Youth Partnership

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

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN UNION   CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Massive Open Online Course: Essentials of Youth Work (2021 edition)

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

The massive open online course (MOOC), "Essentials of youth work" was implemented by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership from 17 May 2021 to 20 September 2021 on the CANVAS e-learning platform.

The participants who took the course had an opportunity:

- to become more familiar with the "basics" of youth work (concepts and definitions, forms, practices, approaches, objectives, actors at European and national levels);
- to gain an overview of how youth work is supported (through policies and strategies, youth work research, education of youth workers, funding, etc.);
- to get inspired by the diverse good practices existing in Europe on different aspects of youth work;
- to reflect on the future of youth work in Europe and on how to engage in youth work developments.

The course built on the experience of the previous MOOC run by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership in 2020 and was re-designed following the recommendations from the first edition, the most notable of which were the following.

- The narrative on youth work practice presented in the A Day in the Life of a Youth Worker video series was strengthened, featuring five youth workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Latvia, Portugal and the Russian Federation and who appeared in each video and told their stories, focusing on specific topics related to youth work practice. This approach differed compared to 2020, when each video had featured different youth workers. The new approach allowed for more consistency and created a "full picture" of youth work realities based on concrete youth work practice. The group of invited youth workers was very diverse, to reflect the diversity of youth work practice in Europe.
- The course provided more opportunities for interaction through online meetings. In this edition, six online meetings/webinars were organised (compared to four in the first edition).
- The content of the online modules was re-designed, simplified and differently organised, to provide better navigation in the course content and to accommodate new developments in youth work, youth policy and youth research.
- More trainers/facilitators were involved in the design and implementation of the MOOC: three instead of two. Two of them were responsible for community management.

The content of the course was updated, considering the developments in the youth work/youth policy/youth research fields, mainly stemming from the results of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, which highlighted the social change that affects young people (and youth work), such as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change or the rise of anti-democratic trends in Europe. Therefore, the final Declaration of the Convention, European Youth Work

[Agenda](#) and the [Bonn Process](#) became the transverse themes in most of the content of the MOOC.

The course consisted of six modules, divided into several e-learning units. Besides reading, participants could access the following elements: videos, podcast episodes, forum discussions, quizzes and other assignments (e.g. brainstorming activities or written assignments). Furthermore, six online meetings/webinars were delivered through Zoom. These meetings were available to all interested participants; some audio and webinar content was open to external participants as well.

The MOOC was updated and implemented by a team of five people:
- Marietta Balázs, course director
- Dariusz Grzemny, course co-ordinator and facilitator
- Ekaterina Sherer, facilitator
- Snežana Bačlija Knoch, facilitator
- Adina Marina Şerban, researcher

Participants

As in the previous edition of the MOOC, the course was open to all who wanted to learn about both theory and practice of youth work, regardless of whether they were beginners or had experience in youth work.

In this edition, 136 participants finished the course and 96 requested the course certificate. The table below shows the numbers related to the participants in comparison with the 2020 edition.
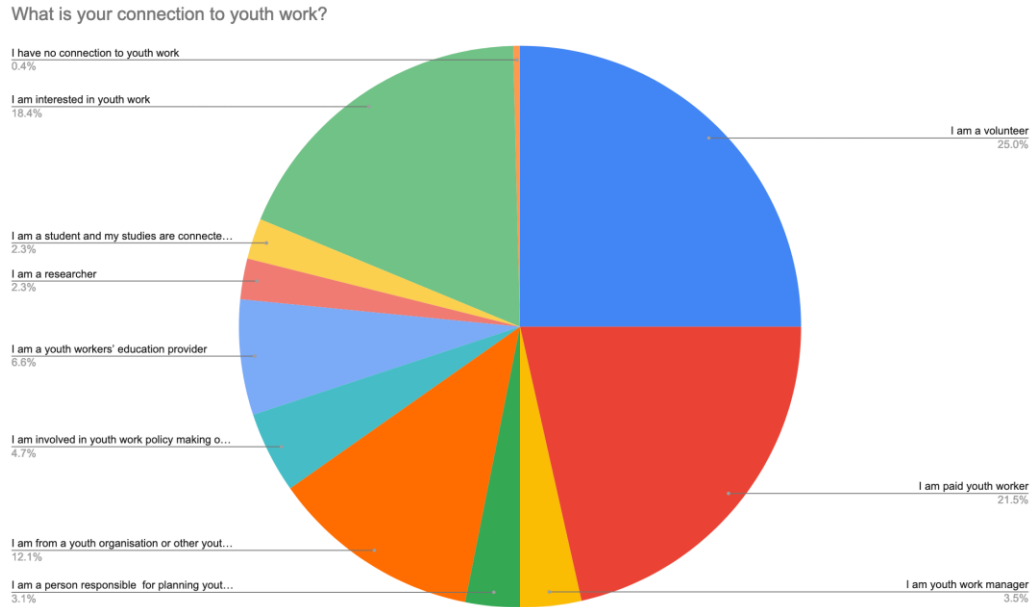
	2021 edition	2020 edition
Enrolled participants	984	3496
People who started the MOOC	273	1035
People who finished all the modules	136	168

The participants came from 67 countries, most of them in Europe:

By continent


Asia 6.7%
Australia 0.4%
America 20.8%
Europe 43.9%
Africa 28.2%
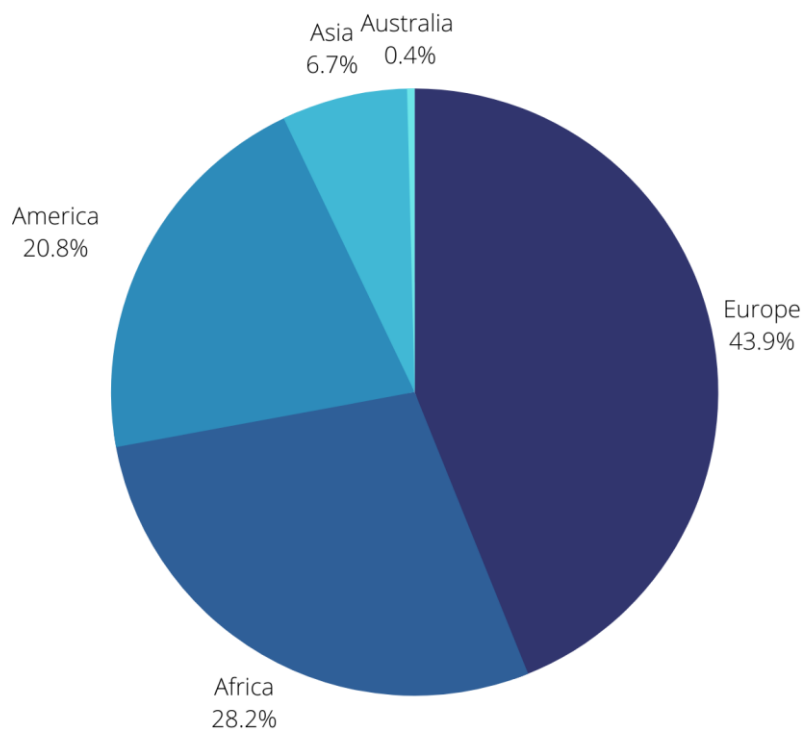
The majority of participants who enrolled in the MOOC identified themselves as volunteers (25%), followed by paid youth workers (21.5%) and people interested in youth work (18.4%).

What is your connection to youth work?

I have no connection to youth work
0.4%

I am interested in youth work
18.4%

I am a volunteer
25.0%

I am a student and my studies are connecte…
2.3%

I am a researcher
2.3%

I am a youth workers' education provider
6.6%

I am involved in youth work policy making o…
4.7%

I am paid youth worker
21.5%

I am from a youth organisation or other yout…
12.1%

I am a person responsible for planning yout…
3.1%

I am youth work manager
3.5%

Some 70.3% of participants self-identified as female, 29.3% as male and 0.4% as others. Regarding age, the majority of participants were between 25 and 40.

Age

56-65
1.5%

Under 18
2.2%

41-55
20.3%

18-24
17.0%

25-30
29.2%

31-40
29.9%
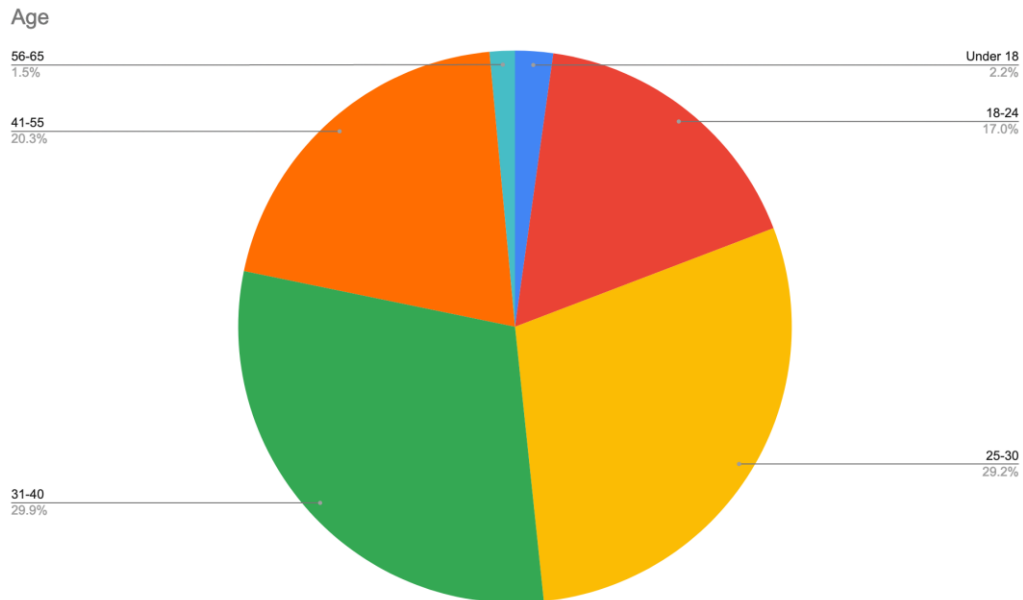
Content of the e-learning modules and the learning process

The MOOC consisted of six modules, which were gradually opened for the participants. Each module contained the following elements:
- readings – texts with specific information related to the topic of the module;
- resources – in each of the units, participants were provided with various resources, such as videos, links to documents and webpages;
- podcasts – audio recordings with youth work practitioners, policy makers and researchers on the following topics:
    - Advocating for youth work - European Youth Work Agenda in practice
    - Advocacy for youth work
    - Youth workers: values and ethics
    - Youth research
    - Quality and standards in youth work
    - History of youth work
    - a bonus episode in the Under 30' podcast series promoting the course: MOOC on Essentials of Youth Work
- videos – the video series A Day in the Life of a Youth Worker was produced for the MOOC. Each video featured five youth workers from different European countries introducing their youth work practice. The following videos were developed for this edition of the MOOC:
    - How did you become a youth worker?
    - Who are the young people you work with?
    - How do you build relationships with young people?
    - What does your regular day as a youth worker look like? What do you actually do?
    - How does European and local youth policy influence your work?
    - What is your vision of youth work?
- activities – in each module, participants were invited to take part in various activities, such as discussion forums, quizzes, written assignments, etc.;
- a final self-assessment – at the end of each module, participants had a chance to check what they had learned in the module by doing the Check what you have learned quiz;
- a final evaluation.

Six online meetings/webinars were organised for the participants:
- an online meeting to get to know each other and to open up peer networking possibilities on the platform – 19 May 2021;
- a webinar on "Outreach and open youth work" with two experts: Cosmin Catană, youth worker and youth work trainer (Romania) and Thomas McCarthy, outreach youth worker (Ireland) – 26 May 2021;
- a webinar on "Ethics and values of youth workers" with John Taylor, youth worker (UK), Juha Kiviniemi, digital youth work expert (Finland) and Sladjana Petkovic, youth researcher (Serbia) – 2 June 2021;

- [a webinar on the "3rd European Youth Work Convention and Implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda"](#) with Antje Rothemund, Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe and Babis Papaioannou, policy officer, Youth Policy Unit, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission – 9 June 2021;
- [a webinar on "Current debates and the future of youth work"](#) with Adina Marina Şerban, youth researcher (Romania), Laimonas Ragauskas, facilitator, supervisor and coach in non-formal learning and training (Lithuania), Ajša Hadžibegović, youth work specialist (Montenegro) and Yael Ohana, expert in the field of non-formal education and international youth work (Germany) – 16 June 2021;
- an online networking meeting for the participants – 30 June 2021.

Summary of the online modules

Module 1 – Introduction to the course

This introductory module of the MOOC set the stage for the rest of the course. It contained the following elements: an introduction to the course, a getting-to-know-each-other activity, a chance to share one's expectations of the MOOC and a welcome survey to fill out, to learn who was in the course and what experience they brought to the MOOC.

Module 2 – Youth work: definition, purpose and principles

This module was a starting point to explore youth work. The following topics were explored: elements of the history of youth work; definitions, purpose and characteristics of youth work; principles and values in youth work; youth work as a response to needs, interests and concerns of young people; youth work as social and educational practice; links between youth work and other social professions/occupations; the diversity of youth work practices (in terms of youth work traditions). In this module, participants had a chance to learn and reflect on the fundamentals of youth work: history, definitions and purpose, underpinning principles and values. They were also given an opportunity to reflect on and develop their own understanding of youth work.

Module 3 – The youth work environment

This module started with the assumption that youth work is a complex practice: it takes many forms, includes different processes and stakeholders and should consider different principles that would guarantee it is of good quality. Therefore, the content focused on the following topics: different types of youth work; actors involved in youth work and their role; what quality youth work is; standards in youth work; the reality of youth work in Europe.

Module 3 showed the complexity of youth work practice, its many forms and processes. Participants were introduced to the concept of a "youth work space" – a geographical, physical, material, temporal, virtual and human space in which young people interact with their peers and with youth workers in a positive and secure environment that enables and supports their personal and social development.

Module 4 – The youth worker

This module explored the most important figure in youth work after young people – the youth worker. Participants had a chance to learn about the roles and tasks of a youth worker and the competencies necessary for youth work. The module included an opportunity to perform self-assessment of youth worker's competencies by using one of the available online tools, then to reflect on the experiences and share insights with other learners. Connected to that, the module explored how one becomes a youth worker through learning about various education and training paths for youth workers, with examples from different youth work contexts and support

structures available for youth workers. Finally, within the module, there was a webinar dedicated to the topic of ethics and values of youth workers, in addition to a specific page with additional information on this topic.

Module 5 - Supporting and recognising youth work in Europe

This module was mainly focused on feasible youth policy and how it connects to youth work at local, national and European levels, exploring this topic from the perspectives of supporting measures, recognition and resources for youth work. Youth research was an important part of the module, reflecting on how it can support youth work. In this module, participants had an opportunity to explore the level of recognition of youth work in different countries and get first-hand information in the discussion forum about formal education opportunities and formal recognition of youth work in different places. The module included important input about the European Youth Agenda and European Youth Work Convention and how the Bonn Process can be reflected at local and national levels. There also was a webinar on this topic with the head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and a representative of the Youth Policy Unit of the European Commission.

Module 6 – Impact of youth work

This module was focused on discovering how youth work practice influences the lives of young people, how we can evaluate it and what impact it has on local and other levels. One key topic of the module was advocacy for youth work, which included exploring advocacy processes on the European level (including the podcast about the European Youth Work Agenda in practice). As it was the last content module, it also provided opportunities for reflecting on what is happening in youth work nowadays and what its future is. This module's webinar looked at current debates about youth work, with particular focus on digitalisation in youth work, shrinking space for civil society and the political role of youth work.

Recognition of learning

The MOOC was based on a self-directed learning approach; at the end of each module, participants had a space to reflect on several questions concerning the module, what they had discovered and also how they can implement it in their everyday work/life. Participants could earn badges by completing the modules. Five different badges were available throughout the course. During the course, 564 badges were issued in total. At the end of the MOOC, those participants who had completed all the modules received a certificate of completion.

Evaluation of the MOOC

The evaluation by participants clearly shows that the MOOC was a meaningful learning experience for them. The majority of the participants found it very useful for their professional development and appreciated all the knowledge they received during the course and how it was delivered.

Around 94% of participants said that they became familiar with the main concepts and practices of youth work after the course. In the comments to this question, they mentioned that they had learned a lot from the course, not only on the level of knowledge, but they had also changed their perspective on youth work. The course motivated them to go more in-depth and develop themselves further as youth work practitioners.

After this course how familiar are you with youth work main concepts and practice?

129 responses
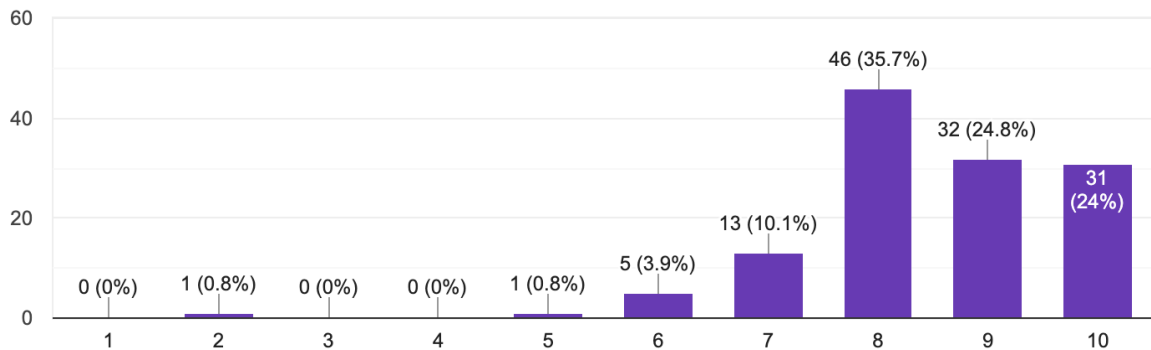
Most participants stated that the course met their expectations. In the comments, some participants mentioned that it exceeded their expectations. A couple of participants would have expected a more practice-oriented approach, though it is difficult to identify what they actually meant. Several people also stated that it was the best MOOC they had ever done.
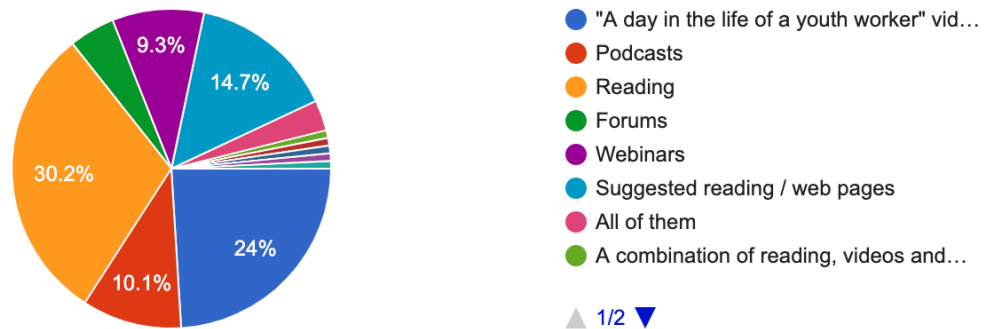
Did this course meet your learning expectations?

129 responses
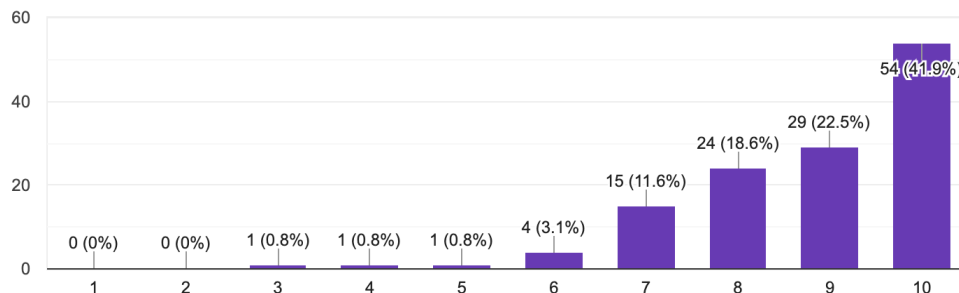
Participants considered the following activities the most useful for their learning: readings (30.2%), the A Day in the Life of a Youth Worker video series (24%), suggested readings and resources (14.7%), then podcast episodes (10.1%), webinars (9.3%) and forum discussions (4.7%).

What learning activities were the most useful for you?

129 responses

Legend:
- "A day in the life of a youth worker" vid…
- Podcasts
- Reading
- Forums
- Webinars
- Suggested reading / web pages
- All of them
- A combination of reading, videos and…

1/2

Participants had some proposals to improve the course: to add peer-reviewed tasks, to allocate more time for completion of the modules, to add more practical exercises and to add information about youth work practice in regions beyond Europe.

Here are some illustrative quotes provided by the participants:

"An experience like no other! Youth work education done right in online environment, such a great opportunity for professional and personal development of each youth worker."

"Thank you very much to all the organizers for providing us a valuable programme. We were able to share experiences of youth work globally. You are the pioneers who gave us that opportunity. Thank you very much."

"If you want to get familiar with the principles and concepts of youth work, I strongly recommend this course, where you can learn about the concept of youth work, types of youth work, and other concepts that will help you in your work in the future."

"This MOOC was my first and I have definitely enjoyed it. It was very informative, interactive and being a digital platform is what is recommended going forward, especially now during this pandemic affecting the world."

"I came into this course thinking it would make me a better Youth Worker, but instead, I got more, It made me a better person. I left more enriched, more aware and more sensitive to myself and those around me...especially the youths. Who wouldn't want that!"

"It is a fascinating and interactive course covering the basics, providing different formats to learn and giving useful tools, as well as recommendations for further reading, exploring and reflecting. It is also nice to connect to youth workers from across the world and discuss topics such as European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn process, as well as learn from each other's experiences and practices. Recommendation for anyone interested in the topic and/or working in the youth field!"

"Everyone has a value in life and every young person deserves the abundance of opportunities for them to find themselves, if we all work together then this world will be a better place for us and generations to come. It is more about letting everyone shine in their own space."

The team of trainers/facilitators, researchers, resource persons and the staff of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership held an evaluation meeting after the course to reflect on the results from the MOOC and lessons learned. The team highlighted the following aspects:

1. The team managed to implement most of the recommendations coming from the experience of the previous edition of the MOOC. The content was re-designed, simplified and made clearer for the participants. More possibilities for online interaction were provided through online meetings, webinars and more interactive activities on the e-learning platform. The narrative of A Day in the Life of a Youth Worker was strengthened by featuring stories on youth work practice coming from five youth workers who appeared in all videos. The team believes that the quality of the MOOC increased in terms of the content, design and implementation.
2. The MOOC's objectives were reached to a great extent thanks to several factors: interesting content, the diversity of methods used and satisfying engagement of the course participants.
3. The course team was strengthened by one more person, which facilitated the preparation process and the implementation of the course. This person also acted as a community manager, facilitating communication between participants and reacting to posts on the discussion forums and participants' direct messages.
4. The course was implemented during a time when most restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic were lifted in most countries. This could have influenced the outreach of the course, resulting in less attention from potential participants and fewer participants.
5. Graphic recordings of the webinars were not immediately available on the MOOC platform, so participants could not immediately visually harvest the insights. Perhaps even more importantly, the webinar recordings were edited this time by an external company, which took more time, so the videos were put on the platform with a significant delay making it difficult for participants who did not participate in the webinars to follow the MOOC fully.
6. The number of learners attending the webinars was quite low, and the webinar format was not necessarily suitable for this kind of dynamic. A meet-up format would probably be more engaging, since it would enable learners to directly interact with the speakers and team.

Lessons learned and recommendations for the future

The development and implementation of the MOOC on the essentials of youth work was a process that went through different stages: consultations with different stakeholders in the first edition of the MOOC, creating/adapting the learning content, constant feedback coming from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership secretariat, trainers, research, creating the structure of the MOOC on the e-learning platform, running the course, monitoring and evaluation. This is a very complex process that requires a lot of co-ordination and self-discipline. The content of a learning module, taking participants hours to complete, sometimes took a few months to create. The team involved in this edition of the MOOC had a much easier task because most of the content was ready, as it was developed for the first edition of the MOOC. However, each learning process is very specific and has its own particularities. Not only was it a learning process for the MOOC participants but also for the team behind the MOOC.

Below is the list of lessons learned and some recommendations for the future of the MOOC.

1. The course generated a lot of content, as in the previous edition. This content reflects very diverse youth work experience in various parts of the world and thoughts related to different youth work or youth policy issues, such as how one becomes a youth worker, what challenges youth workers deal with in daily youth work practice, personal reflections on the development and history of youth work and how youth work is recognised. Therefore, the team's proposals for how it can be used are as follows.

   - Involving a youth work researcher to look at the content generated by the participants and having a reflection on different themes discussed in the MOOC, such as the career paths and education of youth workers, youth work processes and the results/impact of youth work around the world, etc.
   - Creating mini-courses using the content of the MOOC and the content generated by the participants, such as the link between youth work and youth policy/how to become a youth worker.
   - Creating a series of shorter videos from the webinars, e.g. specific input by one person presenting a particular practice or reflection on various aspects of youth work, youth policy or youth research.
   - Developing a library on the topics tackled in all modules that would include the podcast episodes, the videos and some suggested literature to read.
   - Using the content generated by the participants during the course in the self-paced MOOC as, e.g. examples coming from youth work practice; some participants' reflections can also be used as dilemmas to be reflected upon and discussed.

2. The team highlighted a very high-quality input from the webinar guests. They focused on concrete youth work practice while providing food for thought on how it can be improved. In the future, when the course becomes fully self-paced, it would be good to keep

offering webinars with quality inputs to accompany it, but they can be more spaced in time.

3. The link to the European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn Process that was a transverse theme in the MOOC contributed to a better promotion of these youth policy instruments. Hopefully, the MOOC provided ideas for the participants on how they can be associated with or get involved in these processes. However, as these processes are evolving and will influence the future of youth work and youth policy, there is a need to constantly update youth work practitioners on all developments and create a platform for reflection on how they can be associated with youth policy processes.

4. The course was prepared in a relatively short time, as it builds on the content from the previous MOOC. Therefore, extensive preparation was not needed. However, this impacted the promotion of the course, which was also shorter. This might have had an impact on the number of enrolments in the course. Therefore, strategic promotion is needed for further MOOCs, even if they are to be run without facilitation (self-paced). Such promotion should take into consideration the history of this MOOC, highlight how it was developed and use the quotes from participants' evaluations.

5. Sufficient time should be spent for the preparation of the next MOOC, whether it is tutored or self-paced. The experience from the past editions of the MOOC shows that it is crucial for the development of quality content, which is often very complex. Therefore, there is a need for reflection on how it can be turned into a meaningful learning experience for the participants, taking into account the participants' very diverse backgrounds and their different levels of youth work experience.

6. While the course covered many topics related to youth work both theoretically and practically, the youth research aspect needs to be strengthened, especially when it comes to explaining links between youth work, youth research and youth policy. The course could be a great opportunity to underline the importance of youth research in youth work practice. Therefore, the team preparing the next edition of the MOOC could be strengthened by involving different youth researchers, who could consult and provide input/content to different learning modules, e.g. in video format.