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Symposium

'Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People'

12 – 14 June 2017, Prague

Symposium Report

by John Muir, Symposium rapporteur



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Executive Summary

The Symposium 'Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Youth People' was an initiative of the European Union and Council of Europe's youth partnership (EU-CoE youth partnership) organised in the framework of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and hosted by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Czech National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme.

Through a mixture of keynote speeches, expert inputs, interactive sessions, thematic spaces, a youth policy fair, and informal exchanges, the Symposium provided a unique opportunity for participants to identify and debate the contemporary challenges faced by young people in Europe today; to identify and share policy responses at local, national and international levels; and to understand how effective youth policies are developed.

The programme aimed to enable Symposium participants to identify a series of key challenges affecting young people, review examples of youth policy responses, and develop a series of key messages directed to those responsible for influencing the youth policy context.

The Symposium's working groups were structured around six key thematic areas, organised into three groups:

- Identity and Autonomy: "Belonging" and "Agency and Empowerment";
- Solidarity and Democracy: "Participation and Expression" and "Volunteering";
- Activity and Occupation: "Learning and Training", and "Working and Creating".

Participants were introduced to these themes through a combination of background research papers and identified the key challenges faced by young people in these areas before exploring effective policy responses.



Key Challenges

The **Belonging** theme explored aspects related to young people's identity and place in society. The challenges faced by young people were identified as including integration; the ability of young people from migrant backgrounds to feel at home in the place where they live; the impact of populist movements and nationalist policies and of radical or extremist groups, as well as more localised criminal social groups and 'gangs'. In addition, the group identified economic insecurity and rising unemployment as a key issue impacting on young people's sense of belonging.

Agency and Empowerment was defined as involving individuals, families, organisations and communities gaining control, mastery and agency over their lives. This theme was explored through specific examples of initiatives that seek to promote independent and autonomous housing, access to rights, and empowerment of minorities. The contemporary challenges faced by young people were identified as practices, beliefs and values that disempower young people, such as discrimination against young people because of their age, the violation of young people's rights in areas including education, participation, employment and social protection, health, freedom of expression and information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief.

The **Participation and Expression** theme explored the rights, means, support, opportunities, and spaces young people have for making their voice heard, and having an influence on issues that concern them. The conception of participation was not limited to political participation, but also included young people's right to participate in judicial or administrative proceedings that affect them, or playing a part in the projects and programmes that are designed for them. The challenges faced by young people included declining rates of youth participation in formal participation structures; restrictions on meaningful participation; and restrictions on civil society space. The group also discussed youth under-representation in politics and considered how this affects quality of governance. The group noted that young people have multiple and fragmented political interests that do not necessarily fit into existing participation structures, political parties or civil society.

Volunteering was identified as a means of civic engagement for and by young people and was defined as freely given, unpaid labour. Volunteering was also considered as a way by which young people can build competencies useful in education and employment, such as skills, knowledge, social networks, and a sense of self-efficacy. The group identified two main challenges faced by young people relating to volunteering, firstly, **unequal access to volunteering opportunities**, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities, and, secondly, the **lack of visibility and recognition of volunteering-related competencies and experience**.

The **Learning and Training** theme looked into aspects such as the role of formal and non-formal education as means for supporting young people's personal and professional development. The challenges associated to learning and training included the risk of early school leaving, as well as obstacles to accessing non-formal education opportunities and a gap in careers information and guidance. In both instances, young people with fewer opportunities were identified as being disadvantaged. The group also noted that too often, VET (vocational education and training) is considered to be a tool to prevent young people becoming NEET and that there is prejudice towards VET schools and educational programmes. The group identified a number of ethical challenges associated with entrepreneurial learning, questioning when and how it should be incorporated into educational programmes, stating that the primary purpose of early education should be to develop young people's personality and to develop critical thinking.

The **Working and Creating** theme explored the relation between young people and their participation in the labour market, including access to jobs, young people being equipped with the skills and competences needed to access employment or to undertake entrepreneurial activity. This working group focussed on five key topics including precarious employment, challenges associated with internships, traineeships and youth guarantee schemes, the rural and urban divide, the role of youth work in supporting young people to access employment, and young people's participation in entrepreneurial activity. The group highlighted the impact of labour market conditions and access to employment, on young people's transitions to

independence, including the ability to live independently, to get married, or start a family.

Policy Responses

In advance of the Symposium, participants submitted summaries of over 30 examples of policy responses from 18 different countries, many of which were presented in the thematic groups and at the Symposium's youth policy fair. These responses include examples of actions undertaken at the local level, through to the international level; actions that have been led by youth NGOs to those led by national government ministries; actions undertaken with no budget, through to those that have required multimillion euros of investment.

An analysis of the examples of policy responses has highlighted some key principles that can be considered by those responsible for influencing the youth policy environment. These principles are presented under responses that involved:

1. Leadership from public institutions and civil society
2. Effective use of knowledge, research, data and evidence
3. Commitment to promoting lifelong learning and professional development in the youth sector
4. Commitment to establishing an enabling legislative and policy environment
5. Recognition of the value of campaigning and advocacy.

Key Messages

In each of the six thematic areas, Symposium participants developed a series of key messages addressed to a range of actors and stakeholders, all of whom play a pivotal role in influencing the policy context in which young people live.

These key stakeholders range from youth workers and non-formal educators, to politicians and those working in public institutions. They include those working at the local, national and international levels. Across all of the thematic areas, the key messages highlighted a series of consistent aspirations and expectations for those responsible for improving the policy context for young people.

Symposium participants called for:

- Stronger political and institutional commitment to young people, from politicians and public institutions at local, national and international levels.
- Policy makers and public institutions to support, develop and maintain a strong and vibrant civil society and NGO sector, and to ensure that this sector was treated as a valued and independent partner.
- Greater recognition for the youth sector, and greater investment in the training and development of youth workers.
- Policy makers, public institutions, youth workers, and educators to develop educational programmes that are responsive to the contemporary challenges young people face, and in particular to respond to the opportunities and risks associated with technological developments.
- All those working in the youth sector pay greater efforts to tackling discrimination, social exclusion and inequality.
- All those working in the youth sector to strengthen young people's knowledge of, and access to, rights as a key mechanism through which to address contemporary challenges related to equality, participation and labour market transitions.

Introduction

The Symposium 'Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Youth People' gathered 110 practitioners, researchers, policy makers, representatives of different European, national or local youth organisations, and young people from 37 countries, primarily from the signatory states of the European Cultural Convention. A list of participants can be found in Appendix 1.

The Symposium was prepared by a steering group, which included representatives of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and its European Steering Committee on Youth and of the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Youth Forum, youth researchers and trainers, and the staff of the EU-CoE youth partnership. The steering group formulated the objectives and leading themes of the Symposium, and together with two facilitators designed its programme (appendix 2). The programme aimed to enable Symposium participants to identify a series of key challenges affecting young people; review examples of youth policy responses; and develop a series of key messages directed to those with an interest and responsibility for improving the lives of young people.

This report offers a synthesis of the main points that arose throughout the event and presents the key messages formulated by participants.

Context

Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People

The Symposium took place at a time when young people across Europe face considerable challenges in making their transitions to autonomy.

These challenges relating to issues such as employment, education, housing, and political participation, stem from social and economic conditions that are far from inevitable. Whilst many of these challenges are the result of global economic factors, many are the direct result of decisions about political priorities and the allocation of resources. As such, mitigation of these challenges necessitates policy measures.

Youth policy refers to both specific policy focussed exclusively on young people, or to public policies that affect young people in different areas of their lives, for example housing, health, education, leisure, or employment.

The focus of the Symposium on youth policy responses requires consideration to be given to identifying who can be considered to be youth policy makers. One approach to defining this group is to consider access to power and control over the resources of the state, and the ability to make decisions that impact on the lives of citizens. Such an approach identifies elected public officials and civil servants as the primary group of policy-makers principally responsible and accountable for youth policy. Such a definition, however, overlooks the nature of the power available to these groups. Elected officials and civil servants are influenced by and must, to varying degrees, respond to public opinion. With this in mind, multiple actors such as researchers, practitioners, young people, and civil society, influence, inform or are actively involved in policy-making processes.

At local, national and international levels, youth policy actors are developing responses to the contemporary challenges facing young people. Increasingly, this endeavour requires cooperation across different policy fields and cooperation between different stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors. Respectively, these can be considered as horizontal- and vertical cross-sectoral cooperation.

The Symposium aimed not only to identify some key contemporary challenges faced by young people, but also to identify examples of effective and innovative policy responses to these challenges, and to establish a series of key messages to all those responsible for influencing the youth policy context.

Institutional Context

The Symposium was an initiative of the [EU-CoE youth partnership](#), organised in the framework of the [Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe](#). The Czech Chairmanship runs from May 2017 to November 2017 and focuses on five key priorities:

1. Protecting the human rights of persons belonging to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and promoting gender equality
2. Strengthening the rule of law
3. Supporting local and regional democracy and public administration reforms
4. Promoting human rights education and linguistic skills
5. Co-operation and co-ordination with other international organisations.

With particular reference to priority one, the Symposium aimed to identify the current challenges faced by young people and to understand the ways in which youth policy can address these challenges.

Both independently and through the EU-CoE youth partnership, the Council of Europe and the European Commission have established a comprehensive series of measures that aim to improve the policy environment for young people within and beyond Europe.

In opening the Symposium, Matthew Johnson, Director of Democratic Citizenship and Participation at the Council of Europe, reaffirmed and emphasised the organisation's ongoing commitment to the youth sector. He did so by presenting the youth policy standards established by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe that are based primarily on a series of recently adopted recommendations of the Committee of Ministers. These include [CM/Rec\(2015\)3](#) on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights, [CM/Rec\(2016\)7](#) on young people's access to rights, and [CM/Rec\(2017\)4](#) on youth work.

Matthew Johnson outlined the work of the Council of Europe in the youth field, and the aspirations of the organisation to promote values-based youth policy that associates young people with human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. Matthew Johnson emphasised that the Council of Europe's work in the youth field is based on the principles of participation, empowerment and learning; considers young people positively; and is driven by opportunity and potential, not by the challenges young people face. To this end, the Council of Europe leads a programme of work that aims to influence and support the development and implementation of effective youth policy and youth work practice, seeks to set European level standards for youth work and youth policy, and establishes multi-lateral and bilateral advice and support measures.

Through its co-management approach, youth organisations and government have an equal say in determining the programme and activities of the Council of Europe, which are framed within [Agenda 2020](#); a medium-term strategic document on youth policy that was unanimously approved by the youth ministers of almost 50 European States at the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in Kyiv in October 2008.

Both Matthew Johnson and Jacob Kornbeck, from the Youth, Volunteer Solidarity and Traineeships Office Unit at the European Commission outlined the joint work of the EU-CoE youth partnership, which aims to promote an effective policy environment for young people. The EU-CoE youth partnership leads work that aims to establish a comprehensive knowledge base for youth work and youth policy through the production of publications and factsheets; to foster international cooperation and dialogue in youth research, policy and practice on issues of relevance to young people, such as participation, social inclusion, youth work and citizenship; and to make purposeful financial investment in young people. In 2017, the EU-CoE youth partnership will develop a training programme and an online course on youth policy. The results of this Symposium will contribute to both actions.

In outlining the work of the European Commission, Jacob Kornbeck detailed the substantial investment made by the Council of Europe and the European Commission into the sector; including €1.2 million into the common budget of the EU-CoE youth partnership, and a €341.5 million European Commission financed European Solidarity Corps initiative to enable 100,000 young people to volunteer, train or work for solidarity projects across Europe. In addition, Jacob Kornbeck highlighted a number of resources that have been prepared for those working in the youth sector including, ['Improving Youth Work: Your Guide to Quality Development'](#) and a toolkit ['Support for youth workers tackling violent radicalisation'](#) and presented information about the forthcoming ['Structured Dialogue'](#) cycle six, focussing on 'Youth in Europe: what's next?' and forthcoming Youth Strategy.

The Symposium and Preparatory Documents

The programme of the Symposium was designed, delivered and documented by a team of 19 people (see appendix 3). The Symposium participants included:

- Representatives of local, national and international public bodies, directly responsible for developing and implementing youth policy and public policy that affects young people;
- Representatives of local, national and international youth-focussed Non-Governmental Organisations working with and for young people;
- Local, national and international youth researchers with expertise in youth policy;
- Young people involved in youth policy processes, or interested in contributing to discussions on the challenges and needs of young people, including former and current participants of Erasmus+ projects.

The Symposium sought to:

- Identify the emerging trends in young people's contemporary lives and the most topical issues for the youth sector in the coming years;
- Further the understanding of youth policy responses and initiatives at local, national and European levels, from a theoretical and practice perspective, and to understand its capacity to address some contemporary challenges that young people face;
- Explore thematic areas of youth policy of particular relevance to young people's lives today, by sharing examples of effective youth policy responses that tackle contemporary challenges;
- Identify key messages for the future work on youth policy at local, national and European levels;
- Offer a space for networking among the participants from policy, practice and research.

The Symposium's working groups were structured around six key thematic areas, organised into three groups:

- **Identity and Autonomy:** "Belonging" and "Agency and Empowerment";
- **Solidarity and Democracy:** "Participation and Expression" and "Volunteering";
- **Activity and Occupation:** "Learning and Training", and "Working and Creating".

A number of key documents, setting out key concepts and introducing the themes were prepared in advance of the Symposium:

- [Youth Policy: The Essentials](#), by Zara Lavchyan, Howard Williamson, Sven Retore
- "Triangles and Pyramids": An Analysis of Applicants Responses and Profiles as a [full report](#) and [executive summary](#), by Magda Nico
- An overarching [introduction to the themes of the Symposium](#), by Cristina Bacalso
- Six 'Teasers' introducing the themes of the symposium: '[Belonging](#)' and '[Agency and Empowerment](#)' by Max Fras; '[Participation and Expression](#)' and '[Volunteering](#)' by Gary Pollock and Andreia Henriques; and '[Learning and Training](#)' and '[Working and Creating](#)' by Maria-Carmen Pantea and Andreia Henriques
- A [Summary and Initial Analysis](#) of youth policy responses to contemporary challenges faced by young people, based on practice examples submitted by participants, by John Muir.

Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People

Throughout the Symposium, a number of contemporary challenges facing young people were identified, debated and presented, including, in addition to the material already mentioned:

- **An Interactive Keynote:** The Symposium's key note speech delivered by Dr Steven Roberts from the School of Social Science at Monash University, Australia;
- **Stories from the Field:** Two story telling sessions delivered by a young activist, Vicky Anne Reichling, and a youth worker, Bruno Antonio.

Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People – Participant Perspectives

Through the application process for the Symposium, participants were asked to identify the contemporary challenges facing young people in their context through a multiple-choice questionnaire and open-ended questions. The responses were analysed by Magda Nico from the Pool of European Youth Researchers and presented in the already mentioned paper "[Triangles and Pyramids](#)".

Table 1 presents responses to the multiple-choice questionnaire, in which participants were asked to identify up to three contemporary challenges from a pre-defined list.

Table 1: Contemporary Challenges Facing Young People as Identified by Symposium Participants

| Challenge | % of respondents identifying this as a challenge |
|--|--|
| Youth participation | 23% |
| Mobility and migration | 14% |
| Young people's voice in the context of the democratic deficit | 13% |
| Youth expression and spaces for young people | 12% |
| Young people's access to rights, precariousness and social dislocation | 11% |
| Gender equality | 10% |
| Combating radicalisation | 8% |
| Information literacy | 6% |
| Safeguarding values | 3% |

Within the open-ended responses, 20% of the responses highlighted **transition to the labour market** as a key concern. 75% of these responses referred explicitly to unemployment, with the remaining highlighting challenges associated with precariousness employment and under-employment.

20% of responses highlighted challenges related to **inequality and social exclusion**, referring to issues such as discrimination, gender inequality and poverty.

16% of responses made reference to challenges related to **voice, expression and participation**, stating that young people's voices were not sufficiently well heard, and that young people are not sufficiently involved in decision-making processes.

10% of responses highlighted the **political and economic context** as being a key challenge facing young people. Participants highlighted issues such as economic instability, extremism – including a rise in right wing and populist leaders, and distance from European institutions.

10% of responses referred to **education and literacy**, including non-formal and informal education.

Finally, 10% of the responses focussed on the theme of **belonging**, considering issues such as vulnerability, disconnection, and citizenship.

Labour market transitions

"Precariousness, unemployment, low quality jobs and uncertain futures are a fundamental reality for youth."

Inequality and social inclusion

"Differences in the roles and status of women and men, influenced by patriarchal culture and traditions, cause discrimination against women in the labour market, education, and political representation."

Voice, expression and participation

"It is vital that those responsible for making decisions regarding youth policies maintain regular dialogue with young people."

Political and economic context

"The unity of the EU and Europe as a whole have been seriously questioned and the European political climate is influenced by the rise of new nationalism and right-wing populism."

Political and economic context

"Many young people find themselves disconnected, excluded."

"Young people want to feel connected with and supported by people from government and international communities... They want support to create great ideas that will give our world a better future."

Interactive Keynote: Dr Steven Roberts

Dr Steven Roberts's keynote speech focussed on two of the main themes articulated within participants' responses to the open-ended questions in the pre-Symposium questionnaire: (i) inequalities between young people, and (ii) labour market transitions within a rapidly changing economic context.

Dr Roberts critiqued recent media articles that portrayed young people as being entitled, lazy and narcissistic, stating that overly simplistic explanations, that focus on intergenerational conflict, often mistakenly present youth as a homogeneous group. Dr Roberts argued that in both the media and research, such approaches mischaracterise youth, and more importantly miss a crucial consideration: that of **inequality within generations**.

By focussing so much on how young people, as a homogenous group, experience precarious times, Dr Roberts argued that we risk overlooking how **different young people have differing levels of access to social, cultural and economic resources**, which in turn influence how successfully young people are able to navigate an ever-changing, and at times hostile world.

Turning to his second theme, the challenge of economic participation in a changing economy, Dr Roberts invited participants to consider the impact of **wage stagnation** and **changes in the labour market** on young people, including increases in non-standard, short-term, fixed-term, temporary, part time and casual or zero hours work.

Re-emphasising the impact of inequality, Dr Roberts stated that, in comparison to graduates, young people with lower education profiles were disproportionately negatively affected by the global financial crisis, and continue to be so.

Dr Roberts highlighted increases in **time-related and skills-related underemployment** amongst young people. Associating these trends with internet-based technological developments, participants were asked to consider whether the gig economy and free-lance work risked creating a grey economy with money being removed from the tax system.

Dr Roberts presented data demonstrating **unemployment, underemployment and precarious labour market conditions** as being directly correlated to heightened **deterioration of mental health**.

In drawing the keynote speech to a conclusion, Dr Roberts argued that **government policies have a tendency to favour those with economic power** while ignoring those lacking it, and that unemployment and underemployment results in young people being made increasingly economically powerless. Dr Roberts reiterated his call to **avoid homogenising discourses** that emerge in generational rhetoric: all young people are not the same: advantages and disadvantages fall across old and familiar lines such as class, gender, ethnicity, and migration status.

Stories from the Field

Bruno Antonio, DYPALL Network

Bruno Antonio presented his experience of working on establishing youth policies at local level through the DYPALL Network. The DYPALL Network is a European initiative currently involving 35 European partners, youth organisations and municipalities from 20 countries that aims to involve young people in the decision-making processes of municipal and regional authorities.

Bruno's involvement in the international youth sector started with a project management role in an international NGO, which saw him delivering capacity building training in Europe and North Africa. Through this work, Bruno increasingly participated in training courses, conferences and meetings of the European Youth Forum and the Council of Europe, whilst also working as a volunteer, trainer, youth worker and project designer.

Bruno outlined the **value of learning and exchanging knowledge at international level**, and the **importance of interaction between local and international levels for his personal and professional development**, enabling him to increase his impact at local level.

Bruno emphasised the **critical importance of establishing local youth policies**, and outlined the work that the DYPALL Network is undertaking to support a network of 35 municipalities and civil society organisations to develop and implement youth policy at local level.

This work seeks to address three main issues: **mainstreaming youth issues in public policy**; **developing and monitoring structures to enable young people and local authorities to work together**; and **building the capacity of youth workers, NGO leaders and public officials**.

Only 15 of the 110 participants were able to report that a local youth policy had been established in their context.

Bruno stressed the importance of **developing competencies and commitment from local politicians, public institutions, and civil society**, and the **complexities of operating at local level**, including the need to engage multiple stakeholders with competing interests, priorities and understandings.

In his concluding remarks, Bruno emphasised a need for **all youth sector actors to include a policy dimension in their work**, and to **engage and influence decision makers in local authorities**.

Vicky Anne Reichling, Conférence Générale de la Jeunesse du Luxembourg

Vicky Anne Reichling, the International Officer at the National Union of Students – Luxembourg and representative of the Conférence Générale de la Jeunesse du Luxembourg, focussed on the **impact of technology and social media on young people's lives and youth participation**, stating that **Technology is re-shaping realities for all of us**, and noting that the institutional and policy response is lagging.

Vicky argued that technology often tends to consume us instead of enhancing daily life, and that young people are **exposed to a constant overflow of information**, and a constant feeling of needing to respond to digital communication. Vicky linked the prevalence of **digital communication and social media to increased stress and anxiety** amongst young people, and argued that this state of being permanently connected is fundamentally changing the way in which young people interact, their views on society, and the way in which they grow up.

With reference to **cyber-bullying** and the public nature of social media, Vicky stated that the contemporary experience for young people is increasingly challenging, leading young people to **mental ill health, burn out and a sense of being oversaturated**.

Vicky argued that, despite living in one of the safest periods of recent history, the abundance of information presented to young people about terror, war, death, populism, humanitarian crises, climate change, corruption, youth unemployment or underemployment leaves young people **feeling anxious and disempowered**. This is further exasperated by the sometimes-contradictory nature of information, fake news, and the lack of emphasis placed on critical analysis in the education system.

Vicky drew connections between this contemporary context and young people's **mistrust of politics and disengagement from formal political processes**, and called on the Symposium participants to realise the potential of young people - emphasising that many young people and youth initiatives are striving for change.

Vicky stated that policy makers must recognise and develop responses to deal with the impacts of technology such as stress, addiction, cyber-bullying, and mental ill health and **create an environment that transforms a sense of despondency or hopelessness into one of engagement and hope** by creating spaces to listen to young people, and by actively **engaging and involving young people as equals** in the decisions that affect their lives.

Key Challenges: Thematic Spaces

Throughout the Symposium participants explored the contemporary challenges faced by young people in six thematic areas, clustered in three pillars.

| Identity and Autonomy | Solidarity and Democracy | Activity and Occupation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Belonging | 3. Participation and expression | 5. Learning and training |
| 2. Agency and empowerment | 4. Volunteering | 6. Working and creating |

In preparation for each working group, Cristina Bacalso from the Pool of European Youth Researchers prepared an overarching [introduction to the themes of the Symposium](#) defining the scope and focus of these thematic groups. In addition, teaser documents were prepared for each thematic group: 'Belonging' and 'Agency and Empowerment' by Max Fras; 'Participation and Expression' and 'Volunteering' by Gary Pollock and Andreia Henriques; and 'Learning and Training' and 'Working and Creating' by Maria-Carmen Pantea and Andreia Henriques. These teaser documents introduced the theme, outlined national and international trends, posed questions for discussion, and summarised key European level policy responses.

This section presents some of the concepts outlined in the preparatory papers, and some of the challenges identified in the thematic working groups as summarised and presented by the rapporteurs for each group.

Identity and Autonomy

1. Belonging

This thematic group explored aspects related to young people's identity (identity formation, belonging to a group, non-discrimination), and issues related to young people's place in society (social cohesion, social dislocation, isolation, marginalisation, and wellbeing).

Belonging was considered to refer to two distinct concepts. The first, belonging as an **emotion – personal, intimate, the feeling of being 'at-home'**, meaning a place of familiarity, comfort, security and attachment (Antonsich, 2010). Factors that contribute to this feeling were identified as including one's own history; the personal and social ties associated with a place; cultural factors including language, traditions and habits; economic factors and the ability to have a safe and stable material condition; and security (Antonsich, 2010).

The second concept considered was **the politics of belonging**, referring to the process of defining the boundaries of communities, the conditions for being part of a community and the benefits associated with it, and defining the differences between 'us' and 'them' (Yurval-Davis, 2006).

Challenges faced by young people in terms of sense of belonging were identified as including: the **integration of young people from migrant backgrounds**, and the ability of young people from migrant backgrounds to feel at home in the place that they live in Europe, as well as for the

society around them to view them as full members of the community; the impact of **rising right-wing populist movements and nationalist policies** that define citizenship and belonging on ethnic or racial lines excluding large segments of minority populations; and **radical or extremist groups**, as well as more localised criminal social groups and 'gangs', that were identified as being attractive to excluded young people but that pose a threat to social cohesion.

The practices shared were from a local community organisation in Slovakia, called Civic Association Club of Roma Activists, represented by Maria Demeova, and a project on the role of youth work in supporting the transition of young refugees to autonomy, based on an example in Greece, by a member of the Youth Social Rights Network, shared by Biljana Vasilevska Trajkovska. From both projects, the role of youth work in creating social cohesion and community unity became apparent. In the first project, community workers ensure that Roma communities and young people receive the support needed to feel empowered members of society. In the second project, the role of youth work in accompanying young people in accessing their rights was presented. The dimensions of working with individuals, to support them in feeling welcome and feeling they belong to a community, and of working with the whole community to ensure there is acceptance, were affirmed as fundamental in supporting belonging. In both cases, support from public authorities was key in working on the topic of belonging.

Other challenges faced by young people related to **economic insecurity and rising unemployment**, which impact on a young person's ability to achieve a safe and stable material condition, thereby comprising their ability to feel invested in a community.

Belonging: Participant Comments

"Young people cannot belong due to socio-economic barriers; it feels like the society is narrowing the possibilities to belong and feel welcome."

"Belonging to a group is essential for young people, especially for minority groups such as transgender and intersex young people."

"What should a young person do to be considered 'integrated'? The term is used in a way that makes 'full' integration impossible, one is always criticized for not being integrated enough."

"In Bosnia and Herzegovina, you cannot be Bosnian-and-Herzegovinian, you must declare yourself as one of the three principal ethnic groups."

Graphic Recording: Belonging



2. Agency and empowerment

This thematic working group considered projects that support young people to affirm themselves and to gain the skills, knowledge and competencies to exercise their rights in society.

Empowerment was considered as being when individuals, families, organisations and communities **gain control, mastery** and have **agency** over their lives (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias and McLoughlin, 2006). Empowerment was considered to involve those who are powerless becoming aware of the power dynamics that shape their circumstances and developing the skills, confidence and capacity over their lives, improving equity and quality of life (Rowlands, 1995). Empowerment was also defined as being concerned with bringing people who are outside the social, economic and political systems, into decision-making processes (Council of Europe and European Union, 2017).

The theme looked at empowerment through specific examples, from issues such as independent and autonomous housing, access to rights, and support programmes that aim to empower minorities.

Two examples of policy responses were presented. The first, undertaken by the [Autonomous Province of Trento](#) - Provincial Agency of Family, Parenting and Youth Policy, which established a project called 'Co-Housing: Io Cambio Status' to address the need for access to affordable housing for young people and to support youth transitions to autonomy. The programme targets young people aged 18-29 who are not in employment, education or training, or only in occasional employment, and who have been living with their parents for at least the last three years. The young people are provided subsidised shared housing for at a third of market rent, and are engaged in a programme of coaching and volunteering. The pilot project resulted in every participant transitioning to independent living arrangements outside of their family home or previous care setting. This programme is managed through a partnership between the Province of Trentino and local NGOs.

The second policy response presented was an international project undertaken by the [European Network on Independent Living](#) (ENIL), in partnership with the Council of Europe. Through a series of study sessions taking place between 2012 and 2017, ENIL has worked to promote awareness, knowledge and access to social rights amongst young disabled people, as well as to mobilise and empower young people with disabilities to lobby and advocate for disabled people at local, national and European levels – particularly within the structures of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

The group identified contemporary challenges faced by young people as being **practices, beliefs and values that disempower young people**, such as ageism, discrimination against young people because of their age, the violation of young people's rights in areas including education, participation, employment and social protection, health, freedom of expression and information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief (European Youth Forum, 2012).

Two groups of key challenges affecting young people were identified. Firstly, 'internal' challenges such as the **capacity for young people to deal with increasingly complex transitions**. Secondly, 'external challenges' resulting from the **failure of policy responses and programmes to create an enabling environment for young people** and a **failure of policy makers to understand, or pay sufficient attention to the needs of young people**. In this regard, the group raised concerns

about the **failure of the state to engage effectively with non-governmental organisations**, and policy discourses that focus on **conflict, rather than partnership between generations**.

Agency and Empowerment: Participant Comments

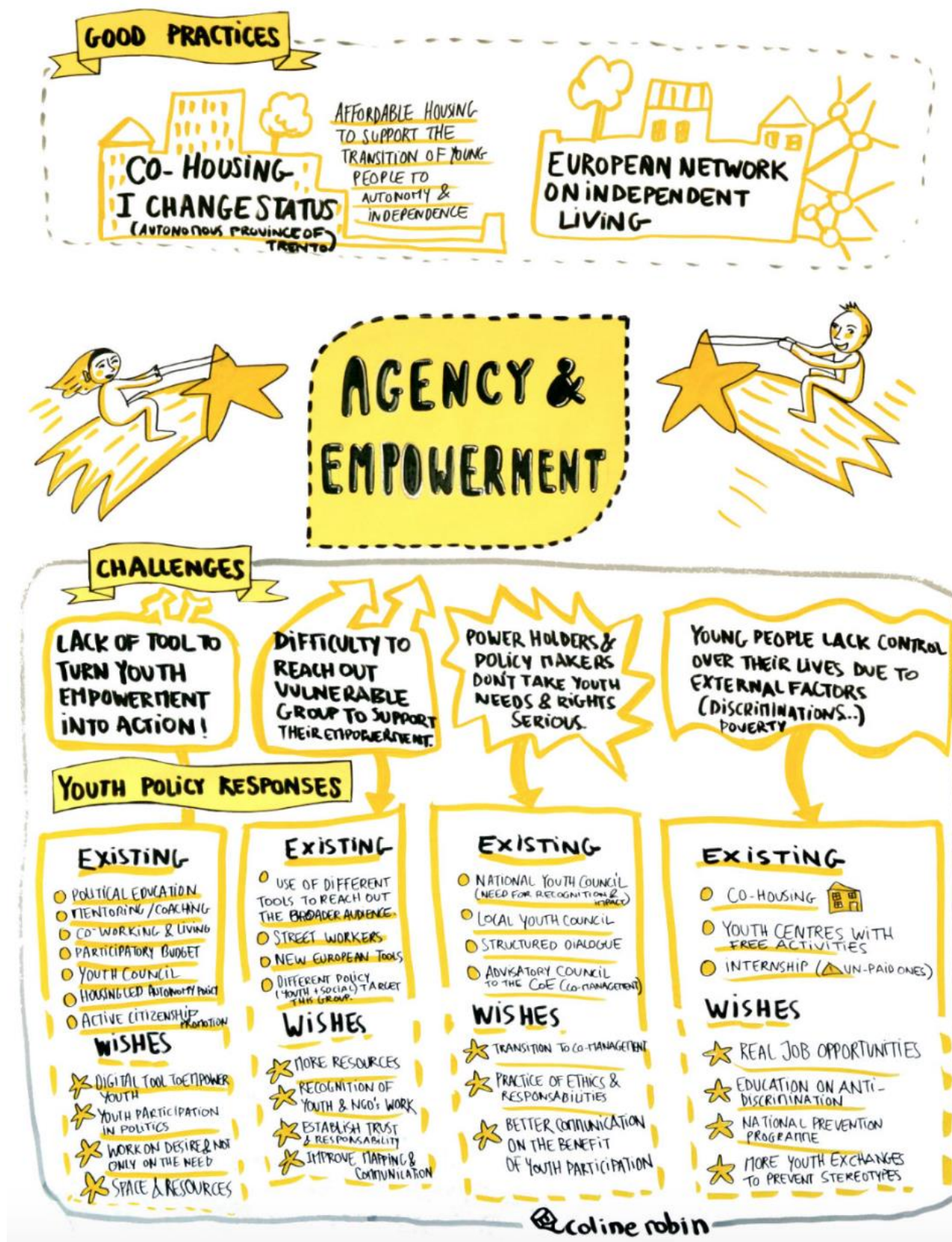
"The powerless becoming aware of injustice and of their rights is a necessary condition for their empowerment, but it cannot stop there... Empowered youth also need tools to be able to act on their empowerment."

"Adults, power-holders and policy-makers have the responsibility to engage in partnership with young people, to support their empowerment. They have to be open to sharing power."

"Young people are bound to experiment with different social roles in this stage of identity formation, but there are few services to help them get through this stage safely."

"...while all young people face uncertainties, some young people from vulnerable groups face more uncertainties than others."

Graphic Recording: Agency and Empowerment



Solidarity and Democracy

3. *Participation and expression*

This theme looked at the rights, means, support, opportunities and spaces young people have for making their voice heard, and having an influence on issues that concern them. This referred to all areas of a young person's life, from the family, school, local communities, public services, and wider government policy (United Nations, 2009).

The conception of participation was not limited to political participation, meaning when a young person, acting as a citizen, engages in the public realm to affect change in a policy, law, or politics and society more generally (Anderson, *et al.*, 2016). It also encompassed young people's right to participate in judicial or administrative proceedings that affect them, such as adoption or divorce proceedings in the case of minors¹, or playing a part in the projects and programmes that are designed for them, such as participating in the planning of a programme targeted at young people, or providing feedback in the monitoring and evaluation of a youth programme (Landsdown and O'Kane, 2014).

Participation was identified first and foremost as a right, enshrined in international human rights instruments as well as the Treaty of the European Union. Beyond being a right, youth participation was identified as having additional benefits, such as providing information and insights from young people to design better policies and programmes, contributing to a culture of respect and peace where decision-making is undertaken through negotiation rather than conflict, building accountability and promoting transparency, and fostering positive youth development, as young people gain skills, knowledge, competencies and confidence through their participation (Landsdown and O'Kane, 2014).

Freedom of expression was considered a precondition for participation. This theme explored the idea of youth expression and the granting or securing of 'space': public spaces where young people can express themselves, spaces for assembly and association and also spaces for creativity and artistic expression.

Three policy responses were presented. The first, a European level initiative undertaken by the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB) with the support of the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. The initiative aims to increase youth participation in political decision-making, through the development of an online, multilingual platform of e-participation resources and practice guidance for youth workers, researchers and policy makers.

The second, led by Timis County Youth Foundation (FITT), an umbrella organisation for 35 youth NGOs in western Romania, focussed on the work of the Timisoara Youth Centre, a youth organisation managed by young people. The youth centre aims to support young people to participate in local decision-making processes and provides training in participation for youth workers and youth leaders.

¹ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child articulates the right of children under 18 to express their views, with explicit relevance for judicial and administrative proceedings, however also lays the basis for youth participation as a fundamental right. United Nations, 2015, *UN Treaty Collection: Convention of the Rights of the Child*.

The final case study presented by the [Irish Second-Level Students' Union](#) concerned a social media campaign, reaching over 36 million people that successfully aimed to maintain and secure increased funding for an anti-suicide and mental health promotion programme in Ireland.

The challenges faced by young people relating to participation and expression, identified through the discussion, included **declining rates of youth participation in formal participation structures** such as voting, and being a member of a political party or trade union; **restrictions on meaningful participation**; and restrictions on **civil society space**.

The group discussed **youth under-representation in politics** and considered how this affects quality of governance. Further challenges were identified including, **young people being squeezed out by older 'block voting' in elections; prejudice towards younger electoral candidates; and lack of willingness among youth to participate in politics**, which was associated with education systems that encourage passivity and compliance. The group noted that young people have **multiple and fragmented political interests that do not necessarily fit into existing participation structures**, political parties or civil society.

The group critiqued **tokenistic and ineffectual opportunities for youth participation** and discussed trends in e-participation, noting that e-participation can be an effective means of supporting young people to engage in political issues, but arguing that **online participation needs to be joined with offline participation**.

Participation and Expression: Participant Comments

"There can be a lack of willingness among youth to participate; this may be related to an education system that breeds obedience, meaning that young people listen but don't take action."

"Young people have multiple and fragmented political interests and they do not necessarily fit into existing participation structures in civil society."

"There is a 'crisis' when there is no recognition or trust in youth, this results in a loss of motivation to participate among young people."

"E-participation can be effective as a means of supporting youth politics, but it needs to be joined with offline participation."

Graphic Recording: Participation and Expression



4. Volunteering

This thematic group looked at volunteering, as a means of civic engagement for and by young people. Volunteering was defined as freely given, unpaid work that might be undertaken by “a will to share, a desire to help others, to be useful, to defend a cause, to give meaning to their life, even to test a vocation or training” (Anderson, *et al.*, 2016).

Volunteering was also considered as a way by which young people can build competencies useful in education and employment, such as skills, knowledge, social networks, and a sense of self-efficacy. The group also considered caring roles as a common, but sometimes overlooked form of voluntary work routinely undertaken by young people. Volunteering was also considered as a pathway to further participation in democratic life.

Two policy responses were presented and discussed. The first, an initiative of the [Abdullah Gül University](#) – Youth Factory (Youth Research and Implementation Centre), established a ‘Non-Academic Transcript’ tool to enable students to record and valorise the skills, knowledge and attitudes developed through their participation in non-formal or extra-curricular activities, such as student clubs, student councils, Erasmus+ projects, volunteering or sports programmes. The second, Stiftung Mercator/Perspektivwerk’s project, brought together German and Turkish volunteers to Turkey and Germany respectively, to discover the culture, realities, learn the language and engage in a local reality through practical volunteer work.

The group identified two main challenges faced by young people relating to volunteering. Firstly, **unequal access to volunteering opportunities**, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities, was identified as a key challenge. For example, young people facing poverty or other economic barriers lack the time and resources to volunteer, having to choose paid work instead, or taking on other unrecognised unpaid work in their family or community, such as caring for elderly relatives or younger siblings. It was noted that young people who are unable to access volunteering opportunities are further disadvantaged by not being able to accrue the benefits of volunteering, such as skill development and network building. Similarly, not all young people have access to information on the range of volunteering opportunities available to them and the support that is available. It was noted that civil society organisations have a role and responsibility in reaching these young people and for managing volunteering programmes.

The second challenge identified by the group was the **lack of visibility and recognition of volunteering-related competencies and experience**. The group stated that there is a need to link formal and non-formal education in programmes that support and promote the recognition of competences developed through volunteering.

Volunteering: Participant Comments

“Despite efforts from institutions and CSOs, some young people do not have the opportunity to benefit from volunteering opportunities.”

“Civil society organisations have a role in reaching young people that usually do not even have access to information about these opportunities.”

"...Where there are recruitment procedures to volunteering opportunities, special attention should be given to including young people from marginalised backgrounds to prevent discrimination."

"The impact, benefit and the future opportunities of young people with fewer opportunities, that are able to participate in volunteering and international mobility, are very significant."

Graphic Recording: Volunteering



Activity and Occupation

5. Learning and training

This theme looked into aspects such as the role of formal and non-formal education as means for supporting young people's personal and professional development. The discussion paper for this group noted that non-formal education is now more closely tied to vocational training with the aim of preparing young people for the labour market, particularly in those countries with rising youth unemployment. The group also considered the concept of lifelong learning, defined as "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence".

In the introductory paper, the challenges associated to learning and training included the **risk of early school leaving**, as well as **obstacles to accessing non-formal education opportunities**. In both instances, **young people with fewer opportunities were identified as being disadvantaged**, having higher rates of formal school leaving, and also falling through the cracks of non-formal education programmes.

Additional obstacles faced by young people include the ability of vocational education and training (VET) programmes to keep pace with fast technological progress, early specialisation that limit transferability, the poor reputation of VET programmes in some countries, and the strong focus on manual work at the expense of learning about society, culture and civic life.

The policy response presented and discussed was a €690 million programme called [Giovanisi](#), established in 2011 by Regione Toscana. The programme was established with the aim of promoting autonomy for young people by improving opportunities for education and training, supporting youth transitions from school to work, and by facilitating entrepreneurial start-ups. The programme, which is for young people up to 40 years of age, addresses seven key areas including internships, housing, civil service, entrepreneurship, employment, education and training. Over 230,000 young people have benefited from services and activities delivered through a partnership of NGOs, local businesses, public services, schools and universities.

The group noted that too often **VET is considered to be a tool to prevent young people becoming NEET** and that there is a lot of **prejudice against VET schools and educational programmes**. In some contexts, VET is viewed as 'second chance' schooling and the qualifications provided in VET can be very narrow, with poor possibilities of further development and progression. The group identified that, in some contexts, a **new divide is emerging between state and private provision**, with state-funded VET schools being of lower quality, poorly funded but free, and private VET schools being of better quality, but more expensive and exclusive. Business-based schools were identified as being better positioned to respond to the needs of the labour market. The group considered this to contribute to **widening educational inequalities**.

The group identified a number of ethical **challenges associated with entrepreneurial learning**, questioning when and how it should be incorporated into educational programmes. Although the EU recommends that entrepreneurial learning should begin from very early age – primary & pre-primary education, the group stated that the **primary purpose of early education should be to develop young people's personality and to develop critical thinking**. The group expressed the concern that business-orientated entrepreneurship overly focuses on the needs of the labour market and an ethos of competition, and stated that greater emphasis should be placed on social or community-based entrepreneurship.

The group identified a **gap in careers information and guidance**, in which young people do not always know about the qualifications and the training opportunities available. This issue is compounded by the fact that young people are sometimes expected to make career choices at a very early age, and an insufficiently developed career counselling or guidance offer at high school and university levels.

Learning and Training: Participant Comments

"VET is considered a tool to prevent NEET. Yet, it is much more. There is a lot of prejudice against VET schools. Some are very oriented to the needs of the labour market, some are innovative."

"There is a need to work against prejudice and stereotypes in VET."

"There is an information gap among young people. They do not always know the qualifications and the opportunities for training available."

"...a major barrier is still the prejudice that the non-disabled young people and parents hold. These are especially potent when the school environment is permeated by an ethos of performance and competition."

Graphic Recording: Learning and Training



6. Working and creating

This theme explored the relation between young people and their **participation in the labour market**, including access to jobs, young people being equipped with the skills and competences needed to access employment or to undertake **entrepreneurial activity**.

Youth unemployment in the EU has decreased from its historic high of 23% in February 2013, to less than 19% in August 2016, but is still very high, and in several countries, youth unemployment is over 40% (European Commission, 2017).

In addition to the direct economic impact, far-reaching consequences of unemployment for young people were identified, including loss of confidence, undermined trust and expectations, and greater risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society (Schroeder, 2014).

Two examples of policy responses were presented and discussed. Firstly, a co-living and co-working initiative established by the [Office for Youth Policy in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano](#), South Tyrol, Italy. The initiative will see the restoration and regeneration of a state owned 3000 square metre building, which will be used to support young people to establish cultural and social projects.

The second policy presentation from the Youth Committee of the [European Trade Union Confederation](#) outlined the role, function and value of trade unions in labour market negotiations.

This working group focussed on five key topics including **precarious employment**, challenges associated with **internships, traineeships and youth guarantee schemes**, the **rural and urban divide**, the **role of youth work in supporting young people to access employment**, and young people's participation in **entrepreneurial activity**.

The group highlighted the impact of labour market conditions and access to employment, on young people's transitions to independence, including the ability to live independently, to get married, or start a family.

Despite variations between countries in Europe, **insecure and illegal employment practices**, such as from **temporary contracts or zero-hour contracts** and employment in the informal or illegal economy, were identified as a key concern, particularly given the impact that these forms of employment have on **young people's access to employment rights and social insurance schemes**.

Skills-related underemployment was raised as another challenge facing young people in some places, with over-skilled young people choosing to postpone entry to the labour market. Relatedly, whilst recognising that preparation for the labour market should not be the primary focus of the education system, the group identified a **lack of connection between education and the labour market** as a key contemporary challenge facing young people.

Turning to the topic of **internships, traineeships and youth guarantee schemes**, the group discussed the way in which these approaches can support transitions from education and training to employment, and enable young people to develop **practical skills not gained in formal education**. However, unpaid internships were noted as **further entrenching inequalities** amongst young people.

Given the high rates of youth unemployment across some European countries, the [Youth Guarantee Scheme](#) was viewed as an important and necessary policy commitment. The group noted the value of the scheme to prevent the long-term scarring effects of unemployment, precariousness, and underemployment. However, the group critiqued the results of these schemes, noting that, in some contexts, youth guarantee schemes had led to **exploitative practices from employers**, had **degraded employment conditions** with unpaid internships substituting paid positions, and that **work experience placements were failing to lead to paid employment**.

The **divide in employment opportunities between urban and rural areas**, and between towns and cities, was identified as primary **drivers for youth migration** – particularly in countries where a high proportion of the population live in rural areas. The group discussed policy measures to address this, such as public investment in rural areas, collaboration with the agricultural sector, improving local transport systems, and detached youth work, but noted that these insufficiently address growing social and economic geographical inequalities.

The group debated the role of youth workers in supporting access to employment and promoting entrepreneurship. Participants stated that **youth workers play a key role in supporting young people to develop interpersonal skills** such as leadership and communication, **supporting young people to make transitions between education and employment** by promoting awareness of labour market conditions and providing information to young people, and may contribute to **preventing young people from leaving school early**. However, the group highlighted that youth work represents only a fraction of youth policy, and that despite being able to support young people in their labour market transitions, youth workers' primary focus should be non-formal education, rather than for integrating young people into the labour market. In discussing entrepreneurship, the group stated that there was a need to place greater emphasis on **entrepreneurial activity in the social or community, rather than private, sector**.

Working and Training: Participant Comments

"...precariousness exists mainly because of informal economy and illegal economy, there are no social guarantees, no paid vacations, no access to rights. If young people are injured, they have no money, compensation or security."

"The problem in this country is a bit different, with over skilled people and underemployment being a bigger problem than unemployment or precariousness. This started with the financial crisis. They ended up prolonging university and consequently postponing the entry in the labour market."

"Labour market integration is not a responsibility for youth work. Youth workers cannot be the 'implementers' of youth policy... youth work is a fraction of youth policy."

"The paradox of Youth Guarantee is that we desperately need a guarantee to prevent the scarring effects of long term unemployment, long term precariousness, long term underemployment, but the youth guarantee is an illusion."

Graphic Recording: Working and Creating



Policy Approaches – An Analysis

In preparation for the Symposium, participants were asked to submit examples of effective youth policy responses that have had a material impact on the lives of young people within their context. Over 30 examples from 18 different countries, encompassing a wide range of initiatives, were submitted, many of which were subsequently discussed in the thematic groups. They include examples of actions undertaken at the local level, through to the international level; actions that have been led by youth NGOs to those led by national government ministries; actions undertaken with no budget, through to those that have required multimillion euros of investment.

The policy responses relate to the thematic areas addressed at the Symposium, belonging, agency and empowerment, participation and expression, volunteering, learning and training, and working and creating, but also explicitly seek to address other thematic areas, including young people's physical and mental health, and inequality and discrimination affecting particular groups of young people.

The policy responses were presented at the Symposium's youth policy fair, discussed during the thematic working groups, and have been summarised and analysed in a [compendium of good practice](#). A list of the practices and the contributors to the compendium can be found in appendix 4.

An analysis of the examples of policy responses has highlighted some key principles that can be considered by those responsible for influencing the youth policy environment. The responses involved approaches demonstrative of:

1. Leadership from public institutions and civil society
2. Effective use of knowledge, research, data and evidence
3. Commitment to promoting lifelong learning and professional development in the youth sector
4. Commitment to establishing an enabling legislative and policy environment
5. Recognition of the value of campaigning and advocacy

The specific approaches adopted in each of these areas are presented below. Specific details of each policy response can be found in the compendium of good practice.

Leadership from public institutions and civil society

The youth policy responses that illustrated effective leadership from elected officials and public institutions demonstrated the importance of:

- Working across ministerial lines and policy domains with a holistic perspective on the range of factors that impact on successful youth transitions.
- A positively framed commitment to youth empowerment rather than a deficit or problem orientated approach.
- Working across sectors to establish effective partnership between public authorities, civil society and the private sector.
- Developing and communicating an ambitious vision for young people and establishing a clear strategy to achieve this.
- Promoting dialogue between local, regional, national and international levels, utilising enforcement where necessary.

- Allocating significant resources and investment into youth services and programmes for young people.
- Establishing a programme of grants to NGOs to strengthen the role of civil society.
- Establishing opportunities for civil society, young people and public services to engage in dialogue.
- Meaningfully involving young people in decision-making, governance and programme development.
- Utilising expert knowledge to inform policy responses and decision-making.

Effective use of knowledge, research, data and evidence

Two of the examples illustrated the value and importance of those in the youth sector establishing and making effective use of knowledge, research, data and evidence to inform youth policy, including:

- Promoting access to, and use of, comparative data across different policy domains to identify issues affecting young people and to hold elected officials to account.
- Undertaking youth-led participatory research to inform policy dialogue at regional, national and international levels.
- Promoting the practical application of academic research with youth workers and policy makers.
- Utilising expert knowledge to inform policy responses and decision-making.

Commitment to promoting lifelong learning and professional development in the youth sector

Three of the responses demonstrated the value and importance of ongoing professional development and lifelong learning to improve the youth policy context, highlighting the importance of:

- Investing in the training and development of front-line practitioners, policy-makers and researchers.
- Establishing training programmes and qualification frameworks to promote skills development of youth practitioners.
- Promoting the exchange of good practice at local, national and international levels.
- Involving young people, youth workers and youth organisations in policy dialogue to promote learning.

Commitment to establishing an enabling legislative and policy environment

Four of the responses highlighted the importance of influencing the legislative and policy environment, by:

- Establishing a comprehensive legal framework designed to create a favourable environment for young people, including the involvement of young people and youth NGOs in this process.
- Establishing youth policies, and mainstreaming youth across key areas of public policy.
- Actively involving young people and youth NGOs in policy development through dialogue and co-production.
- Gaining commitment from public authorities to establish and resource a local youth strategy.

- Utilising international standards, frameworks, and best practice to influence local policy makers and practitioners.

Recognition of the value of campaigning and advocacy

Two examples of practice for the Symposium highlighted the role that campaigning can play in influencing the youth policy context, and demonstrated the importance of:

- Local, national and international campaign frameworks that can mobilise civil society and youth NGOs.
- Financial support from international agencies and public institutions to enable youth NGOs to engage young people.
- Young people and youth NGOs seeking to influence political priorities.

Key Messages

In each of the six thematic areas, Symposium participants developed a series of key messages addressed to a range of actors and stakeholders, all of whom play a pivotal role in influencing the policy context in which young people live.

These key stakeholders range from youth workers and non-formal educators, to politicians and those working in public institutions. They include those working at the local, national and international levels. Across all the thematic areas, the key messages highlighted a series of consistent aspirations and expectations for those responsible for improving the policy context for young people.

Firstly, Symposium participants called for a **stronger political and institutional commitment** to young people, from politicians and public institutions at local, national and international levels, stating that this commitment should be accompanied with resources, initiatives, programmes and campaigns designed to improve the lives of young people.

Secondly, Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society were seen as critical to efforts to improve the policy context for young people, particularly given their ability to be responsive, innovative and to contribute to policy making processes. Participants called on policy makers and public institutions to **support, develop and maintain a strong and vibrant civil society and NGO sector**, and to ensure that this sector was treated as a valued and independent partner.

Youth work and non-formal education were cited as critical important mediums through which to improve outcomes for young people. The Symposium participants called for **greater recognition for the youth sector**, and **greater investment in the training and development of youth workers**.

Relatedly, across all of the thematic areas, participants called on policy makers, public institutions, youth workers, and educators to develop **educational programmes that are responsive to the contemporary challenges young people face**, and in particular to **respond to the opportunities and risks associated with technological developments**.

Throughout all of the thematic areas, participants demanded that all those working in the youth sector pay greater efforts to **tackling discrimination, social exclusion and inequality**. Similarly, participants considered **strengthening young people's knowledge of, and access to, rights** as a key mechanism through which to address contemporary challenges related to equality, participation and labour market transitions. Finally, reference to the importance of **youth participation** runs through all the key messages.

The following section presents the key messages developed by the thematic working groups. The key messages have been coded with the following categories to identify emerging trends:

- Increase political & institutional commitment
- Strengthen civil society
- Enhance recognition of youth work
- Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education
- Respond to technological developments
- Tackle discrimination and inequalities
- Increase access to & knowledge of rights
- Promote youth participation

Key Messages: Belonging

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers should establish and finance initiatives that promote positive relationships, intercultural dialogue, citizenship and a sense of belonging and solidarity amongst young people – including beyond Europe. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Increase political & institutional commitment  Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers must recognise the critical role of the local context, and the role that youth work plays in developing young people's citizenship, identity, and sense of belonging. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities should be created for youth workers and youth organisations to network, participate in training, and to exchange best practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Enhance recognition of youth work  Strengthen civil society |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth work approaches should recognise the multiple identities that young people may hold, and should support young people to form their individually unique identity: all work with and for young people should celebrate young peoples' diversity whilst emphasising that which they have in common. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Tackle discrimination and inequalities  Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision makers and youth workers should create social spaces for young people so that they experience belonging as a consequence of communal life, rather than a struggle to form identity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education  Strengthen civil society |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people should be actively involved in decision-making processes at all levels to strengthen their sense of belonging to civic life. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Promote youth participation  Strengthen civil society |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, should be supported to understand their rights and to develop the skills, knowledge and competencies required to access these rights. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Increase access to & knowledge of rights  Tackle discrimination and inequalities |

Key Messages: Agency & Empowerment

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy makers must recognise the critical role that youth work plays in promoting youth empowerment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities should be created for youth workers and youth organisations to share practice, tools and effective approaches to promoting youth empowerment and youth social action. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enhance recognition of youth work ■ Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people should be supported to be active and empowered citizens through programmes at all levels. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council of Europe's co-Management approach should be adopted across public institutions at all levels in order to strengthen young peoples' influence in decision-making processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promote youth participation ■ Increase political & institutional commitment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness and understanding of rights-based frameworks should be increased amongst young people, youth workers, and policy makers, and policy makers should establish effective mechanisms to report and respond to rights violations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase access to & knowledge of rights |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisations and institutions working for and with young people should use innovative and youth-friendly communications approaches that are relevant to the current digital context. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Respond to technological developments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unpaid internships should be banned. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase political & institutional commitment ■ Tackle discrimination and inequalities |

Key Messages: Participation and Expression

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective and meaningful youth participation should be integrated into policy and decision-making processes, and youth participation should be incorporated and embedded across all areas of public policy, not just youth policy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation Increase political & institutional commitment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners and policy makers working with and for young people should be trained to incorporate effective youth participation approaches into their practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory budgeting processes involving young people should be incorporated into decision-making processes related to funding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners and policy makers should establish opportunities for inter-generational dialogue, and meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in the co-design of policies and services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation Strengthen civil society |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs should develop age-appropriate eParticipation methodologies and use these techniques to advocate with and for young people. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation Respond to technological developments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and non-formal education systems should ensure that young people develop the skills, knowledge and competencies required to participate in policy and decision-making processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and training on effective eParticipation should be provided to young people, youth workers, youth organisations and public authorities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation Enhance recognition of youth work Respond to technological developments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory approaches and a stronger culture of participation should be established within educational institutions and educational curricula, mandated by legislation if necessary. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation |

Key Messages: Volunteering

| | |
|---|---|
| ▪ Local and national governments, and international institutions should establish and communicate stronger political commitment to youth volunteering. |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ Local and national governments, and international institutions should work with civil society and public institutions to ensure that policies, legislative frameworks, and programmes that promote and enable youth volunteering are developed. |  Increase political & institutional commitment  Strengthen civil society |
| ▪ Local and national governments, and international institutions should provide financial support to youth organisations to run and manage youth volunteering programmes |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ European institutions should work with national and local partners to disseminate and advocate for the adoption and implementation of the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers . |  Increase access to & knowledge of rights |
| ▪ Local, national and international policy makers should emphasise the learning and social contribution made through voluntary activity, rather than focussing on volunteering as a pathway to employment. |  Enhance recognition of youth work |
| ▪ Local and national governments, and international institutions should establish schemes, media communications, and award programmes to formally recognise, celebrate, and promote the contribution that young volunteers make to society. |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ Local and national governments, international institutions, NGOs, and formal education institutions should actively promote and raise awareness of volunteering amongst young people. |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ Local and national governments, and international institutions should establish accreditation schemes and award programmes that formally recognise corporate commitments to employee volunteering. |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ Public and private sector organisations should make corporate social responsibility commitments, for example, through staff volunteering programmes. |  Increase political & institutional commitment |
| ▪ Digital mappings of volunteer-involving organisations should be undertaken to enable young people to identify volunteering opportunities. |  Respond to technological developments |
| ▪ All organisations that host youth volunteers should commit to equal opportunities policies and provide financial support to enable young people, whatever their background, to participate in volunteering activity. |  Tackle discrimination and inequalities |
| ▪ Youth organisations should provide targeted outreach and mentoring to support and encourage young people from all backgrounds to participate in volunteering. |  Tackle discrimination and inequalities  Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education |

Key Messages: Learning and Training

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers should recognise the value of youth work, non-formal and informal education for young people. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> International governmental organisations, NGOs and governments should develop measures, including in the field of education and training, to respond to the changing role of technology, including the increasing role of artificial intelligence and robotification in contemporary society. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education Respond to technological developments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers and practitioners should recognise that formal and non-formal education are complimentary, and should develop educational programmes that incorporate both formal and non-formal education, for example life skills, civic education and entrepreneurship. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance recognition of youth work Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers should promote and enable life-long learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase political & institutional commitment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers and practitioners should ensure that education is a participatory process, and that young people are able to actively participate in planning and decision-making processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote youth participation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational institutions should commit to preventing all forms of discrimination and to promoting inclusive education and equal opportunities, for example through the establishment of equal opportunities policies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle discrimination and inequalities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training programmes for teachers and youth workers should include mandatory diversity and equality training. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle discrimination and inequalities Enhance recognition of youth work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education programmes and curricula should be reformed to respond to the contemporary challenges young people face, incorporating subjects such as global education, critical thinking, active citizenship, volunteering and media and digital literacy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational institutions and practitioners should promote and incorporate peer-learning approaches within educational processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish responsive/contemporary non-formal education |

Key Messages: Working and Training

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|--|---|
| ▪ Policy makers should ensure that all areas of public policy, such as education policy, labour-market policy, and economic policy reflect the needs and interests of young people. |  <i>Increase political & institutional commitment</i> |
| ▪ Policy makers should ensure that effective legislative frameworks are in place to address the issue of insecure employment. |  <i>Increase political & institutional commitment</i> |
| ▪ Politicians should commit to long-term investment in public services, enabling public services to increase recruitment of young people. |  <i>Increase political & institutional commitment</i> |
| ▪ Policy makers and the youth sector should actively seek to address issues of inequality in labour market transitions and the impact of unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment on young people with lower levels of educational attainment. |  <i>Tackle discrimination and inequalities</i> |
| ▪ Policy makers should promote and encourage social entrepreneurship to establish new forms of social business that connect employment and positive social impact. |  <i>Strengthen civil society</i> |
| ▪ The EU should establish a European youth innovation fund to support business ideas of young people. |  <i>Increase political & institutional commitment</i> |
| ▪ Information campaigns and formal and non-formal educational programmes should be developed in order to increase young peoples' awareness of employment rights. |  <i>Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education</i>  <i>Increase access to & knowledge of rights</i> |
| ▪ Those involved in youth work as practitioners, trainers, managers and policy-makers should identify activities, programmes and actions through which the youth sector can support young people to access employment, and address issues of insecure- and under-employment. |  <i>Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education</i>  <i>Enhance recognition of youth work</i> |
| ▪ Opportunities and programmes should be established to enable young people to access business mentors. |  <i>Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education</i> |

Key Messages: Other Issues Identified

- Policy makers must recognise and do more to support youth NGOs that play a key role in addressing the contemporary challenges young people face.

■ *Strengthen civil society*
- The youth sector must play a bigger role in young people's physical and mental health from body image, obesity, self-esteem and health inequality, in particular the impact of social media on young people's mental health.

■ *Establish responsive/ contemporary non-formal education*

■ *Respond to technological developments*
- Decision makers have crucial roles and responsibilities in addressing climate change and environmental issues; this should be reflected in youth policies.

■ *Increase political & institutional commitment*
- Diversity of youth is not sufficiently reflected in policies, events and other activities of institutions and youth NGOs. Measures should be taken to monitor diversity and inequalities in these areas and appropriate actions should seek to ensure greater equality.

■ *Tackle discrimination and inequalities*

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Appendix 1: Address List

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| Nicholas MORGAN | European Youth Mental Health |
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| Rapporteur |
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| Mara GEORGESCU | |
| Viktoria KARPATSKYI | |

Appendix 2: Programme Content

Day 1

Opening Remarks: Youth policy from the perspective of the two partner institutions

- Matthew Johnson, Director for Democratic Citizenship and Participation, Council of Europe
- Jacob Kornbeck, Youth, Volunteer Solidarity and Traineeships Office Unit, European Commission

Interactive Keynote: Young people's experiences and aspirations and the contemporary challenges they face.

- Dr Steven Roberts, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Monash University, Australia

Day 2

Youth Policy Fair: tools, advocacy and policy processes existing on local and European level

- Youth Metre, ALDA
- KEKI, A critical reflection tool on youth participation for policy makers
- Developing a youth law in Bosnia Herzegovina
- Youth work policy development in Ukraine
- Catch EyoU – European level project
- Methods of youth participation – Christian Roma Special College of Szeged, Hungary
- The creation and functioning of the network of local youth centres in Bulgaria
- Toolkit on quality standards for youth policy, European Youth Forum
- An example of cross-sectoral cooperation in youth policy in the Czech Republic
- The work of the Council of Europe in the youth field
- The work of the European Commission in the youth field

Stories from the Field

- Bruno Antonio, youth worker, DYPALL Network
- Vicky Anne Reichling, young activist, CGJL - Conférence Générale de la Jeunesse du Luxembourg a.s.b.l

Thematic Working Groups: Introduction to the themes of the working spaces and challenges, policy responses and good practice examples

- Cristina Bacalso, Pool of European Youth Researchers

| Theme | Facilitator | Rapporteur | Good Practice Examples |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1. Belonging | Mara Georgescu, EU-CoE youth partnership | Max Fras, London School of Economics and Political Science | Biljana Valisevska-Trajkoska, Youth Social Rights Network Maria Demeova, Civic Association Club of Roma Activists in the Slovakia |
| 2. Agency and empowerment | Sulkhan Chargeishvili, Youth Social Rights | Cristina Bacalso, Pool of European Youth Researchers, | Francesca Gnech, Autonomous Province of Trento - Provincial Agency of family, parenting |

| | | | |
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| 4. Volunteering | Valentin Dupouey, JEF Europe - Young European Federalists Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe | Andreia Henriques, Expert | Zeynep Tugçe ÇİFTÇİBAŞI GÜÇ, Abdullah Gül University Youth Factory, Cornelia Pürschel, Stiftung Mercator / Perspektivwerk |
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| 6. Working and creating | Veronica Stefan, Social Doers | Magda Nico, Pool of European Youth Researchers | Luca Bizzarri, Autonomous Province of Bolzano, and Marcus Linnros, European Trade Union Confederation – Youth Committee |

Day 3

Opening reflections: Inspiration for the key
messages

- John Muir, General Rapporteur

Sharing of key messages

Taking stock: Closing panel and Participant
Reflections

- Matthew Johnson, Director for Democratic
Citizenship and Participation, Council of
Europe
- Antje Rothmund, Head of Youth
Department, Council of Europe
- Jacob Kornbeck, Youth, Volunteer Solidarity
and Traineeships Office Unit, European
Commission

Closing words: from the representatives of the
Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

- Michal Urban, Director of Youth Department

Appendix 3: Symposium Team

The Symposium was designed, planned, facilitated and documented by:

- Zdenka Maskova, steering group member
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- Una Clarke, steering group member
- Laurence Hermand, steering group member
- Magda Nico, steering group member
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- Biljana Vasilevska Trajkovska, facilitator
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- Lucie Missemer, EU-CoE youth partnership
- Mariantonietta Ciavarella, EU-CoE youth partnership
- Evelin Tukora, Council of Europe

Appendix 4: Compendium of Youth Policy Responses to Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People

| Title | Location | Contributor |
|---|----------------|--|
| Leadership from public institutions and civil society | | |
| Promoting Youth Independence in Regione Toscana | Italy | Chiara Criscuoli, Giovanisi – Regione Toscana |
| Improving Access to Education and Employment Opportunities for Disabled People | Georgia | Nino Mikhanashvili, International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Georgian Committee |
| Establishing a Youth Assistance System | Belarus | |
| Co-Housing: I Change Status | Italy | Francesca Gnech, Autonomous Province of Trento - Provincial Agency of family, parenting and youth policy |
| Future in Mind | United Kingdom | Nicholas Morgan, European Youth Mental Health Ltd. |
| Culture and Creativity: Co-Living, Co-Working | Italy | Luca Bizzarri, Autonomous Province of Bolzano |
| Establishing a First Local Advisory Council on Youth Affairs | Romania | Mirela Lupu, Timis County Youth Foundation |
| Finish School on the Move | Finland | Matti Hakamäki, LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health |
| Establishing a Youth Assistance System | Belarus | Alena Ignatovitch, National Institute for Higher Education – Belarus |
| Knowledge, Research, Data and Evidence | | |
| Our Life, Our Voice: Young People and Poverty | European Level | Elie Demerseman, YES Forum |
| YouthMetre | European Level | Mihaela Onofras, ALDA-European Association for Local Democracy |
| Catch-EyoU | European Level | Cinzia Albanesi, Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna Lorenzo Floresta, Forum Nazionale dei Giovani |
| EUth: Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation | European Level | Evaldas Rupkus, IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany |
| Lifelong Learning and Professional Development | | |
| National Education Programme for Youth Workers: A Professional Approach to Youth Work | Ukraine | Anna Ostriкова, Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, State Institute for Family and Youth Policy |

| | | |
|---|------------------------|--|
| #WeProjectOurFuture #ProgettiamociilFuturo | Italy | Francesco Isetta, Agenzia Regionale per il Lavoro la Formazione e l'accreditamento – Regione Liguria |
| A Critical Reflection Tool on Youth Participation for Policy Makers | Belgium | Gloria Ghéquièrre, Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (KeKi), Belgium |
| YouthNET | Romania | Andrei Popescu, Ministry of Youth and Sports – Romania |
| Creating an Enabling Legislative Environment | | |
| Youth Laws and Youth Strategy | Republic of Moldova | Roman Banari, Nondiscrimination Coalition – Republic of Moldova |
| Youth Laws and Youth Strategy | Romania | Andrei Popescu, Ministry of Youth and Sports – Romania |
| Establishing a Youth Policy | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Katarina Vučković, The Institute for Youth Development KULT |
| Local Youth Strategy of Timisoara | Romania | Mirela Lupu, Timis County Youth Foundation |
| Campaigning and Advocacy | | |
| Youth at the Centre: Utilising Enter! | Greece | Sulkhan Chargeisvili, Youth Social Rights Network Maria Roidi, Youth Social Rights Network |
| No Hate: A Romanian Tale | Romania | Andrei Popescu, Ministry of Youth and Sports – Romania |
| Human Libraries: Building connections with Donbas | Ukraine | Olena Sheremet, NGO - Youth Initiative of Cities |
| Improving Employment Opportunities for Young People with Disabilities | Albania | Anisa Proda, Albanian Disability Rights Foundation |
| Empowering Young Disabled People | European Level | Dilyana Deneva, European Network on Independent Living |