previous experience in assisting refugees are trying to provide a response. They are learning on-the-go how to provide humanitarian aid in ways that are both effective and

meaningful. Youth workers from Ukraine's neighbouring regions called for increased support for the grass-roots organisations entering humanitarian assistance and work with displaced young people.

Shrinking civic space

The symposium included a presentation on the impact of Covid-19 on youth participation and democratic spaces, based on a publication by Tomaž Deželan and Laden Yurttagüler (2020) and a survey conducted by the youth partnership in 2021 (report forthcoming). The study noted a tendency towards persistent silencing of voices of civil society under the camouflage of alleged "urgency" to react to crises including, but not limited to, the pandemic. Discussions highlighted the dangers of the learned narratives on the priorities of the youth sector and young people in ways that reproduce at different levels, the official, normative agendas where Covid-19-related topics rank high. Conversely, other issues young people are concerned with, such as corruption, nepotism, clientelism, marketisation of public spaces and gentrification receive a low profile and are insufficiently addressed.

Who defines a social problem and the priorities of the youth sector for the future? Who speaks on behalf of whom and based on whose values and priorities? The symposium highlighted a crisis of representation and the need to re-conceptualize transitions, the social problems and the solutions. It was argued that youth organisations are becoming good at adjusting to donors' agendas, without ensuring young people are also included in the definition of the problem. The structures of youth participation, when available, tend to be selective, elitist and dissuasive for those with fewer opportunities. Often, solution-driven interventions are proposed (i.e., a new smartphone application, employability services of various kinds) without proper engagement with young people themselves on how they articulate a problem, its causes, and ways out.

Several inputs written by participants on the symposium's "vision wall" referred to the opening of political spaces. Young people want both the strengthening of conventional youth participation in policy making and support for unconventional forms of political participation. The importance of physical spaces that are public, accessible and youth-friendly was repeatedly stated.

Artificial Intelligence, digital youth work and young people's transitions

The symposium explored participants' views on artificial intelligence (AI) in the youth field, the way it can influence the meanings and practice of youth work and what is needed to improve the understanding and implementation of AI in youth work (and non-formal learning).

Participants discussed several concerns related to the way algorithmic stereotyping reinforces pre-existing biases and shapes societal norms in ways that are political and power-based. The implications of high reliance on AI were examined in relation to the youth work principles of diversity, inclusion, empowerment and accountability. Several unsolved tensions discussed related to social media as a tool for participation, but also a tool for social disengagement, the difficulty of "meaningful" communication online, privacy concerns, the digital divide and the carbon footprint. It was argued that increased dependence on digital tools as substitutes for physical interaction poses dangers for our democracies; it reduces the necessary diversity of our social worlds and reinforces disconnectedness. Instances of misuses of AI (i.e., in elections and referendums), online propaganda and fake news phenomena were also touched upon.

Consensus was built around the idea that the future of youth work is hybrid, with the online world becoming an inherent part of non-formal learning and working with young people. Besides the benefits of the online world (i.e., the capacity to reach some young people not previously affiliated to organisations), participants spoke at length about the concerns related to "tech-solutionism" (the belief that the solution to all problems lies in technology). One such example is the growing number of mental health support applications, which may work in the short run, but may be far from a sustainable way to deliver psychological services and youth work, for instance.

Participants called for a stronger involvement of the youth sector in the process of regulating the technology industry. They demanded policies likely to hold "big tech" companies accountable, to increase transparency and ethics and to make clear their legal responsibility.

Young people and conflicts

Young people in Europe have different relationships with wars and conflicts. They are victims, fighters, survivors, internally displaced or refugees, concerned observers, peace activists, humanitarian aid volunteers. War became a generational experience for young people in Ukraine. Others from the Eastern Partnership countries feel its threat or its long-lasting implications. Young people from the countries bordering Ukraine are often the first to provide humanitarian support for those displaced. But war is also an intergenerational issue, with inherited (sometimes unconscious) traumas and coping strategies. The

experiences of young participants from the Western Balkans were illustrative. When living in regions with frozen conflicts, young people need to get a better understanding of how to manage situations when facing nationalistic or aggressive behaviours. During the symposium, Svitlana Ivanova (Ukraine) shared her personal testimony about her experience during the war, including young people's difficulties when facing everyday dangers and stress.

The symposium discussed many of the negative implications of war in young people's lives: the conscription of young men to war and the voluntary enrolment of young women, with consequent dangers, the limited access to rights for girls and their exposure to war rape, the high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder, the increased number of suicides, and grief. The radicalisation of survivors, inherited trauma, censorship and misinformation in the lives of young people, hate speech and the demonization of the enemy were also discussed. The distorted transitions in war contexts were analysed in relation to education loss, the sense of uncertainty and weakened capacity to plan. At a broader level, participants emphasised the importance of resisting the normalisation of war due to fading public interest in prolonged conflicts.

Several European initiatives that promote the spirit of reconciliation and co-operation between young people living in countries with recent histories of conflict were highly commended. The Regional Youth Cooperation Office and EU4Youth were discussed at length, highlighting their support for intercultural dialogue, promotion of tolerance, understanding, peace and reconciliation. These initiatives were valued for giving young people opportunities to overcome physical and cultural borders. They cherish a regional identity, while fostering a broader sense of belonging to Europe, in accordance with the EU enlargement agenda.

Part 4: Ways forward and proposals for a renewed approach

The section below presents the key points for further action that emerged during the symposium. As participants were not always specific in regard to the target audience for the proposals, these are organised around topics and less according to the domains of action (policy, practice, research) or the levels of policy making (European, national, local, etc.). Thus, the ways forward should be read as tentative attempts to make sense of the recent changes and to map a changing landscape.

Revise the grand narratives from the bottom up

The symposium highlighted the prominence of two main narratives: one that – invariably- victimises young people, and another that celebrates their resilience. Both seemed reductive, likely to (re)produce biased generational labels, without the capacity to mobilise adequate policy responses. Participants called for increased awareness of the diversity of young people in terms of geography, location, gender, class, education, employment status and personal circumstances. Policy language needs to become more nuanced, and a more inclusive theoretical model is critical to achieve that.

The symposium also questioned the suitability of understanding transitions in relation to the five conventional markers of adulthood: finishing school, stable employment, independent residence, marriage and parenthood (Pitti 2022). Since the enabling circumstances for such markers are no longer tenable and as young people make different choices or have to go for alternative lifepaths, a re-conceptualisation is needed.

Participants also called for stronger youth ownership over the definition of problems and solutions, in ways that replace learned narratives or organisations' drift towards the funding priorities of the moment. To many, the conventional services provided by the state appeared "adultocratic", obsolete and insufficiently tailored to the actual needs and profile of young people themselves. Youth work was called to advocate for youth-informed and rights-based provision of services. A more general sense of frustration related to the postponed transitions and silent anger for not being listened to or understood as a generation permeated the symposium messages. More qualitative research is needed to gain a bottom-up understanding of the (unanticipated) meanings young people attribute to the changes around them.

Make other sectors aware they do youth policy

Participants called for revisiting the definition of youth policy, in ways that consider that other policy fields, not traditionally associated with young people, do

have implications for their lives. Young people want a say in climate policies, in local urban planning, in refugee and asylum policies, in the regulation of AI and digital governance and in policies on agriculture and energy. Environmental policies ranked high. One concern, for instance, was related to the double standards in the use of pesticides in Europe. Participants demanded a stronger stance from the youth sector in relation to policies for mitigating climate change (i.e., reducing greenhouse gas emissions also by making nationally determined contributions legally binding under the Paris Agreement). They also asked for stronger engagement of the youth sector in claiming a regulatory regime for the tech industry (higher social accountability, ethical obligations, privacy laws, more transparency, lower carbon footprints, fair taxation, etc). Overall, making other sectors aware they do youth policy emerged as a powerful message.

Safeguard civic spaces

The symposium challenged the 'centrality that economy has in defining who is recognised as an adult and who is not' (Pitti 2022b: 11) and proposed alternative views on adulthood. Civic participation emerged as an important part of the transition to adulthood that called for stronger policy attention. Thus, whilst previous crises were mainly about 'fixing economic problems', interventions needed go beyond employment and education alone. To many the pandemic brought to the fore the high value of physical spaces for participation. They noticed with concern the limitations posed by gentrification and the marketization of public spaces. To enable democratic participation, physical spaces need to be free of commercial interests, open, inclusive and youth-friendly. Young people called on local authorities to maintain public spaces for citizenship, not for consumption, and to de-commercialize the urban commons. Ultimately, they called for a robust commitment towards transparency and political integrity from decision makers. They expect the European institutions to increase awareness of the need to safeguard the grassroots activist organisations navigating increasingly illiberal environments, where politicised organisations that mimic civic group gain terrain.

Mind the trade-offs of service provision

There are trade-offs involved when youth organisations shift to service provision in the post-pandemic world. The focus on Covid-19-related topics and services within the youth sector risk silencing activism in a move that preserves the current state

of affairs and the fear of retribution. Participants called for a critical reflection of mission drift in the youth field, with long-term implications for the identity of the youth sector and for our democracies. The costs of the shift in focus are particularly high in Eastern Partnership countries, the Western Balkans region and European countries experiencing growing illiberal trends, where reliance on funders' agendas is key for the survival of small organisations.

Enlarge the scope of recovery agendas

A cross-cutting concern was related to the absence or inadequacy of non-formal learning and youth work as reflected in recovery agendas. Participants noted with concern the narrow understanding of the social losses incurred by young people during the pandemic, an area youth work is able to address and which falls within its mission. In addition, the priorities of recovery agendas were insufficiently tailored to the advocacy and watchdog mission of many youth organisations. According to several participants, many small, grass-roots NGOs saw themselves in the situation of trading previous advocacy and watchdog roles for service-provision activities (a funding area in recovery plans).

Participants noted with concern the prospects of future predicaments and called states to include a new chapter on crisis management in their future policy planning. To them, "youth work is good in crises" because it can adapt faster than other sectors and institutions, as was the case during the pandemic. Consequently, they argued future policy making to incorporate youth work as a default response in their future crisis responses. This also entails that the youth sector make its contribution more and better known.

Bring gender closer to the centre of youth policy

The symposium made a case in favour of bringing gender and intersectionality closer to the centre of youth policy agendas. It was argued young women and girls bore a disproportionate burden during the pandemic. They argued the restriction measures reinforced the patriarchal norms in Europe's more traditional communities. It fractured the emancipatory routes for girls and young people from sexual minorities who remained trapped in conservative communities or in controlling families. Participants called for increased awareness of early marriage in the context of rising school drop-out rates during Covid-19, especially in rural areas from Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans region. Also, one workshop opened up the discussion on period poverty and the ways youth work could advocate for free and accessible period products.

Reach the "hard-to-reach" and address the crisis of representation

Participants called for a stronger commitment to social inclusion, for innovative, proactive tools able to get to, engage and maintain in activities young people who are hard to reach. They expressed concerns related to privilege, representation,

creaming and tokenism in youth work and youth policy making. Questions on the moral legitimacy of privileged young people speaking on behalf of those on the margins were raised often. Innovative services and youth work interventions that are culturally competent and able to reach young people in very difficult situations were considered needed.

Young people in the symposium asked to strengthen the outreach and inclusion of the Erasmus+ programme to particular groups, such as young people with disabilities, young people leaving care, young people from conflict and war areas, LGBTQ+ young people, young Roma and Travellers, young people facing homelessness and those living in rural areas or small towns. This was considered particularly relevant in the context of diluted notions of disadvantage and the heightened vulnerability of the more general youth population after two years of the Covid-19 pandemic.
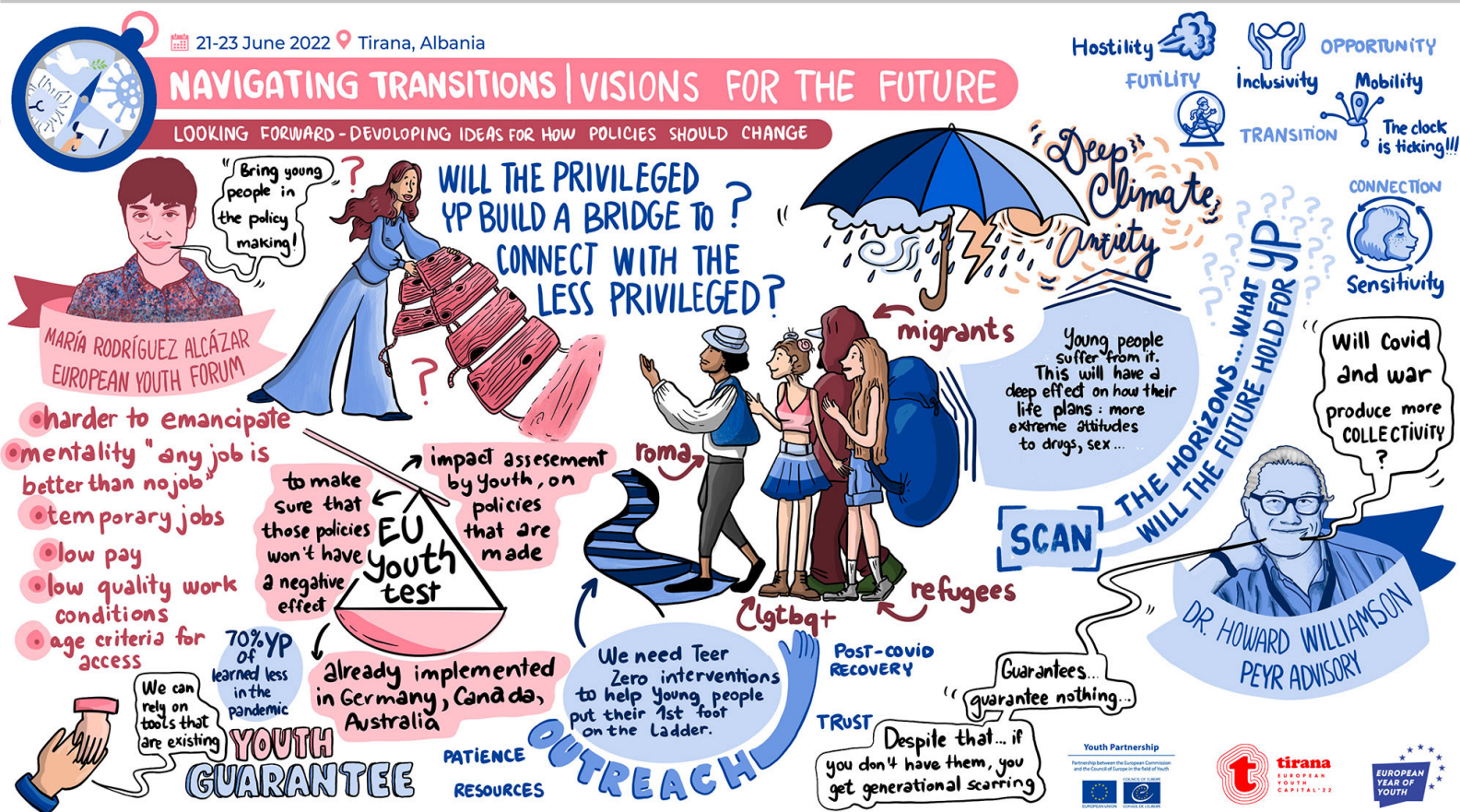
Consider good mental health and well-being as outcomes in themselves

Participants emphasised the need for young people's mental well-being to be embedded in diverse settings and services, including, but not limited to youth work, employment and education. The concern for mental health emerged as part of an "alternative idea of adulthood" (Pitti, 2022b: 11) shaping young people's new transitions. Advocating for new bridges between the world of employment and mental health was needed. Young people also called for increasing the capacity of

youth workers to engage in non-clinical interventions aimed at mental well-being outcomes. They argued that preventive, non-clinical psychological interventions can be carried out by youth workers, provided they receive proper information/training.

Address youth poverty through stronger social protection

Social protection refers to the structural measures meant to ensure the needs and the rights of disadvantaged groups in society are met. One socio-economic problem that calls for stronger social protection measures, is youth poverty. While transitions are becoming increasingly difficult for the general youth population, some groups are particularly hard-hit. There was clear support for stronger social protection and more adequate minimum or universal income schemes for young people out of school, education or training or those already suffering multiple disadvantages. Poverty-alleviation measures were deemed necessary since precarious employment no longer leads out of deprivation. Serious consideration of universal basic income for all young people to have a good starting point in life was proposed. As socio-economic background determines participation and social engagement, participants called on youth work to engage with hard-to-reach groups. A more proactive stance in relation young people in poverty was needed to address the crisis of representation in youth work and the effect of creaming.

Advocate for jobs of quality

One in six young people lost their job due to the pandemic (ETUC 2021). Prompted by the inputs of Howard Williamson, María Rodríguez Alcázar (European Youth Forum) and Shunta Takino (OECD), the symposium called for recalibrating the discourse on job creation with a more nuanced analysis of the quality of jobs that are available. One message was that when the focus is placed on the supply side (skills and "equipping" young people for the "world of work"), the demand side of employment tends to be ignored (that is, the quality of jobs available). Employment guarantees and support schemes were also questioned for being directed to employers who perpetuated market criteria ("back of the queue" young people were less likely to be selected for jobs, trainings, or apprenticeships). Participants called for a stronger social commitment to be embedded in activation measures in ways that reduce their misuse. They argued for a renewed focus on social connection and meaningful relationships, as an alternative to checklists and "tick-box indicators" in youth work.

Beware of "tech-solutionism"

"Tech-solutionism" is the belief that technology can provide a solution to any or most (social) problems. While the pandemic made youth work discover the unanticipated potential of the online world, overreliance on technology may not be sustainable and can induce a false sense of confidence. Participants cautioned against new digital applications being proposed in youth work regardless of the

problem or existing alternative solutions. Youth workers and policy makers need to ensure there is no similar tool already in place and especially that the creation of a new application, digital platform or online service is not a solution-driven choice.

Engage with young people's relationship with wars and conflicts

The symposium demonstrated that young people have complex relationships with war and that there is a strong expectation for youth work to engage with its implications in young people's transitions. Wars and conflicts are a reality in many Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans region. There are not many environments where discussions on its implications can be done in ways that are open, safe and transformative. The Youth Partnership has publications on the role of youth work in supporting refugees, including a Youth Knowledge book, a T-Kit on conflict transformation and a handbook for working with young refugees. Despite the important ways in which war and peace shape young people's life orientations in today's Europe, this is still an area requiring more consolidated engagement from the youth work community.

Addressing young people's (silent) anger and traumas related to conflicts and wars is not easy: it requires knowledge and sensitivity to local and historical dynamics, political awareness and exceptional social skills. Youth work may play a role in helping young people unpack the different positions of those involved, including themselves. It can help young people reflect upon and make sense of fundamental questions, such as: what historical, political, geographic, biographical elements make someone believe and act in certain ways? How do people mobilise different value sets, informed by different historical experiences? How are different hierarchies of values produced in time? How are conceptions of peace often subverted for political gain and how can young people make sense of these processes? Addressing these questions would strengthen young people's democratic agency and, hopefully, move towards post-traumatic growth.

Support young people from Ukraine and young activists in Russia and Belarus

A cross-cutting theme in the symposium referred to the need to support young people in Ukraine. Participants considered it important to maintain solidarity with youth organisations facing very difficult circumstances there. Inclusion of participants and organisations from Ukraine in future projects was considered key. As many anti-war activists risking their lives in Russia and Belarus are young people, participants called for increased awareness of their courageous actions and stronger solidarity with them. Participants anticipated the dangers of normalising war and conflict and called for the youth sector to play a role in enhancing young people's political agency. Active or frozen conflict zones are areas where human rights are regularly infringed, and many young people grow up or live in such areas without enjoying their rights. Participants called for supporting youth work and youth NGO initiatives in those areas.

Develop the knowledge base and evaluate what is being done

It was noted that there is insufficient information and analysis on the impact of many policy interventions, programmes, and initiatives for young people. Proper evaluation was considered key for gaining an understanding of what works, what does not work, what is promising. The value of replicating interventions from the T-Kits produced by the Youth Partnership was highlighted. This would further increase the quality of interventions and add to the knowledge base on activities. Participants learned of the Youth Partnership e-library of youth sector evaluation, a project aiming to build capacity in the youth sector for better evaluation and learning for policy and practice.

New relationships with mobility?

A finding shared during the symposium was that young people's propensity for learning mobility seems to have decreased. While one cannot yet speak about a documented trend, it is important to watch this closely. Potential reasons may be the discovery of the local and the capacity to have meaningful change at home, a post-pandemic unease with travel and legitimate concerns related to the carbon footprint (recommendations for more sustainable approaches to mobility ranked high). It may also be that the face of youth work becomes more local. The rationales behind this, as well as adapted practices that reach similar goals to the ones provided through physical mobility, may call for further research. The best ways of

using online and offline tools need to be explored to draw the benefits of both, while increasing environmental sustainability.

Remain open to unanticipated effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

Although there was a legitimate expectation to identify and address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, participants considered it to be a starting point for the learning process with many unknown factors related to long term impact. To avoid the "dangers of forecasting" (Williamson 2022), it may be worthwhile to remain tuned to possible long-term effects not yet evident or still to unfold.

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