

4th European
Youth Work Convention

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What the 4th European Youth Work Convention really concluded

A shared legacy for youth work in Europe – from Reflection to responsibility

Youth work across Europe is full of energy, creativity and commitment. Yet it too often operates in silence when it comes to recognition, resources and political understanding - a silence the 4th European Youth Work Convention set out to break. The **4th European Youth Work Convention (Malta, 2025)** responded to this gap by agreeing **74 strategic conclusions** that clearly state what youth work needs in order to survive, improve and matter.

This leaflet draws directly from the Convention Report's Conclusions. It reflects the collective voice of the convention.

The conclusions are organised around three interconnected dimensions:

- The Youth Work Core: what youth work *is*, stands for, and protects
- The Youth Work Environment: the conditions that allow youth work to happen
- Youth Work Systems: the structures, funding and partnerships that sustain it

The conclusions are practical compass for youth workers, managers, organisations and decision-makers who want youth work to be ethical, visible, sustainable and led by young people and who want to lobby in their National contexts to strengthen youth work.

Read it as a legacy reminder from Malta 2025. Youth work does not need to be heroic. It needs to be taken seriously - structurally, politically and sustainably.

The Youth Work Core

01

Clarity without rigidity

The Convention confirms youth work as a value-based, democratic practice rooted in dialogue, participation and voluntary engagement. Diversity of approaches is a strength, but clarity is essential. Youth work must be clearly distinguished from related professions while remaining open, flexible and responsive.

Shared European definitions matter, yet they must be meaningful at national and local level. Language such as *participation* or *inclusion* needs to be used precisely, not symbolically.

Ethics are not optional

The conclusions call for a European ethical framework for youth work. Ethics are not abstract ideals; they guide daily decisions, power relations and boundaries. Core principles repeatedly highlighted include equality, integrity, respect, care and solidarity.

Crucially, the report of the convention recognises youth worker well-being and self-care as part of ethical practice. A sector built on inadequate capacity cannot provide safe or empowering spaces for young people.

Recognition and visibility

Youth work's diversity should be used to communicate its value, not to dilute it. Social recognition matters as much as legal recognition. Where formal frameworks exist, they should be developed with the youth work community, not imposed on it.

The Convention challenges a familiar imbalance: youth work is often asked to prove its impact without equivalent scrutiny of policies that fail young people. Evidence must serve learning and improvement, not constant justification.

Quality and evaluation that support practice

Quality youth work depends on stable funding, time and infrastructure. The short-term project logic undermines long-term relationships with young people.

Evaluation is necessary, but it must be fair and participatory. The conclusions of the convention emphasise a long-term investment in evaluation capacity. A balance of qualitative and quantitative methods with the active involvement of young people and practitioners is essential.

Evaluation should strengthen trust, reflection and learning and should not function as surveillance.

Youth work starts with shared values, ethical clarity, realistic expectations and quality systems — the foundations the Convention identified are essential for the next phase of European youth work.

Youth Work Systems

03

Voluntary youth sector: independence needs backing

The conclusions are clear: volunteers cannot carry youth work alone. Sustainable funding, professional support and respect for independence are essential. Youth work must remain a space of free participation, not political instrumentalisation.

Infrastructure is not a luxury

Youth centres, spaces and equipment are described as critical quality factors. The report of the convention calls for dedicated funding for infrastructure, maintenance and development, including independent youth-led spaces. Quality labels and accreditation systems are proposed to support standards without stifling diversity.

Public authorities and civil society: real partnership

Cooperation only works when all actors are involved from planning to evaluation. Strong, independent civil society organisations must be meaningfully included.

Funding that works

Youth work needs funding that is accessible, focused and multi-annual. Complex systems and short cycles discourage participation and weaken sustainability.

European and national funding should align with youth work strategies, reduce administrative overload and provide long-term certainty.

Cross-sector work with boundaries

Youth work can connect policy areas, but must not lose its identity. It is not a service arm for other sectors. Keeping young people at the centre is its unique contribution.

The Convention captures it bluntly: without balance, cooperation becomes *a guided walk, not a dance*.

02

The Youth Work Environment

Young people as agents, not audiences

The conclusions underline that youth work must respond to young people's realities while actively supporting their agency. This includes helping youth groups build networks, reducing isolation, and creating meaningful opportunities for political and democratic engagement.

Participation does not happen automatically. It requires: - accessible funding and flexible support, physical and digital youth spaces and individualised approaches for different ages and needs Youth work must be co-created with young people, not delivered to them.

Advocacy needs time and structure

Advocacy is recognised as a core youth work function, not an add-on. Youth workers and organisations need time, skills and resources to speak up for young people and for youth work itself.

The Convention calls for stronger youth work associations, formal channels to influence policy and advocacy skills embedded in youth worker education

Without this, youth work remains visible at ground level but absent at decision-making tables.

Professionalisation with purpose

Professionalisation is not about uniformity. It is about **competence, ethics and working conditions**. The conclusions highlight the need for clear career pathways, fair wages, job security and continuous learning.

Paid and unpaid youth workers can coexist meaningfully when they share values and standards. Professionalisation should strengthen practice rather than excluding grassroots engagement.

Voluntary youth work matters

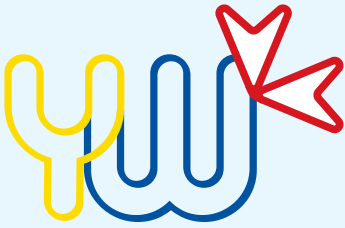
A key message is unmistakable: unpaid does not mean unprofessional. Voluntary youth work is value-driven, often youth-led, and frequently the entry point into lifelong engagement.

The report of the convention stresses the need to recognise competences gained through volunteering. It also stresses the administrative burdens and calls for training, mentoring and public recognition of volunteers.

Digital youth work needs real support

Digital youth work is here to stay. The conclusions call for sustained investment in digital competences, ethical guidance (including data protection), peer learning and funding that covers real costs and not only project outputs.

Youth work thrives when young people are trusted, workers are supported, advocacy is enabled and environments are designed for reality, not rhetoric.



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Final Note

The 4th European Youth Work Convention did not aim to produce declarations. It produced direction.

Youth work does not ask for privilege.
It asks for **conditions that allow it to do what it already does well with integrity, independence and impact.**

These conclusions are not an ending. They are a shared responsibility and a reference point for the years ahead of youth work in Europe.

From the 4th European Youth Work Convention (EYWC), Malta – May 2025. Based on Chapter 5 (Conclusions) of the Convention Report.



Presidency of Malta
Council of Europe
May - November 2025
Présidence de Malte
Conseil de l'Europe
Mai - Novembre 2025



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