

## Youth Partnership

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



# **COUNTRY SHEET**

# **ON YOUTH WORK**

# **in NORWAY**

Last updated: 14. May 2020

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# 1. Context of youth work

Youth work in Norway has its origins in the voluntary sector, particularly represented by the missionary, temperance, and labour movements. The expansion of the welfare state following WW2 into fields that had previously been run by voluntary organizations included areas such as health and social work, culture, sports, and recreation. In a 1949 bill to parliament, principles of state support for youth work were described primarily as facilitating organisational life and youth associations. Annual government grants for youth work were allocated to youth organisations and through the the National Youth Council [Statens Ungdomsråd].

The Committee on public support for youth organisations [Komiteen for offentlig støtte til ungdomsorganisasjonene] which presented its recommendation in 1959 argued against strong public sector involvement in the implementation of youth work on the grounds that it would stifle the independence of youth organisations and their activities. However, as in the rest of Europe as well as in the USA free/unproductive time among “unorganized” youth was increasingly considered problematic and there was a concern about youth and crime, particularly in urban areas. It was in this context that the first municipal recreational youth club was established in 1953 in Oslo.

In 1968, a committee was set up to examine youth work. The committee presented its recommendation in 1971. The committee's principle assessment was that the public had a duty to create conditions for a better leisure/recreational environment, and that young people had a right to access varied leisure activities. The report also contributed to a gradual and substantial shift in the understanding of public responsibility for young people's free time - from pure prevention (based on an at times negative view on youth as potential delinquents) into service, facilitation, and non-formal learning to harness young people's potential and resources.

## 2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work

Municipalities are expected to deliver youth work in accordance to national priorities in the area of children and youth. The [Government's 2015 plan on child and youth policy initiatives](#) and the national annual budget describe priorities in the field of children and youth. The Government encourages cooperation between municipalities, city boroughs and the voluntary sector in the creation and development of inclusive youth work efforts (meeting places, activities, clubs etc) at the local level. The importance of youth work is acknowledged in other policy documents such as White Paper No. 19 (2018-2019) on [Public Health](#) [Folkehelsemeldinga — Gode liv i eit trygt samfunn] and White Paper No. 8 (2018–2019) [The Power of Culture – Cultural Policy for the Future](#) [Kulturens kraft. Kulturpolitikk for framtida].

While there is no legal definition of youth work, collective terms like “leisure/recreational clubs/houses” and “open meeting places for youth” are used to describe the areas in which youth work is exercised today. The informal learning that occurs in these spaces is understood as crucial for young people’s personal and social development. In addition, open meeting places for youth often function as spaces for the exercise of, and participation in, cultural activities. Youth work is informed by the needs of young people and their participation, and through spaces where they engage with competent and caring adults.

### 3. Recognition

Child Care and Youth Work is a designated route in upper secondary school which consists of two years of school-based education and training, followed by two years of apprenticeship in a training enterprise. Training completed and passed in the subject will lead to a Trade Certificate with the professional title Child Care and Youth Worker. A Child Care and Youth Worker can organise and carry out pedagogical programmes offered to children and adolescents 0 to 18 years of age. A 'childcare certificate' as described in the [Police Register Act](#) [Politiregisterloven] may be issued to persons who work or have tasks in youth clubs or in child and youth camps and where the tasks involve responsibility with minors or persons with learning disabilities.

While there is no college level training programme for youth workers, there is a practitioner focused bachelor level semester course at the University of South-Eastern Norway, meant to qualify students for leadership positions within cultural and social pedagogical work in youth clubs and youth projects.

The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs is also the Norwegian National Agency for Erasmus+: Youth in Action in Norway and administers project grants to informal youth groups, NGOs, foundations, municipalities and in some cases commercial actors for courses and training activities to increase the skills of youth workers. The projects require, with few exceptions, international partnerships. In the allocation of funds priority is given to projects that demonstrate grassroots efforts.

## **4. Funding youth work**

Municipalities are expected to deliver youth work in accordance to national priorities in the area of children and youth. However, the delivery of youth work is not a statutory function and funds are not earmarked for this purpose.

The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs administers a grant scheme to support the establishment or further development of open meeting places for children and youth in larger urban communities from which municipalities, city boroughs and voluntary organisations can apply for funding. During 2019 approx. NOK 42 million was awarded.

## **5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision**

### **1. State structures/public authorities deciding on or providing youth work**

The design and implementation of youth work initiatives takes place at municipal level. Youth work is delivered either directly through the municipal services or through the voluntary sector (or by co-operative efforts between the two).

The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs facilitates cooperation and the sharing of best practice at the national level through its biennial youth conference. The conference brings together diverse stakeholders such as voluntary organisations, municipalities, youth councils, youth workers and practitioners in the youth field, researchers and experts as well as private organisations and social enterprises. A NOK 250 000 prize is awarded to the “youth municipality of the year” for outstanding work in the area of youth, including youth participation, youth friendly welfare services and youth work. This is an opportunity to showcase and incentivise initiatives for youth at the municipal level.

### **2. National or local youth councils**

From 2019 and with the implementation of the new Local Government Act it became mandatory with formal consultative bodies/youth councils for youth at municipal and county levels. Youth council members are elected to represent youth in their municipality. The councils have a term of office of up to two years. Members shall not have reached the age of 19 at the time of election. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has developed a guide for youth councils.

Despite new provisions many municipalities have long traditions with youth councils and involving young people and their representatives in the design of youth work programmes and initiatives.

### **3. Youth and youth work NGOs**

Youth Work Norway [Ungdom og Fritid] is the main non-public actor at the national level. The organisation represents young people, employees and volunteers in municipal-supported youth clubs and youth centres. Youth Work Norway receives public funding through the national annual budget and is recognised as a leading source of information and expertise on youth work. The organization trains youth workers, sets quality standards, contributes to research on youth work, and works with policy makers, educators, and employers to promote youth work.

### **4. Other relevant actors**

Many local and national NGOs provide youth work through youth centres and open meeting places for youth, notably the Norwegian Red Cross and YWCA-YMCA.

## 6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country

Youth work in Norway today is primarily based on professional open youth work in youth clubs. These are on the most part supported by or directly provided by the municipalities. There is also an emerging trend of youth clubs run by NGOs such as the Norwegian Red Cross and YWCA-YMCA. Youth work activities are commonly split between junior (10-13 years old) and youth (13-18 (25 years old)).

The state supports youth work targeting specifically young people with fewer opportunities through a national grant scheme to promote open meeting places for children and youth in larger urban communities (more information in section 2. Funding for youth work).

Some examples of successful youth work practices which build on young people's participation are:

1. Urban farming. The local youth club in the Oslo borough of Tveita ran a project to plant vegetables in mini greenhouses and plant boxes. The youth were responsible for taking care of and harvesting the vegetables that were then used for cooking at the club. The club plans to continue and expand by planting berries and fruit trees.
2. Youth festival. Three municipalities (Ringebu, Sør-Fron og Nord-Fron), the regional youth council (Midtdalens Regionale Ungdomsråd) and the local youth club in Vinstra have been organizing the annual youth festival [Kåja Camp](#) since 2009. The festival is open to all youth between the ages of 13 and 19. Kåja Camp brings young people together across interests, gender, background and age for a fun filled weekend.
3. Gaming Rooms. In the town of Tananger the local youth club «Feelgood Tananger» worked with young people to build three gaming rooms which were officially opened by the mayor. The idea for the project came as a result of a survey among seventh graders about their interests. The youth have been actively involved in the planning and different phases of the project. The youth also organized a LAN camp during the winter holidays.
4. Digital youth work. Trondheim municipality runs a digital youth club from 10:30 to 22:00 on weekdays which is staffed by employees from local youth clubs. The server is like a traditional youth club divided into different rooms with different content. There are separate chat channels for gaming, picture sharing, role-playing, homework help, music, etc. These channels can be both text channels and voice channels. There is a dedicated channel where members can submit their suggestions for further development of the server. Young people who are interested in taking on extra responsibility have the opportunity to become moderators. Several measures such as active moderation are put into place to ensure that the server functions as a safe space for all members.

## 7. Quality standards

There is no national system for quality assurance applying to professional youth work. However, application criteria for national grants supporting youth work initiatives and projects emphasise specific principles and standards such as universal access, inclusion and participation as well as low/no costs for participants.

Youth Work Norway [Ungdom og Fritid] and the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees [Fagforbundet] have published a [brochure](#) outlining what their members consider key quality criteria for municipal-supported youth clubs, youth centres and open meeting places for youth. These relate to outreach, commitment to democratic values and youth participation, facilities and resources, competencies of youth workers and interdisciplinary collaboration.



## 8. Knowledge and data on youth work

The Norwegian Directorate of Health has funded a [research project](#) at the Centre for Welfare and Labour Research, OsloMet, mapping municipalities' potential to actively use youth clubs to promote health and well-being. The mapping is based on survey data from Ungdata, a cross national collection scheme designed to conduct youth surveys at the municipal level, and qualitative interviews with young people. The research presents data on the social background, health, social relations and social behaviour of youth who attend youth or leisure clubs in Norway, and the analysis shows that youths who attend youth clubs, and youths who do not use such clubs, are essentially similar. However, the likelihood of attending youth clubs increases with low level of socio-economic resources, the presence of health problems, being a victim of violence or bullying, or involvement in crime. Further, the analysis shows that youths who attend youth clubs also engage in other organized leisure activities such as sports.

Research conducted at the [Centre for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector](#) looks at [youth participation in organized youth work activities in multicultural urban](#) areas, which also shows that the clubs are more popular among minority youth.

Youth Work Norway [Ungdom og Fritid] is involved in the publication of the [International Journal of Open Youth Work](#), a peer-reviewed journal on issues affecting youth work globally. The journal is a collaboration between Newman University (UK), Gothenburg University (SE), Professional Youth Work in Europe (POYWE), the University of Iceland (IC) and Youth Work Norway [Ungdom &Fritid] in Norway.

## **9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country**

Erasmus+ provides organisations engaged in youth work with opportunities to travel abroad to attend seminars, training courses, networking events, study visits, and job shadowing/observation periods. Youth work organisations can apply to either send youth workers abroad or receive organisations and be responsible for hosting a group and developing a programme of activities for participants.

## **10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work**

Although not required by law, almost 80% of Norwegian municipalities run one or more clubs or open leisure activities for youth. However, there are variations between the counties when it comes to the number of municipal leisure clubs per 10,000 children and young people. There are also significant differences between the municipalities in the individual counties. An ongoing debate is whether the provision of youth work through clubs and open meeting places should become a statutory task for municipalities.