

Youth Partnership

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



Analytical report of the consultation process for the next biennial work programme (2022-2023) of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership

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Contents

I. THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS.....	3
II. RESEARCH AGENDA	4
Research about young people, their needs, aspirations, interests	4
Education, work and youth transitions.....	4
Any place for alternative topics or approaches?	5
Thematic research related to young people and the youth sector	6
The implications of Covid-19 for young people and the youth sector	6
Young people and the environmental crisis	6
The relationship between artificial intelligence, young people and youth sector	7
The shrinking of civic space in relation to the youth sector	7
Intergenerational solidarity	8
Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work ...	8
III. YOUTH POLICY SUPPORT AGENDA	10
Framing the context.....	10
Evaluating the impact of the policy measures on the youth sector during Covid	12
Advocating for a youth-centred post-Covid recovery	12
Increased outreach and cross-sectoral work.....	13
Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work .	14
IV. AGENDA FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT	15
Framing the context.....	15
Supporting youth work in the ‘new normal’	16
Regional dimension.....	18
Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work .	19
V. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION	19
VI. REFERENCES	22

I. THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

This document summarizes the contributions during the consultation process organised by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (hereinafter EU-CoE youth partnership) in June 2021, in preparation of the next biennial EU-CoE youth partnership work programme (2022-2023). The consultation process included the following analytical preparation and meetings:

- Hofmann-van de Poll, F. and Williamson, H. (2021) *European Youth Strategies - A reflection and analysis Background analysis for the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership consultative process*. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth.
- Rannala, I.E., Stojanovic, J. and Kovacic, M. (2021) *European youth work policy goals analysed: The role of the EU-CoE youth partnership in the interplay between the European Union and the Council of Europe*. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth.
- The consultative meeting of the European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy correspondents (EKYP) and the members of the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) (June 8, 2021);
- EU-CoE youth partnership consultative meeting (June 10, 2021);
- Expert meeting on the future role of the EU-CoE youth partnership in supporting the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda (June 17, 2021);
- Consultation of the participants in 2021 MOOC on Essentials of youth work on their “vision of youth work in 2030”
- Consultative meeting of the Advisory Group of the Pool of European Youth Researchers (July 5, 2021).

The analytical report is based on the input collected through *padlet*, the main contributions during the plenary meetings and the *breakout rooms*, as well as the background studies. It integrated the feedback from the PEYR Advisory Group and from the EU-CoE youth partnership secretariat. The report does not provide a comprehensive overview of the past and ongoing projects of the EU-CoE youth partnership related to the areas discussed. It collects the contributions of the youth sector stakeholders and maps out areas that need research and capacity building support in the future. The report aims to serve as a basis for planning future work of the EU-CoE youth partnership.

II. RESEARCH AGENDA

The research pillar of the EU-CoE youth partnership should be contextualised in relation to the partner institutions. Its role is to inform current policy actions, to open up emerging policy agendas and views on youth. Its role of identifying trends, carrying out timely and relevant research into young people's lives, needs and aspirations and their participation in society has shaped its perception of a think tank and main research provider for the youth sector in Europe. In this regard, the EU-CoE youth partnership series of 28 Youth Knowledge Books, the Perspectives on youth series, Youth research essentials and the capacity building publications on understanding and making best use of research, for translating research findings into messages relevant for youth policy and practice on a wide range of topics broadly grouped under young people's participation, social inclusion, impact of digitalisation, youth work and youth policy have strengthened the update of the youth sector governance triangle (policy-practice-research) not only in European contexts but also in national ones.

The Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR), the PEYR Advisory Group and the network of correspondents to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKYCP) are the key groups that support knowledge gathering and analysis. The youth partnership maintains a Glossary on youth with terms referencing in academic literature and policy frameworks.

Projects related to youth policy evaluation, to digitalisation and social inclusion of young people, to shrinking space for civil society, Covid 19 impact on young people and youth sector and understanding the youth environmental movement highlight the importance of knowledge base for youth policy processes of the partner institutions (including the EU Youth Dialogue and the work of the Youth Statutory Bodies of the Council of Europe) drawing on national realities across Europe.

At present, a major institutional need is for research findings able **to help integrating youth work in the Covid-relief responses**. The consultations were permeated by a strong concern on the policy overemphasis on the economic dimensions of the recovery and the assessment of the role of youth work exclusively through employability lenses. A cross-cutting theme was making the research of the EU-CoE youth partnership a tool for advocating for an inclusive recovery agenda, in ways that integrate besides economic responses, also, the social dimension and youth development.

Research about young people, their needs, aspirations, interests

Education, work and youth transitions

Education, employment, mobility/ migration, youth spaces are established themes in the youth research agenda. They are important for the young people themselves and are, also, close to the hardcore of the EU-CoE partnership work. The relationship between formal and

non-formal education and learning continues to be analysed and debated, with national legacies and cultures playing a major role. There are many common goals. For instance, a 2018 book on [higher education for diversity and community](#) reaffirmed the democratic and inclusive values of universities in the context of the refugee crisis and the post-truth politics. However, the recent market-driven changes within higher education, notably, the competitiveness ethos in students' recruitment should also be considered.

Yet, in the post-Covid times, notions such as education, employment, participation may need a refreshed understanding and even re-conceptualization. Possible areas of inquiry may start from the questions: What transformations in the roles of schools and universities occurred in the context of the pandemic? What is the future of education and learning and what are the implications of a narrow definition (read: formal education) for young people's wellbeing now and in the future? What can be learned from the role of youth work during the pandemic? Also, the over-representation of young people among the marginal workers of the new economy calls for analysis. Its implications for democracy, participation and community building have been severely overlooked. Ultimately, how can we help rebuild young people's trust in participation and in institutions in the post-Covid time?

Any place for alternative topics or approaches?

Several inputs referred to the need to open up a discussion on **issues that do not usually enter the mainstream youth research and policy agendas**. This would be able to generate knowledge on un-anticipated issues and to welcome a plurality of views on highly divisive topics. A refreshed understanding of *youth participation* in ways that integrate the non-normative and the politically loaded instances of civil disobedience and activism is such an example (see Bessant, 2021). The recent EU-CoE youth partnership [study on the climate strike movement](#) already opened up the debate on 'disobedient youth'.

As many research calls are accessible to large entities and the themes are often driven by funding-bodies priorities, a proposal for **small, independent research** on topics that are not included in the conventional calls was considered important for refreshing (or disrupting?) the taken for granted narratives. This line of funding may be used, for instance, for re-visiting established concepts in view of the recent developments: what does *inclusion, radicalization, opportunities, participation, youth culture, youth transitions* and ultimately, *youth policy* mean now? What are the implications of using these concepts (and not others) for the current policy narratives?

Other streams may include experimentation with new participatory research methodologies (in ways able to strengthen the links between youth studies and youth work). These are areas at the research and policy nexus, that do not yet have an academic or policy home and are in need for a safe space where reflection is possible. A certain level of political risk is inherent in this process.

Thematic research related to young people and the youth sector

The implications of Covid-19 for young people and the youth sector

During the pandemic, the EU-CoE youth partnership set up a [Knowledge Hub on COVID-19](#) in order to support research and knowledge development on the impact of the pandemic on the youth sector. This has been a timely decision taken in obviously adverse circumstances, and which created a structure for the mounting knowledge that started to accumulate. Several publications were produced at an early stage, on [digitalisation and youth inclusion during the pandemic](#) and on [youth homelessness during Covid-19](#). Notably, a 2021 report on [the effects of COVID-19 on young people's mental health and psychological well-being](#) provided early empirical evidence on the implications of the pandemic at a time when the crisis was still unfolding (Mastrotheodoros, 2020).

Participants in the consultations called for **further evidence on the impact of Covid-19** on young people's lives and an assessment of the lessons learned from this pandemic for the youth sector (including, but not limited to formal and non-formal education and learning, psychological wellbeing, poverty, employment, housing, health). More research on the **gendered implication of the pandemic** were considered important, given the unbalanced care work and multiple risks encountered by young women. A cross-cutting idea during was that the pandemic has mental health implications for the young people, some problems still unfolding and calling for in-depth analysis. Participants called for more research on the socio-emotional implications of the pandemic and for nuanced definitions of 'mental health', in ways that account for different levels of impact on their wellbeing.

Young people and the environmental crisis

The EU-CoE youth partnership already has an **important stream of actions related to the environment**: a [Toolkit on sustainability and youth work](#) (2018); a publication and a popular webinar on [flattening the emission curve](#) (Buckland, 2020). At present, the EU-CoE youth partnership is working on a **sustainability checklist**, which will provide guidelines for youth initiatives across Europe. It is developed in cooperation with the Task Force on greening the youth sector, and in consultation with youth organisations. Sustainability is one of the seven areas of action of the European Platform of Learning Mobility (2021-2030).

As the new generation of EU's youth programmes have climate action among their core priorities, it becomes even more important to understand the new roles of the youth field in tackling the environmental challenges (e.g., young people's stances on environmental policies, their collective actions, reactions and lack thereof). This area has a strong potential to inform the youth sector in ways that are important for its revisioning of priorities.

Participants reflected on the close-to dystrophic environmental degradation and the dangers of the persistent focus on economic growth. They called for re-visiting the conventional discourse on youth and the environment in ways that **move from a narrative of ‘emerging issues’ to one of ‘emergency’**. They called for the research on the implications of Covid-19 for the young people to add a thorough reflection on the way young people see the ways forward.

The relationship between artificial intelligence, young people and youth sector

The EU-CoE youth partnership has a vibrant record of publications and other activities on digitalisation: [a 2018 book on youth participation in the digitalised world](#), [a 2020 research study on digitalisation and social inclusion](#) and a [2021 book on the same topic](#), a [paper](#) in relation to the digital divide during pandemic, webinars and a [podcast](#) on Artificial Intelligence. A [new research](#) opens the dialogue on algorithmic stereotyping and other risks of AI in reproducing narratives and inequalities in the digital sphere (McQuillan and Salaj, 2020). There is also a plan for exploring the links between youth work and AI under the *Perspective series*.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a fashionable topic and its links with young people, multiple: as users, as (precarious) workers in the labour-intensive AI industry or as innovative producers. Digital technologies have many implications for our democracies: from their participative potential in youth policy, to the risk of restricting the spaces of civil society. The ethical concerns related to AI are still unfolding, including the protection of personal data, the built-in biases and the social media algorithms influencing elections.

Digital transformation is continuing as a transversal phenomenon affecting young people’s lives but also public policy and the organisation of services to people, including youth policy and youth services. The implications of digital transformation require ongoing research and analysis.

The shrinking of civic space in relation to the youth sector

Civic participation has long been at the centre of youth research and at the core of the EU-CoE youth partnership activities. Now, there are strong calls for more robust studies **on the shrinking of civic space in relation to the youth sector** and the dangers of youth activism in countries with major threats to democracy. Some proposals were in favour of mapping the phenomenon in relation to the recent facets: the Covid lockdowns, the austerity measures, the rise of populism and right-wing parties and youth-led grassroots initiatives. This strand of research would fill a gap in the collective understanding of civic participation, which is of interest for other institutions, as well. For the time being, the debates on shrinking civic space rarely focus specifically on the young people and the youth sector (see the regular surveys and reports from FRA; CIVICUS on the civil society in general, civil movements and actors). The EU-CoE youth partnership already started to address this gap by the 2021 [mapping study](#),

[in preparation of the first review of the recommendation CM/Rec \(2016\)7 on young people's right to assemble peacefully.](#)

In view of the recent political transformations and barriers to youth activism, members to the consultations called for an explicit focus on Belarus and Russia, in ways that integrate the forms and the extreme cost of youth participation there.

Other proposed ways of moving forward the agenda on civic participation also included exploratory research on: (i) the new forms/modes of (e)participation; (ii) the civically 'apathetic' young people; (iii) the trust and transparency between democratic institutions and young people. The relationship between **citizenship and consumption** needs to be looked at, especially in view of the broader trends of marketization of the public space and the commodification of rights (including, but not limited to education, healthcare, housing).

Intergenerational solidarity

Intergenerational solidarity and promoting intergenerational dialogue in youth work have long been on the EU-CoE youth partnership agenda. Its work on this had a special focus on volunteering and lifelong learning. The uneven ways in which demography, economic crises and environmental emergencies intersect age, call for a refreshed understanding of intergenerational solidarity. New ways of looking at solidarity are needed, in order to integrate climate justice and to account for the imbalance of labour market and housing policies, among others.

Recently, many organisations started to interrogate intergenerational relations from new angles. The Council of Europe is undergoing a review of the Art. I.1. of its Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people's access to rights ([CM/Rec \(2016\)7](#)). SALTO ESC is preparing a campaign targeting academics to engage in the discourse on the **European narrative on solidarity**, connected to the youth field, where new synergies with the EU-CoE youth partnership's work are possible. **Ageing and ageism** is also gaining traction as a topic, including attention at international level (the UN has just released the [Global Report on ageism](#)), and there will be developments at EU level due to current narrative around demographic change. These processes strengthen the need to explore ageing and ageism from the perspective of young people themselves and the impact it has on society at large.

Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work

The EU-CoE youth partnership developed a robust profile and attracts high expectations from diverse professional groups and policy stakeholders. By and large, its activity can be described in relation to four main pillars that frame its areas of expertise: research on young people's lives (especially through the lenses of participation and social inclusion), youth work and

youth policy making. These areas have allowed for a coherent knowledge development, analysis and translation of its implications for youth policy and practice and have framed its identity as a think tank. Since 2015, digitalisation is another transversal theme of the youth partnership research work. The EU-CoE youth partnership has a strong expertise in interpreting research *for* policy making processes. One can safely argue that it is one of the very rare entities that are proactively searching to work at the intersection of research, policy and practice.

It is important to read the pandemic crisis also in relation to pre-existent tensions related to participation, social inclusion, youth work and youth policy making becoming more visible.

Also, Covid-related challenges create a demand for new topics and concerns that add a new layer of complexity. There are high expectations for the EU-CoE youth partnership to contribute towards a **better understanding of the implications of the pandemic** on young people and the youth sector, especially in regions that are insufficiently examined through this perspective. But equally important is for the **legacy of Covid for the youth-sector** to be reflected upon. What are the **lessons learned** from the pandemic in relation to working with young people? In relation to the methodologies used? Where are new forms of learning coming from and how can they be coagulated in ways able to inform further policies and youth work practice? Researching the **implications of the pandemic on the youth work occupation** may also inform further education and recognition initiatives now on the policy agenda.

During consultations an important point of debate was whether the EU-CoE youth partnership should aim towards gathering more data, or there is sufficient research available, in order to support policy action. The extent the EU-CoE youth partnership needs to engage in the production of **new empirical research or to consider policy-relevant reviews** of the existing literature as a viable alternative, is not without dilemmas. There is, indeed, burgeoning research on relevant issues (from education and employment, to civic and political participation). Yet, the production of research on relevant topic is mounting for a rather limited number of countries, where efforts should not be duplicated. However, taking country-specific research as 'evidence' to inform policy making at larger European scale is far from a solution.

This is especially true for regions without a common youth research platform where the role of the EU-CoE youth partnership is important. A consensus was built around the idea that the EU-CoE youth partnership should support **data-gathering from countries where there is no or insufficient evidence** and to rely on the existing research for the countries where the level of evidence is satisfactory. It is, for instance, important to analyse the impact and needs of the post-Covid recovery of the youth sector in **Eastern Europe and Caucasus and in Southeast Europe**. The **changing democracies** under Covid-19, the limitation of fundamental freedoms during the pandemic, without justifications that might imply concerns of public health, call for future research.

Further evidence on the **‘invisible pandemic’** experienced by the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach young people is needed, in order to inform youth-sensitive recovery policies. This stream of research needs to look into the new forms of vulnerability generated or deepened during the pandemic, the new grounds for social exclusion and the new, augmented grievances. Given the limited expertise on mental health within the PEYR-EKCYP, its role may need to be prudently aligned in the area of **advocating for young people’s access to services**. According to participants, this is an area weakly represented in the few national resilience and recovery plans that have been made public, thus far.

By and large, young people’s **health transitions** require research attention, as the newer cohorts have poorer health outcomes than previous ones (see, for instance the non-communicable diseases related to environmental pollution, poor diet, sedentarism, tobacco and alcohol use). As, obviously, other European and national bodies work on health issues, the role of the EU-CoE youth partnership may be to advocate for a stronger focus on young people’s health.

The role of AI for young people and the youth sector calls for more research. Just like ‘mental health’, AI is yet another topic that requires specialised expertise. Yet, one could also argue that AI is here to stay and delegating responsibility of the social and ethical implications of AI, is likely to leave many practices uninterrogated. It may be that at this moment in time, the PEYR has a limited capacity to generate knowledge on AI. Possible solutions may include **subcontracting** experts, **but also building this expertise** through invited lectures/ workshops. The EU-CoE youth partnership can externalize the drafting of a specialised report on AI, mental health, but it cannot externalize *the debate* on the implications these issues have on young people and the youth sector. In an age of delegation, **the youth sector community needs the support to be part of the important conversations** that are now unfolding, or that await serious debate.

III. YOUTH POLICY SUPPORT AGENDA

Framing the context

The consultations stressed the need to **contextualize** the future role of the EU-CoE youth partnership in relation to the **institutional and political dynamics** of a challenging time in history. First, the EU-CoE youth partnership needs to reflect the profile and the agenda of partner institutions, both having relatively recent, but ambitious youth strategies (Hofmann-van de Poll and Williamson, 2021). Yet, the partner institutions have their own working methods, internal dynamics and can draw on different financial means. The EU-CoE youth partnership is situated at the intersection of their interests, where co-ordination in regard to some areas, is possible. Second, defining the role of EU-CoE youth partnership depends on the actions of other policy entities, on the gaps that are identified in relation to their actions. The work of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership on supporting youth policy

development through the MOOC on youth policy essentials, two Manuals for Youth Policy (2 one forthcoming in 2021), thematic Insights related to youth policy development, support for youth policy development through the youth sector governance involvement (policy-practice-research) under *Shaping Youth Policy in Practice* project and the upcoming Tkit on Participatory youth policy testify to a strong base for continuing this work in the future. A library of resources on youth policy evaluation (following the study on this topic) is in development.

The expectations exerted on the EU-CoE youth partnership needs to be judged in relation to what is and what is *not* within its role and possibility and what needs are expressed by youth sector on the ground. The policy support agenda is dependent on the neighbouring countries' stance on the European Union policies, for instance. During meetings, several concerns were expressed on the '**behaviours of autocratic countries**', which are important when considering the next steps in the development of youth policies in Europe. Also, issues related to coordination and governance of the **Bonn process**, can have an impact on the work of the EU-CoE youth partnership. On the other hand, the cross-country data collection through the network of correspondents to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY) and the Pool of European Youth Researchers, as well as through various regional and European level thematic symposia and events have guided an evidence and needs-based youth policy support agenda.

The EU-CoE youth partnership has to calibrate its policy responses to **member states'** needs and national developments of youth policy. While it cannot compensate for the absence of youth policy or youth work structure at state level, it can support advocacy for change (e.g., recognition of youth work at national level) and support the connection of the national actors and public authorities to the European institutions. Regardless of the geo-political dynamics, an unsolved tension remains between the major policy issues driving government policies at national level and at the European level. Whilst the main drivers at national level are problem oriented (e.g., crime, functional illiteracy, school dropout, teenage pregnancy), the European policy priorities are opportunity focused. Discussions highlighted the risk for European youth policies to be perceived as visionary, yet, remote. The consultative process did not explore potential answers to this rather longstanding difference and so this will be another dilemma accompanying the future research initiatives.

Finally, there are major **global trends** and tendencies in the youth sector, to which the EU-CoE youth partnership needs to be receptive. Some examples are the environment-driven migration (Briggs, 2021) and young people's demand for climate actions (Gorman, 2021), the ongoing decolonisation movement, new issues of intergenerational justice, the *precarisation* of the economic sectors where young people are overrepresented, the marketization of the public space (including physical youth spaces), with important implications for community building and democracy, the impact of digitalisation on the lives of young people and public policy.

Evaluating the impact of the policy measures on the youth sector during Covid

As the pandemic runs its course, it was considered important to take stock of the impact of the policy measures on the young people and what institutions can learn from this. According to participants, **good policy diagnoses** are needed, including (overdue) **evaluations**. Main questions referred to the extent the current priorities of the new EU programme cycle are reflected and met in the youth policy framework. The ongoing evaluation of the **social impact of youth work** was considered important, besides a **cost-benefit assessment** of its economic value.

Several proposals highlighted the multitude of initiatives for young people or on youth participation by partner institution structures responsible for other policy fields and were in favour of **single-entry points** in the form a youth evaluation hub and an ‘observation point’ (an inventory of youth related policy measures of partner institutions). It was clear that the partner institutions would need to give guidance to the EU-CoE youth partnership whether it should be monitoring such initiatives, this requiring significant resources. Future **monitoring of the youth field**, in view of the recent proposal for an updated dashboard of EU youth indicators was considered another important policy objective linked to the EU-CoE youth partnership’s initiative of a library of youth policy evaluation resources. High expectations linked to the new **EU Youth Coordinator** role were also expressed. At this stage it was deemed too early to know the implications for the EU-CoE youth partnership work plan, as these systems need time to be put in place and further guidance will be needed in the future from the partner institutions on the way the EU-CoE youth partnership can engage with them.

Advocating for a youth-centred post-Covid recovery

Consultations stressed that young people were one of the hardest-hit groups during the pandemic and that, despite the focus on educational discrepancies caused by Covid, many social, psychological and political implications are still unfolding or yet to come. They legitimize the need for a **youth-centred post-Covid recovery**.

Also, whilst states’ allocations for infrastructure gain prominence, **the administrative capacity** of the youth policy sector at national levels and the belief in the value of European institutions are losing strength, faced with neoliberal calls for reducing state administrative apparatus. Following the EU spending on youth, especially in view of the recovery funds was considered necessary. In order for the EU-CoE youth partnership to respond better to the incoming challenges (notably, the increased institutional outreach and cross-sectoral cooperation), an increase of its budget was considered necessary, in particular for it to be able to strengthen the knowledge gathering, analysis and translation for policy and practice.

Moreover, the role of youth work may not only be one of providing support to the young people in order to compensate for the social learning loss during the pandemic. As youth work is based on reflection, dialogue, critical thinking towards empowerment goals, it may also

help young people (re)define the meaning of the Covid crisis in ways that equip them with tools for moving forward. What can the pandemic teach us about inequalities, about the growth economy and the environment? This line of youth work may be linked with the recent interest in sustainability and 'green' youth work, as well as with youth environmental movements recently entering the interest of EU-CoE youth partnership. Advocating for a role of youth work that goes **from personal recovery toward collective sense-making and social change** may be part of this agenda.

Increased outreach and cross-sectoral work

Many participants were in favour of the EU-CoE youth partnership to **expand its outreach** enabling it to contribute to policy dialogue on issues that go beyond youth work and the 'youth sector' as commonly referred to. Participants were commendable of the **high-quality work of the EU-CoE youth partnership** in strengthening the research and policy links. Given the increased expertise that the EU-CoE youth partnership accumulated and the strong professional communities it can draw on, a more proactive stance in regard to broader policy processes that influence young people, was considered timely and necessary. Examples of policy areas where a youth approach may be needed are environment, education, health, employment, housing, culture and the regional policies, among others.

Several **windows of opportunity** were proposed. As the EU will prepare and implement new initiatives related to the **Social Pillar** and its action plan, participants saw potential for the EU-CoE youth partnership to bring in the youth angle in a number of areas, including, but not limited to mental health, access to housing, the mapping of internship/ apprenticeship legislation, platform work. Another proposal was to **connect with the coalitions of higher education** institutions formed as part of the European Universities initiative funded by the European Commission through Erasmus+, in order to liaise with the wider academic sector on topics of interest. The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe invited the EU-CoE youth partnership to contribute with research on a planned set of activities (including a campaign) on revitalising democracy starting in 2022, with a focus on the digital aspect, including AI. Another proposal was to explore potential synergies with DG NEAR, which launched in 2020 the programme EU4Dialogue, aimed to support young people affected by conflicts in Moldova, Ukraine and the South Caucasus.

Stronger **support for national and local networks/ associations**, and their initiatives to connect at the European level, was considered important. As the European Youth Goals (2019-2027) developed in connection with the EU Youth Strategy are important for the wider Europe, as well, a proposal was for the EU-CoE youth partnership to promote them in ways for non-EU young people (including those affected by conflict) to feel better included in this common endeavour. As there is already a consolidated support for **voting at 16**, the support of the EU-CoE youth partnership towards organisations exploring advocacy avenues, was

considered important. Future links with **children's rights policies** were also proposed. More structured communication with the **RAY network** was another option expressed.

Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work

The EU-CoE youth partnership has a strong portfolio of actions in relation to youth work policy; learning; rights; inclusion and participation; combating hate speech, extremism and radicalisation. In many ways, it infused in the youth sector a mode of thinking that integrates research, policy and practice. Also, the EU-CoE youth partnership can draw on a community of researchers, policy makers and practitioners in regions where the youth sector is now developing. For the near future, **evaluating the impact** of the policy measures on the youth sector during Covid and advocating for a **youth-centred post-Covid recovery** in Europe, seem key. These developments integrate the themes that have always been at the core of EU-CoE youth partnership. Rapid and increased support for the **development of the youth sector in areas where political threats** are present is critical.

Yet, again, youth policy is a small field without a robust history of relating to other policy areas. Stronger **cross-sectoral cooperation** is needed. But also, it is important to prompt wider reflection on long-standing and **fundamental questions**: What is youth policy? Can we safely speak about a single European youth policy or there are more? Whose responsibility is youth policy-making, given that many policies have strong implications for young people's lives? (See the impact of environmental policies on young people, for instance). Ultimately, where is the holistic view on young people and how can different initiatives for young people be coordinated? Or is coordination indeed possible or desirable, given the institutional profiles and the diversity of the youth sector(s) in Europe?

IV. AGENDA FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT

Framing the context

The EU-Council of Europe youth partnership's support to youth work development (one of its pillars of work for more than two decades) has contributed a significant knowledge base through projects such as the *History of Youth Work*, *MOOC on essentials of youth work*, *Thematic Tkits*, *Coyote magazine*, *European Platform on Learning Mobility*, *youth knowledge books such as Thinking seriously about Youth work*, and the research project *Mapping educational and career pathways for youth workers and developing youth work country information*. Youth work along with youth research and youth policy have featured as important focus in its work in Southeast and in Eastern Europe and Caucasus regions of geographic focus. It also hosts the content of the first two European Youth Work Conventions and has actively supported the organisation of all three conventions, not in the least with research and expert contributions. Against this background and in the current political context when youth work is a priority of the two partner institutions and whereby they expressed an interest to enhance the role of the partnership in supporting the European Youth Work Agenda, the consultative process focused on the needs, potential role and focus of the future actions. The *Visible Values* website with resources, frameworks and stories from the community of practice on recognition of youth work is being updated.

Participants noticed with concern governments' focus on the 'learning losses' with exclusive reference to formal education. They called for fast and concerted advocacy efforts in order to acknowledge the complex nature of learning and **to introduce youth work** in the processes of compensating for young people's developmental loss and widening inequalities.

Recently, the World Health Organisation took the unprecedented initiative of directing important financial support to the six largest global youth movements, within its 'Global Youth Mobilization for Generation Disrupted' programme. The purpose is to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic on young people, while 'elevating the ideas, ingenuity and innovation of young people working to respond to the global health crisis' (WHO, 2021). In order not to lose momentum and to advance the European youth work agenda, rapid responses are needed. However, a concern expressed in the consultations was that the strong focus on youth work by the EU-CoE youth partnership may risk underplaying the importance of research.

A cross-cutting theme referred to the need for taking stock of **what youth work meant during the pandemic**, how the occupation changed and what are the implications for the steps forward. Participants considered it is important for their community to reflect on the topics to be addressed in the next period, especially in view of the processes of collective sense-making about the pandemic. Also, the need to stimulate youth participation in processes that define the priorities of national resilience and recovery plans was considered key.

Supporting youth work in the 'new normal'

Youth workers need increased capacity to assist young people in their personal/ psychological struggles, in a competent manner. Many participants called for reflection on the provision of **non-clinical mental health support** in youth work settings. This process would entail mapping of current practices and the lessons learned, development of toolkits and provision of training for youth workers.

There is a certain level of uncertainty over the **future of digital youth work**, in ways that may move from activities with 'target groups', towards a 'global community'. Participants acknowledged that the pandemic has been a 'mass incubator for digital youth work'. Main concerns for the future, refer to: (i) the further use of resources that have been developed during the pandemic; (ii) ways to interconnect digital and face to face youth work in order to be mutually supportive and beneficial to young people; (iii) identification of youth services that can become fully digital or automated after the pandemic; (iv) methods of overcoming young people's digital fatigue in the eventuality of a 'worst-case-scenario'. Drawing on the learning of youth work activities generally during the pandemic (and specifically looking at innovations in the digital sphere) was deemed an important topic to investigate.

Advancing '**the recognition agenda**' was a cross-cutting issue, in particular the quality of the training using non-formal methodologies (see also Rannala et al., 2021). Like many semi-professions that search for legitimacy and status, youth work also explores the possibility of academicization, with several university degree programmes gaining prominence. Youth work has, however, a legacy grounded in diversity, autonomy and non-formal education and learning that cannot be easily reconciled with formal education. One proposal was in favour of establishing accrediting bodies from the youth work community, who could validate competences based on a *portfolio model*, that includes diverse combinations of formal and non-formal education and learning, experience, including competences acquired informally, among others. There are already a number of competences and competence frameworks for youth work set up and this can help the validation and accreditation process. However, fundamental questions still call for meaningful debate: How to ensure that this process is value-driven and free of political interference? Ultimately, what sort of 'recognition' and by whom is the youth work community heading for? New ways of looking at the **wellbeing of youth workers in adverse circumstances**, need also to be reflected upon. How to support youth workers in the process of assisting young people in difficulty?

A structural **consolidation of the youth work research** was considered important, in order to strengthen the occupation. This process may entail regular youth work research conferences, besides the usual practice of youth work conferences and a peer-reviewed youth work research journal. Several participants also called for a **special focus on youth-led initiatives** in the new research agenda, as situations where young people act as youth workers themselves are gaining prominence. Understanding these emerging youth-led ecosystems, how the values of youth participation are manifested organically, was important for several

participants. For the time being, these were considered white spots in the overall knowledge on youth work. However, there was no agreement on the actual role of the EU-CoE youth partnership. The European Youth Forum called for the EU-CoE youth partnership support in its future scoping research on volunteering-based youth work.

Concerns were also raised between the development of a European youth work and of youth work in Europe, two intersecting areas with agendas going almost parallel. The need for a permanent reflection and space for coordination of initiatives within the Council of Europe and European Union cooperation with a common pool of experts on youth work development managed by the partnership were highlighted both in the analytical report (Rannala et al.) and in the consultative meetings.

Local youth work is still an area that is not being given much thought outside youth-work practitioners' circles. Policy makers and governments rarely invest in development of supportive (infra)structures for youth work and young people living in small urban areas and in remote villages. Participants welcomed the recent focus of the EU-CoE youth partnership on **rural young people**. Yet, more work is needed to bring other-than-urban forms of youth work closer to the policy agenda. The EU-CoE youth partnership was invited to support the practitioners and actors on the ground with knowledge and evidence-based arguments for investment in and support for youth work and youth services, which would help convince more local public authorities of the value it brings to young people in their communities. Given the deepening social divides during the pandemic, this process could be linked with the post-Covid recovery efforts. Synergies with the recent Europe Goes Local network, with the European Committee of the Regions and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities initiatives were considered important in this process, recognising the resource limitations of the EU-CoE youth partnership

The ethics of youth work became more salient as a topic during the consultations, as all choices in youth work have a strong ethical dimension (although implicit or unrecognised). This would also open up more thorough reflection on the underpinning tensions and dilemmas of participation and practice. There were several calls for debates around Codes of ethics for youth work. The EU-CoE youth partnership research and MOOC resources provide a strong basis for this debate.

The working conditions of youth work practitioners (be it volunteers or paid) and the **labour rights of youth workers** in a general context of increased labour market *precarisation* were considered insufficiently represented in the agenda of the partner institutions. The demographic structure of the occupation was also insufficiently represented (Rannala et al., 2021). Participants noticed the need to open up debate on these issues.

Regional dimension

Europe cherishes its diversity of youth work practices anchored in various national/ regional legacies. According to discussions in a subgroup, in countries facing threats to democracy, there is a risk for youth work to be associated exclusively with leisure, hobbies and culture, in ways that remove any relation between young people and political participation. Conversely, when young people do take political action, this is being regarded as antisocial behaviour. A new mapping of the very **recent transformation in the mission and purposes of youth work**, as well as its risk for instrumentalization, may be timely. Participants called for more spaces for debate on **freedom of expression and activism, active citizenship education and the political dimensions of youth work**.

Previous work of the EU-CoE youth partnership highlighted the added value of youth work in conflict transformation and presented examples of practice. However, the T-Kit on Youth transforming conflict was written a decade ago, when many of the current challenges and tools, such as AI were not so influential.

Given the lack of progress on the human rights situation in parts of Europe, the role of youth work in **revitalizing democracy** was repeatedly stated. This would entail a diagnosis of the current status and support of youth work in countries with illiberal trends. Written contributions from youth sector representatives called for an explicit focus on countries undergoing such trends. A proposal for re-thinking the role of youth work in view of the necessary **reconciliation and conflict transformation processes** was considered important for conflict-ridden Caucasus countries and not only. Important tasks are to decide how to approach the issue of transnational justice with young people in war-affected regions and how to prevent the creation of one-sided nationalistic narratives. This 'hard talk' would entail engaging with more (ideologically) diverse youth groups (including conservative and religious young people) and **building the capacity** of youth organisations in initiatives dealing with the past.

The youth work community values its diversity of practices and the partner institutions are supportive of this. During the meetings, it became evident that in a post-Covid Europe, the notion of quality youth work needs to be expanded in ways that integrate innovation and adaptability, alongside sustainability of results, aligned with the long-standing values. Quality reference guidance was not considered incompatible with diversity; in fact increased **standard settings in youth policy and youth work for Southeast and Eastern Europe regions** was considered needed. In the reality that countries have different capacities to sustain youth work, several participants were in favour of exploring ways to integrate youth work development in the current neighbouring cooperation initiatives.

Strengths of the EU-CoE youth partnership, challenges and implications for its future work

The EU-CoE youth partnership already has a history of engagement and an established network in European countries. It is well positioned to draw to an extensive pool of practitioners (see its 2019 Regional Youth Knowledge Forum on youth research in South-East Europe). The team is also extremely competent in **addressing the regional challenges** in the youth sector. The recent publications and the MOOC on Youth Work Essentials illustrate its commitment for building the capacity of the youth sectors in contexts where research-policy-practice links are underdeveloped.

Mapping the youth work developments in **Eastern Partnership countries** and in **Southeast Europe** is an important area. The task ahead would be to explore the dynamics of the youth sector (and, ideally, ways forward) towards post-Covid recovery in changing political landscapes. At a next stage, a strong proposal was for the EU-CoE youth partnership to work towards increasing the quality youth work in environments that are more difficult. According to Rannala et al. (2021), one way is for the EU-CoE youth partnership to establish and coordinate thematic/specialized expert bodies at European level that provide direction and mentoring support to regional and national level for the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda.

The EU-CoE youth partnership supports the community of practice and is currently at the forefront of researching the education and career paths of youth workers. Depending on the course of the recognition agenda, the EU-CoE youth partnership can play a major role in the **development of standards**, in subsequent **accreditation** processes and in supporting the **competence development** of youth workers so the research focus on education and career pathways should be continued.

V. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

As a think tank with constant knowledge gathering, analysis and production, the EU-CoE youth partnership has communication of its research findings and its translation for decision-making and for youth work practice in the youth field as a transversal objective. The website is the main repository of all the knowledge organised by thematic and country information under About youth/EKCYP section and by the areas of work of the youth partnership: youth policy, youth work, youth research and geographic priorities. A section of resources includes the contacts of EKCYP, PEYR and PEYR AG as well as all the knowledge books, Tkits, Insights, Essentials series produced to date. Coyote magazine is hosted on a separate website. A large library of multimedia resources with videos and webinars hosted on the youtube channel, podcasts available on several platforms, visuals and infographics on the youth partnership website aim to diversify communication of research findings in multiple accessible formats for a wide range of beneficiaries starting with young people, youth organisations, youth work practitioners, policy and decision-makers at all levels and the research community. The two

MOOCs (youth policy essentials and youth work essentials) are other tools of communicating many knowledge resources in a youth-friendly format. Finally, an increased presence on the social media channels and the constant monitoring and evaluation of this presence has ensured a growing interest in the work of the youth partnership from Europe and beyond.

There was an overwhelming consensus during all consultations, that in the EU-CoE youth partnership carried out an outstanding communication and dissemination work. In the last years, the EU-CoE youth partnership produced a very high number of quality materials and it consolidated its expertise on topics that may, potentially, inform policy areas without a record of cooperation with the youth sector. A large consensus was built around the need to incorporate a *youth dimension* in policy areas that do not have an explicit youth focus, but affect the lives of young people. According to participants, the EU-CoE youth partnership has the necessary level of professionalism and policy maturity for having a more proactive stance beyond the youth sector and for establishing **new links** across a wide range of policy areas.

Advocating for the direct **involvement of youth researchers in the ongoing policy** processes (e.g., expert groups, consultations, policy monitoring and evaluation processes), besides the involvement in the Council of Europe youth statutory bodies meetings was considered important. Also, in view of the Bonn process, there is an expectation for the EU-CoE youth partnership to contribute with innovative solutions for involving young people in the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda. This may entail the development of accessible materials for the young people, in cooperation with other institutions/organisations working directly with young people.

Preparing a **third edition of the MOOC** ('Essentials of Youth Work') needs to be decided in ways that take into account on the one hand, the important policy momentum (notably, the Bonn process), which calls for a new edition to be available. Yet, on the other hand, the decision needs to consider the workload behind and the opportunity costs of this effort. The European Commission was strongly in favour of maintaining the MOOC, as it is able to supplement the inherently limited outreach of the conventional training courses of the partner institutions.

Coyote was considered valuable, as it provides a platform of reflection for the youth work community and a good instrument for supporting the internal commitment of those already in the sector. However, a revision of the approach may be needed for *Coyote* to become more inclusive in relation to the whole community of practice interested in youth issues. A first step would be to map the identities and needs of these 'untapped' professional groups.

Optimizing the communication of the burgeoning amount of information that is produced, was considered important. A brainstorming of communication possibilities retrieved several inputs: (i) a monthly newsletter integrating past and future events/ initiatives of the EU-CoE youth partnership and a space to profile work/ initiatives of members; (ii) promotion support from the EKCYP and PEYR members in their respective countries and regions; (iii) a workshop

on data visualisation for the presentation of research findings to non-academic audiences; (iv) a publication series focused on independent research; (v) inviting experts working on youth issues in other sectors in the podcasts.

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