

## **Youth Partnership**

---

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



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# **(Un)Equal Europe?**

## **Responses from the Youth Sector**

### **Symposium**

30 May to 2 June 2016

European Youth Centre Budapest

Zivatar utca, 1-3

1024 Budapest, Hungary

## **Key Messages**

Introduction .....	2
Key messages .....	3
1. Inequalities in general .....	3
2. Young refugees.....	5
3. Finding a place in education.....	5
4. Finding a place in the labour market .....	6
5. Finding a place in communities (engagement).....	6
6. Finding a way to a healthy life .....	7
Final remarks.....	7

*“I am the girl that stopped believing in people until they believed in her and now she believes in everyone; I am an older me looking back on life saying well done.”*  
(Amerah Saleh, Opening poem of the symposium)<sup>1</sup>  
*“Stop saying young people are the future, they are the present!”*  
(Young participant at the 2015 European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty)

## **Introduction**

The symposium (Un)Equal Europe? Responses from the Youth Sector<sup>2</sup> at the European Youth Centre Budapest, Hungary, brought together more than 100 youth workers, policy makers and researchers, who were offered a chance to listen to contributions by 19 experts on the broad topic of inequality in the following areas: poverty and NEETs, refugees, health, employment, justice, formal and non-formal education, access to rights, art, gender, extremism and identity.

The extensive list of topics above was not only covered in expert presentations but also in discussions by the participants themselves, be it during the informal garden conversations, the stimulating labs or the fruitful final plenary debate.

The key messages<sup>3</sup> sum up the input of both the participants and the presenting experts. After summarising overall remarks on inequalities for youth in general, the text is divided into thematic areas of barriers to inclusion, as identified in the document that paved the way to the current discussions, “Finding a place in modern Europe”:<sup>4</sup> finding a place in communities (engagement), finding a place in education, finding a place in the labour market, finding a place to live (housing) and finding a way to a healthy life. The reason for this division is that the overall debates were so wide and crossed through so many sectors, that it seems only natural to organise them and link them to work already done. In addition to these areas, specific emphasis during the symposium was put on the topic of young refugees, and that is yet another area where the key messages are listed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Saleh, A. 2016. Opening Poem of the Symposium. available at <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/opening>.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter referred to as “the symposium”.

<sup>3</sup> Disclaimer: The content of this document, commissioned by the EU - CoE youth partnership, does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either of the partner institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe).

<sup>4</sup> Markovic, J., Lopez, M.A.G., Dzigurski, S. (2015) “Finding a place in modern Europe”. Youth Partnership. Online, available at <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668217/Finding-09-2015.pdf/a1045d8f-a4c7-4889-b1a1-e783e470858b>.

## Key messages

The key messages differentiated by the specific areas of interest are listed below. The main message is stated in bold and further explained and elaborated for the reader's convenience in the subsequent text.

### *1. Inequalities in general*

- **Build more cohesive societies for everyone's well-being.** Research into income inequality shows that low relative income inequalities lead to a cohesive, community-oriented society characterised by high trust in others, whilst high relative income inequalities lead to atomised, individualistic societies characterised by high mistrust in others. Therefore, not only the poor, but the whole society is affected. Young people should engage in raising public awareness on the effects of inequalities and contribute to building cohesive societies.
- **Help young people change the system, not squeeze them into an existing box.** There are different groups of young people experiencing social exclusion and they should be supported in being themselves and doing things their own way; tools and language used in youth work must speak to young people. Youth events, initiatives and projects should be tailored to the needs of the particular young people they are addressing (young people in precarious employment conditions or those with family responsibilities, for example).
- **Youth work should be a safety net combined with a trampoline.** The fact that you are not in a disadvantaged situation at the moment does not mean you will never be. Inequality may affect people at different stages in their lives. A safety net is needed in order to catch the young people who drop out of the formal education or employment system and a trampoline effect is necessary to catapult these young people back to accessing their rights and enjoying adequate living conditions.
- **Youth organisations should seek partnerships with organisations in other fields.** Young people face multiple discrimination in accessing their rights to housing, education, health care and other services. This leads to further increases in the obstacles young people need to overcome to fully participate in society. Partnerships with schools, NGOs in areas other than youth work, or social service providers are therefore necessary for youth work to be able to assist young people in difficult situations.
- **Reach out to the invisible youth.** Certain groups of young people are still barely reached by youth work, for instance disabled youth or young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Young people attending youth centres and schools could be messengers, enabling youth work to reach those who do not participate. If this situation is due to mental barriers, youth work should focus on them as well. For example, when unemployed young people are not willing to move

from one area in a country to another even though employment opportunities open up there.

- **Use clear language.** It is necessary to clarify meanings of the often confusing concepts, phrases or terms which can mean different things in different contexts, such as “participation within the youth sector triangle”, so that messages are clear, even to other sectors. Clear language should be used with young people as well, since being understandable and coherent is the only chance to convey the messages.
- **Make initiatives, programmes and infrastructure sustainable.** Sustainability should be guaranteed on a systemic level, in order to avoid interference from political changes on the international, state and local levels. Already tested and proven initiatives should also be supported: less emphasis might be put on innovation and more on sustainability when considering project applications in the youth sector. Sustainable youth work should be developed across Europe and connected to other sectors.
- **Improve communication within the youth sector triangle.** Online tools could be created in order to facilitate information exchange among youth workers, policy makers and researchers. The example of ResearchGate could be used in order to establish a “YouthGate”. Research needs to be communicated in an appropriate manner to policy makers as well as practitioners; studies carried out need to reflect the needs of practitioners and policy makers; policy makers need feedback from practitioners concerning their policies with respect to the intended and unintended consequences, and further issues. Youth sector priorities should be set with the agreement of all three of its pillars. Round tables could be used to bring together practitioners, policy makers and researchers to facilitate the process of priority setting.
- **The youth sector and youth work in particular should lobby for their interests.** Youth work should be an actor of social change; it should be asking questions no one else dares and focusing on long-term goals. To do so, youth work should be generally more coherent and organised, since there are currently too many split and solitary initiatives without proper co-ordination. These separate initiatives allow only very limited lobbying opportunities; this could change if we work together. The youth sector should also involve researchers more and use evidence when negotiating with policy makers. In particular, a lobbying association should be established to advocate for the interests of disadvantaged youth across Europe.
- **Strengthen the profession: improve visibility and recognition of the youth sector.** Youth work should aim at continuing to develop the youth worker profession based on the competences developed at European level, work for wide acknowledgement of its role and the existing structures; and communicate its values better through the media. The Erasmus+ programme’s mobility schemes for youth workers facilitate such exchanges, which are vital for the strengthening of the profession.
- **Increase resources available to the youth sector.** Additional financial and human resources are needed in the youth sector. Funding of the youth sector should come from the state and from other sources to strengthen the independence and security of youth organisations.

## *2. Young refugees*

- **Youth programmes should be adjusted to enable access for asylum seekers and refugees.** Young refugees are socially and politically excluded; they need to be integrated into the democratic system (participation, rights, residence permits, citizenships, etc.), but at the same time youth programmes such as Erasmus+ should be tailored to their needs in order to engage them as soon as possible.
- **Youth work should contribute to creating a long-term overall strategy for integration and equal opportunities for young refugees.** Youth work should be used for the integration of young refugees as well as to support researchers and policy makers. The youth work field has enormous expertise and experience in dealing with young people from different backgrounds and should put them to good use in regard to refugees. At the same time, coherent strategies should be put together at the national level in order to provide co-ordination and support for the current local initiatives in this area. Specifically, regular communication should be set up between former and current refugees and migrant workers, and relevant public and private actors. At the same time, it is vital to launch safe and permanent physical and online spaces for cultural exchange and dialogue in order to create sustainable partnerships among all interested parties (young refugees, youth workers and other actors in the public space) enabling integration and inclusion of young refugees. To support the integration and inclusion processes, recognition of acquired educational qualifications is necessary.
- **Knowledge of young refugees should be improved.** Refugees are not a homogeneous group: there are more than 60 nationalities in the current migration wave. Our Eurocentric assumptions and views of minors and children should be confronted with how the refugee children and youth see and perceive themselves. We know very little about them or how to effectively help them and this needs to change. The youth sector should support and initiate more research in this area.
- **Youth work should also have an advocacy role.** Young refugees are marginalised, and often left out from consultation and decision-making processes. The youth sector should do its best to help young refugees express themselves.

## *3. Finding a place in education*

- **Non-linear, adapted education alternatives should be provided to young people.** More investment in lifelong learning and non-formal education is needed. Connections among formal education, vocational education, adult education, youth work and second chance schools can create alternative education paths for excluded groups. More flexible learning trajectories should be developed for young people who drop out from formal education. Education should also be practical, providing knowledge and skills for life, and experiential learning should be one of the principles of good education. More youth work–school collaboration is needed, enabling youth workers and volunteers to come to schools and support young people.

- **All young people (including refugees) should be engaged in human rights and social rights education.** Young people can learn human rights through games and simulations, using youth work know-how. These non-formal learning approaches should be introduced in school curricula and more global education should be provided so that young people develop empathy with peers within and outside Europe, and know what life looks like elsewhere. Young refugees could play an active role in this awareness-raising process.

#### *4. Finding a place in the labour market*

- **Young people should receive adequate social protection when needed: not only to survive, but to thrive in society.** When social protection schemes are generous, they tend to generate little dependency, because young people do not get trapped as is often the case in less generous schemes. If young people do not receive adequate support, there is a danger of the rise of an informal or grey economy and other alternative survival strategies without health insurance and other benefits. Adequate and accessible social protection provides a basis for entering quality employment and thus reduces the democratic deficit, which is often accompanied by low labour market participation.
- **Youth work practitioners with counterparts from other sectors should come together to translate European policies into working solutions at the local level.** Lifelong guidance is an important tool to align the aims of education and the labour market and could be an excellent example of cross-sectoral co-operation.
- **Quality apprenticeships and internships are needed.** Internships, as they are today, tend to resemble cheap labour force exploitation, rather than really providing young people with labour market skills and connections. This needs to change in order to provide young people with adequate jobs and to end the exploitation of young people.

#### *5. Finding a place in communities (engagement)*

- **Youth work should listen more to young people with fewer opportunities and act on their needs.** NEET young people constitute an invisible generation which does not participate in society; youth work should offer ways to change that. In co-operation with other sectors it should provide opportunities to practice participation for young people on a small scale (space to be provided in youth work, and in education, supported by decision makers). Youth workers themselves should act as examples: voting in elections, participating actively in the community and speaking about it. The internet may be a valuable tool to bring down social barriers; its importance should not be underestimated by youth work. Structured Dialogue is a useful tool, but themes and questions must correspond with interests and needs of young people. Mobility programmes should also be tailored to the needs of young people with fewer

opportunities (for example, young single parents or young people in precarious employment situations).

- **Policy makers should not only be more aware of the need to involve young people in political processes, but do it in practice and act on/react to proposals from young people.** Youth work should support this through advocacy and practical support.
- **European identity cannot be created when young people with fewer opportunities are not reached by EU programmes.** Young people attending schools in disadvantaged socioeconomic areas are less likely to participate in EU activities and, therefore, are less likely to feel European, in comparison to their counterparts from schools in other socioeconomic areas. On the other hand, international youth projects have a lasting positive impact on young people's personal development. Youth work, in general, should target as many young people from different backgrounds as possible.

#### *6. Finding a way to a healthy life*

- **Youth work, in co-operation with the education and health-care sectors, needs to be aware that young people's mental health is a serious issue.** There are severe threats to young people in the area of mental health (suicidal behaviour, eating disorders, stress, depression, etc.). The youth sectors and others need to make sure young people care about their mental health and overcome (self) stigma. At the same time, youth workers themselves should be able to spot warning signs and co-operate with other sectors to resolve potential issues. Systematic co-operation between the youth work and health professionals should be put in place.
- **Youth work should adopt a strong gender perspective.** Youth work should be aware of the individual, family, social and career pressures young people bear as a result of gender bias and should deal with them on all levels (strategic and systemic).

#### **Final remarks**

In the extensive list of messages, suggestions and observations above, certain topics were repeated and, therefore, seem to be of utmost importance to the participants of the symposium. These are listed below.

- Cross-sectoral co-operation should occur in all possible contexts to ensure an inclusive society that reduces inequalities and empowers all young people to fully participate.
- Lobbying and advocacy should be strengthened in youth work.
- The visibility and recognition of youth work from other sectors and society at large need to increase.
- Long-term sustainability of the youth sector needs to be established.
- Young people with fewer opportunities, including NEET, should be primary beneficiaries of youth sector initiatives.



- The professionalisation of youth work is needed.
- The knowledge base of youth work should be enhanced, ensuring good practice approaches in policy and youth work are well researched and useful for policy making and practice.
- Communication within the youth sector should function based on a common understanding by all actors of its value and long-term vision.
- Youth work should become an active agent of social change. Using the abovementioned recommendations, youth work should become one of the key players in the social inclusion of young people.

*Put together by Ondrej Barta, rapporteur of the Symposium*