

Youth Partnership

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



European Code of Ethics for Youth Work

Draft concept note and timeline

The scope of the project

Background

To strengthen the essential features of youth work, the Youth Partnership in its current workplan (2026-2028) will implement activities in three key areas: enhancing the visibility and recognition of youth work, promoting ethics in youth work, and building capacities on the fundamentals of youth work. Building on the conclusions of the [4th European Youth Work Convention](#), this includes that the Youth Partnership will develop a European Code of Ethics for Youth Work.

Context / rationale

Youth work is recognised as a powerful means of promoting young people's personal development, social inclusion, and active citizenship. As a value-driven social practice aimed at fostering participation and social cohesion, it involves moral and ethical dimensions, with actions that carry social and political implications.

A working paper published by the Youth Partnership, [Ethical Standards in Youth Work and How They Support Education and Career Pathways of Youth Workers](#), examined the nature, content, and limitations of existing ethical codes and standards in youth work. The study found that ethical practice in youth work is commonly defined through a set of standards encompassing fundamental principles and values, specific rules and policies, and the moral qualities, dispositions, and competences expected of practitioners. The findings underline that youth work requires a strong ethical foundation and a consistent commitment to ethical behaviour from all those engaged in the field. The recent comparative research on [Youth work quality tools in 15 European countries](#) demonstrates that ethical guidelines are a structural precondition for quality youth work.

Objectives

Building on the conclusions of the 4th European Youth Work Convention and existing national and international initiatives on ethical standards, this **Code will aim to inspire, guide, and support youth work organisations and practitioners in fulfilling their roles amid complex societal challenges, while upholding shared values and ethical principles in their daily practice.** The Code will be aimed at all those practising youth work, including youth workers (paid and volunteer) as defined in the [European Youth Work Agenda](#).

The Code will also contribute to strengthening the visibility, recognition, and trust of youth work among external stakeholders. A complementary educational component (such as a practical tool or learning material) could also be developed, focusing on ethical guidance and behaviour for young people and youth workers, including in sensitive contexts.

Detailed plan and methodology

The methodology proposed below combines a structured drafting cycle in cooperation with consultants and a drafting group, targeted consultations (including young people), and explicit testing in practice before formal adoption and publication. The steps outlined are meant to ensure legitimacy and ownership among key stakeholders.

1. Defining the scope and frames

- Why a European Code is needed, what it will and will not do. What are can be the objectives and expected impact of such code?
- Building the conceptual framework and conducting a review of existing national and regional codes.

2. Governance and participatory design

- Validation of the concept by the partner institutions.
- Drafting group representing practice, training, research, youth organisations, institutional partners, with a regional balance and diversity. (See *below under 'Drafting group'*).
- Reference group to be informed and contributes to the discussions about main directions and key milestones.

3. Drafting process

- Development of a concise structure, including a core Code. First testing of the draft through comparison with the existing Codes and with the support of the Drafting group.

4. Consultation and validation phase

- Consultation at a variety of relevant events (See *'Consultation opportunities and testing' below.*)
- Presentation of the draft Code for the reference group and validation by partner institutions.
- Testing and potential review clause to be added

Involvement of the EU-Council of Europe reference group

2026: Drafting and consultation process

- 31 March-1 April 2026, Brussels: 1st Meeting EU-Council of Europe reference group: consultation about the draft concept

- Reference group members support the Drafting group's work
- October-November: Presentation of the draft Code at the 2nd Meeting EU-Council of Europe reference group
- Testing of the draft Code at events

2027: Publication of the European Code of Ethics (early 2027) and promotion at the events of the Youth Partnership, its partner institutions and partners

Drafting group

A drafting group will be convened and coordinated by the Youth Partnership, representing the community of practice and involving experts with relevant experience in developing similar ethical codes or standards, as well as with practical knowledge about the use of such tools in everyday youth-work reality. Members will include representatives of the reference group, umbrella structures of youth work organisations, institutions and consultants.

Consultation opportunities and testing

- Presentations of the concept and collecting feedback at relevant activities (AYWA, Trainers' Guild, EYF INGO event, QL YCs)
- Testing of the draft Code (e.g. at the Exchange Forum 'Growing youth work' (November 2026))

Questions to be discussed with the EU-Council of Europe reference group

- What is your experience with codes of ethics on youth work?
- What do you expect from the European Code of ethics? What should be its objectives and expected impact?
- What are the key features you would like to see in it?
- What should be avoided when developing such a European Code of ethics?