

Chapter 1

Introduction

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: YOUNG PEOPLE, INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

This chapter aims to look at the challenges Europe is facing in terms of economic, political and social changes that have a direct impact on young Europeans. Special attention is dedicated to the challenges that socially excluded groups – young Roma, young refugees and young migrants – are facing. The second part of the chapter looks at the role of youth workers and youth organisations in supporting young people in going through these changes and in stimulating their active participation.

“From a youth perspective social inclusion is the process of individual's self-realisation within a society, acceptance and recognition of one's potential by social institutions, integration (through study, employment, volunteer work or other forms of participation) in the web of social relations in a community. In present-day European societies the concept is relevant to all young people as youth is the life stage when young people make the transition from family dependence to autonomy within the larger society under rapidly evolving circumstances. It has a particular meaning to those young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and live in precarious conditions. For them social inclusion involves breaking various barriers before acquiring their social rights as full members of society.”

– European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy – page on Social Inclusion by Siyka Kovacheva, PEYR member, see <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/social-inclusion>, accessed 27 October 2016.



Europe has been going through different challenges. The Great Recession of 2008-09 had a strong impact on the economic and social situation of European citizens, generating high rates of unemployment as well as contributing to social movements in different parts of Europe. The most affected groups in this situation continued to be those with limited access to opportunities due to social, economic, cultural or religious barriers. Minority groups were exposed to even more discrimination and intolerant attitudes from majority groups, as evident in the rise of incidents of hate speech, extremism and violence. Also, in 2015, more than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe, sparking a crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx while trying to find the most efficient mechanisms to deal with their resettlement.

The continent has been challenged by new phenomena that have exacerbated the crisis of ethics and human rights issues that refugees and migrants are facing. Migration is changing the political, social and economic landscape of Europe. Young people are certainly vulnerable and over-represented among migrants. In order to provide opportunities for these young migrants, policy makers need to make sure that there is a strong link between integration and migration policies, and the outcomes of these policies in the long term. This would in turn have a strong impact on the social and economic development of host communities (Eurostat 2015).





Thousands of young refugees are currently looking for a better and more secure life in Europe. Back home, most were exposed to war, situations of conflict, poverty and social insecurity, and thus left their countries looking for better life conditions in Europe. But in most cases, the new host community offers them a totally different social, cultural or economic framework. To be able to deal with the new context, they need special support. Poor and uncertain living conditions, the lack of access to education as well as discriminatory attitudes and the stigma they are exposed to are imposing barriers to the social inclusion of young refugees.

Yet all these challenges represent an immense wealth of opportunities for Europe and its people. We have the opportunity to build together a Europe of peace, based on the respect and defence of human rights and with new forms of democracy that can truly engage Europe's institutions with Europe's citizens.



The Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion defines social cohesion as "the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities". Consequently, social cohesion should be at the core of ensuring access to rights for all, respect for the dignity of others, the right of all individuals to personal development and participation in the democratic process.³ The rise of youth participation on the political agenda reflects significant developments in the thinking and the emphasis given to youth policy and youth work in Europe. Both the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) have invested significant resources in developing programmes and policies aimed at ensuring that youth have opportunities for personal and professional development. The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth set a target of lifting 20 million people out of the risk of poverty by 2020. Special attention is given to improving the situation of young people, with policy documents setting as top priorities for European youth policy themes such as employment, education, social inclusion, youth and the world, volunteering, health and sport, participation, creativity and entrepreneurship. Consequently, creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment as well as ensuring access and the full participation of young people are also in line with the Renewed Social Agenda and its priorities (Potočník 2015).

But certain groups of young people (including women, young people with disabilities and youth from migrant backgrounds) are still particularly exposed to the risks of unemployment, long-term unemployment, early school leaving or inactivity. In total, 7.5 million 15 to 24-year-olds are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and the situation requires immediate action. The European Commission has tried to respond by taking direct action to provide support for youth employment activation measures via, in particular, the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).⁴

The rise of political extremism coupled with the challenges arising from the influx of refugees and the crisis of human rights also requires an emphasis on Roma youth participation, more than at any other time. Anchored in Roma traditions and cultural heritage, this group of young people faces the same challenges as other young Europeans: unemployment, social and economic exclusion, the difficult transition to adulthood and an uncertain future. Their poor educational attainment translates into a lack of the skills required for employment, and their access to other social rights such as housing and health care are restricted. Without employment, Roma youth run the risk of being permanently excluded from mainstream society and falling into the underclass.⁵ To make sure that Roma youth are meaningfully represented, European institutions have developed policy measures and mechanisms aimed at ensuring their empowerment and participation. The Roma Youth Action Plan (2013) is the response of the Council of Europe to challenges faced by the Roma population in Europe. The plan pays attention to the need to ensure participation in policy decision-making processes and structures at European level, and the multiple realities of discrimination. In a time of political radicalisation and extremism, the plan gives priority to human rights and intercultural dialogue as responses to discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.⁶

Social, political and economic changes have had a major impact on young Europeans, who face a widespread trend of a delayed transition to adulthood (Eurostat 2015). Moreover, this most dynamic

3. Available at www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/GUIDE_en.pdf, accessed 20 October 2016.

4. European Commission (2014), "Youth Employment Initiative and the European Social Fund", European Social Fund thematic paper, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/BlobServlet?docId=450&langId=en>, accessed 27 October 2016.

5. See <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2177949&Site=COE&direct=true>, accessed 20 October 2016.

6. See <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046d028>, accessed 20 October 2016.

group within society is at times invested with measures that are not adapted to the requirements of the digital era. The EU Youth Strategy states that “Europe’s future depends on its youth. Yet, life chances of many young people are blighted”.⁷ But if Europe’s future depends on its youth, measures taken should respond to the challenges that youth are currently facing: reduced access to health services; sluggish access to the labour market; difficulties in continuing their studies; and reduced access to housing which often means postponing the moment of moving out from the parental household. Policy answers are, at times, not able to invest in youth for the future, but to invest in the youth of today, especially those groups that are more exposed to social exclusion and discrimination.

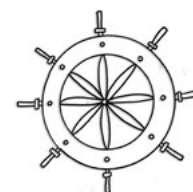
Young people are thus firmly and rightly on the political map of Europe, and their role and importance are highlighted. But what exactly has all this got to do with social inclusion in youth work? Also, are youth workers ready to respond to the dynamism of the challenges that youth face?

If Europe’s youth is the greatest resource for its development, for its present and future, then young people should be visible in the public arena, should be listened to by adults and should definitely be involved in shaping local, national and European youth policies. This link becomes clearer when the idea of youth participation is examined more closely.

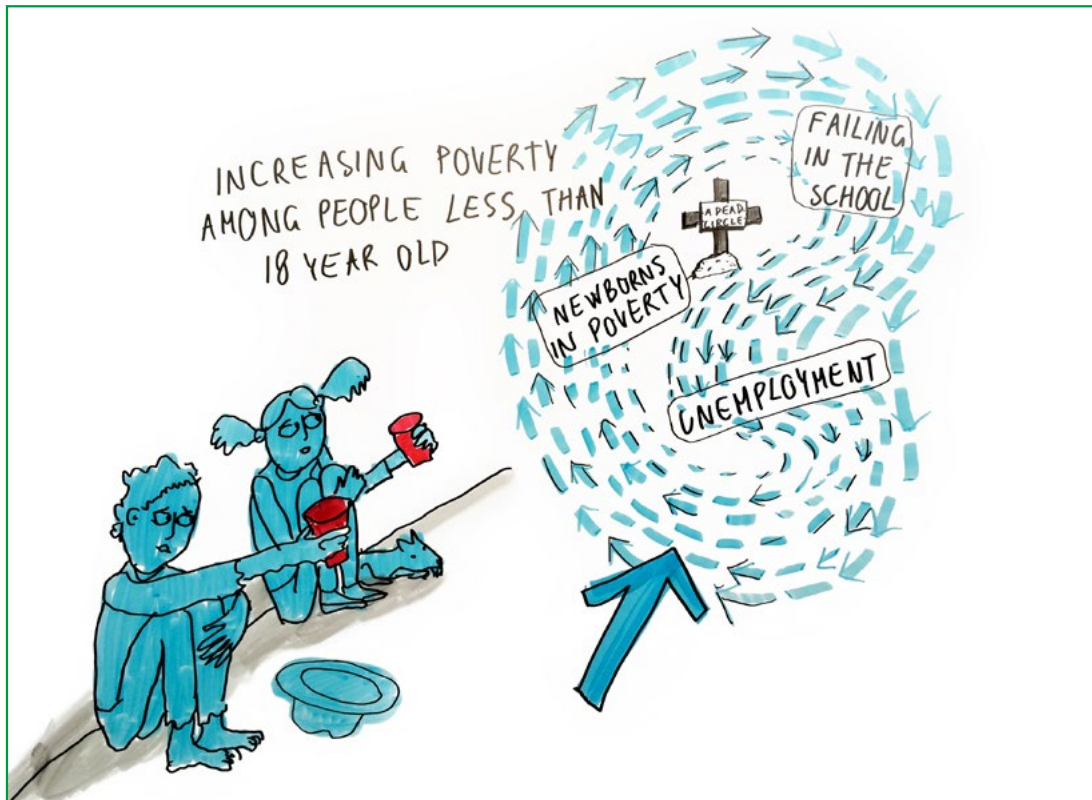
The notion of the participation of young people in society, particularly in the civil and political organisation of society, is developing. Participation in this context means more than mere consultation with young people about changes and initiatives that will affect their lives and shape their futures. We are talking about the participation of young people who are really representing, and representative of, a cross-section of European youth. It is this last point that brings us to the crux of the matter. But youth participation mechanisms and structures have also evolved. The World Forum for Democracy, which took place in November 2014 in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement and the results of the study “Youth participation in democratic life” (2013) show that entering digitalised work requires also reflections on youth participation and the future of democracies in the digital era. For this purpose, the Symposium on Youth Participation in a Digitalised World (September 2015) that gathered together policy makers, youth workers, educators and young people showed that the use of the internet and social media is constantly changing democratic participation, and that e-participation is definitely a core part of new youth participation tools and mechanisms.

For society to really benefit from the engagement of young people, all young people must be given the means and the opportunities to take up their right to participate. It is essential that young people with fewer opportunities, indeed with the fewest opportunities, can get involved and make their contribution felt, not least because it is their fundamental right as much as any other young person. But it is not only a matter of the intrinsic ethical value of preventing exclusion or of recognising the richness of diversity. The participation of young people with fewer opportunities is a barometer of the underlying health of our democracies and societies. It is imperative that the voice of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people is heard because their contribution, their perspective and their knowledge is invaluable and unique in the effort to forge a better society for tomorrow, for everyone. Young people who have the most difficult lives and the most uncertain futures can really teach us about the meaning of, and the path towards, a Europe of equality, justice and peace. But these young people must first have the possibility to participate.

Even though the insight and knowledge of people who experience social exclusion directly can help us understand the roots of exclusion, these are complex and difficult experiences to understand. Yet young people in the most difficult situations do tell us that they need opportunities to meet others in an atmosphere of friendship, mutual support and security. They also tell us about the importance of having the possibility to join in with others in the normal pursuits and projects open to young people in society, such as sport, volunteering and cultural activities. It is very much as a result of such an inclusion that young people can go on to discuss and share their views on the issues that concern them. This is true for all young people but especially true for those young people at risk of social exclusion.



7. EU (2009), “An EU Strategy for Youth. Investing and empowering. A renewed open method of co-ordination to address youth challenges and opportunities”, COM(2009) 200 final, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52009DC0200>, accessed 27 October 2016.



Youth work plays an essential role in reaching and bringing together young people who face exclusion on a daily basis. It is true that there are many other factors in society that can contribute to the social inclusion of young people, not least the abilities and strengths of young people themselves, but for young people with the fewest opportunities, youth work and youth organisations can be a principal means of such inclusion.

If youth workers and youth organisations cannot reach out to and include young people with the fewest opportunities in their activities, where else will they benefit from the non-formal learning experiences these activities provide? How else will the most marginalised young people be able to join other young people and adults in the projects that are open to them in our societies? And outside of the formal structures that do not always serve them the best, where will the most vulnerable young people find the encouragement and support to develop their self-esteem and confidence? Without such broader inclusion, where will the most isolated young people develop the necessary skills and self-belief to take up the challenge of representing others? And what possible future will Europe be missing out on without such inclusion?

How then do youth workers and youth organisations go about being inclusive? This T-Kit aims to provide both conceptual and practical tools and resources from which to begin to explore and approach this question.

THE VALUE AND CHALLENGE OF WORKING INCLUSIVELY

Excluded young people are hard to reach and the more excluded they are the harder it is. Making contact with young people is not enough; we need to engage and work with them. The problem is compounded by the fact that many marginalised young people express suspicion, even hostility, towards the involvement of professionals in their lives.

This is why youth work is so important. Its often voluntary and community-based nature means that youth workers and youth organisations have a better chance than most to make contact and build trusting relationships with young people on the margins of society.

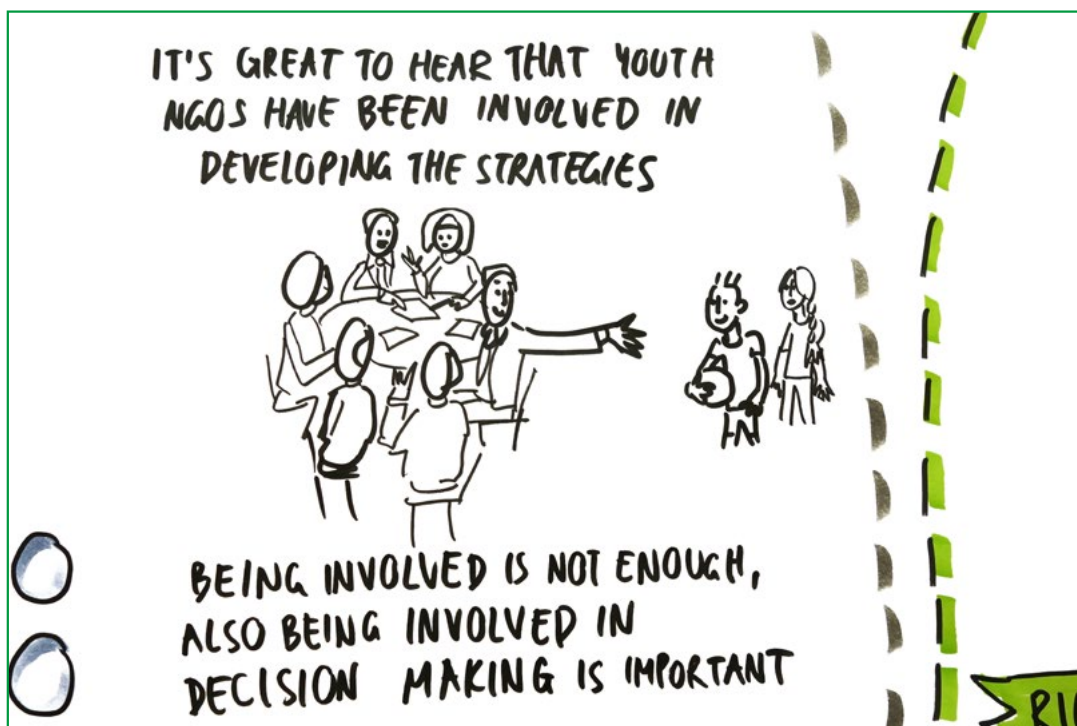
So what are the benefits to be gained when we as youth workers build on this vocational advantage and work as inclusively as we can?

"Youth workers and youth nongovernmental organisations provide alternative non-formal education activities and leisure-time activities, counter discrimination and exclusion, and promote participation and citizenship to young people". (Ohana 2011)

Youth workers do play an essential role in working with young people with fewer opportunities. Working with a very dynamic group, in contexts and situations that are permanently changing, the work done requires a permanent change in methodologies and approaches as well as constant innovation. The 2nd European Youth Work Convention that took place in April 2015 in Brussels was also focused on analysing the social situation of young people in Europe. Practitioners, policy makers and researchers concluded that:



In many different ways, young people from all backgrounds live in precarious circumstances. Some face pronounced, extended and multiple challenges. All need some level of support, and support in strengthening their autonomy. While enjoying new opportunities enabled through new technologies and digital media, the expansion of educational opportunities, access to information and more, they also face risk and uncertainty.⁸



The programmes and policies that are to respond to youth needs are ideally developed within a partnership structure that involves the policy makers, the youth researchers and the youth workers working directly with the representatives of youth. Consequently, the youth workers should be permanently working with the other actors in working with and for young people with fewer opportunities. Cross-sectoral co-operation is essential to having consistent and efficient measures to support the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

When designing projects for youth with fewer opportunities:

- ▶ the first thing we need to recognise is the tremendous knowledge and insight that young people who face exclusion on a daily and long-term basis can bring to youth work. Their contribution will enrich any youth initiative or project;
- ▶ young people facing persistent exclusion will benefit from new opportunities that could have been previously out of reach. Through being able to know and encounter other young people they will, together, all be challenged and their prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions questioned. Their horizons will become broader, their contacts more diverse. They will have the opportunity together to see patterns of injustice and explore their concerns and questions. Despite the differences in their backgrounds and experiences they will discover their similarities as young people with hopes and aspirations for the future;
- ▶ youth projects and initiatives will benefit too. If locally based, they will be more relevant to their communities. By listening and learning from disadvantaged young people, youth work and those involved in it will gain a deeper and broader understanding of what is really important. By reaching



8. "2nd European Youth Work Convention. Similarities in a world of difference", Final report, Brussels, 27 to 30 April 2015, available at: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-website-final-report>.

and engaging excluded young people, future initiatives will have a better chance to include them as well; events or projects can be tailored to meet the young people's actual needs and interests, not what adults imagine them to be;

- ▶ in terms of its content, the project, and all the people in it and affected by it, gain too. Racism, sexism, poverty, inequality and other forms of discrimination and injustice can be raised not as abstract “-isms” but as real forces affecting real people. Young people can understand the realities of other people's lives better when there is an emotional connection between them. This principle is well understood as an element of global youth work, but it applies just as keenly when the gap between or within communities is across a city, not a continent;
- ▶ in this way, and especially if what we learn through working inclusively can be shared outside the world of youth work, society, as a whole, will benefit too;
- ▶ especially for young people facing multiple discrimination (discrimination against one person on the basis of more than one ground), the activities that the youth workers and youth organisations can structure will have a strong impact on making this group visible. It will also fundamentally and meaningfully contribute to promoting participation and citizenship as well as to empowerment and social inclusion;
- ▶ youth workers should relate the above to youth needs in their working community.

However, bringing all this about is far from easy. Working in an inclusive way demands change – organisational and individual. By definition, the status quo has failed some young people. To change that, people and organisations have to do things in different ways. They must identify the barriers they have, perhaps unwittingly, erected. Projects must examine their organisational culture, their values and practices, to see where and how they are reaching and engaging some young people but not others.

In all this it is vital that youth workers know their limitations. Some of the barriers to young people's inclusion are deep-rooted, long lasting and structural. Youth projects obviously cannot single-handedly eradicate poverty, unemployment, drug use, racism and xenophobia, educational underachievement, homelessness, abuse and neglect, youth crime or any of the other problems linked with young people's social exclusion. But they can work with young people in informal settings, broadening their opportunities, providing new experiences and challenges, showing their faith in young people and bringing out of them what is best. For young people facing daily discrimination and exclusion, and trying to cope with the humiliation and the injustice that it brings, sensitive and inclusive youth work based on respect and dignity can be an immense source of strength and personal encouragement.

The practical part of this paper aims at equipping youth workers with good practices in terms of methodologies and activities. It is designed to support youth workers in developing activities for young people with fewer opportunities, and has been tested. Next, we will tackle one of the biggest stumbling blocks – that of trying to grasp what inclusion actually is and who those young people with fewer opportunities are.