

Youth Partnership

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



Youth Knowledge Forum 2020

Concept note

v. 24/03/2020

The Youth Knowledge Forum

In light of its commitment to further youth research dating back to the start of its research strand in 2003, the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership observes that **youth research in Europe is increasingly considered not only in enhancing the understanding of the situation of young people within their contexts but also in its role in shaping youth policy and developing youth work practice on the European, national and local levels.** However, the terms and modalities of this cooperation may and should be enhanced for optimising the process and the outcomes.

From the previous work of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership in this area of work, we concluded that

- Firstly, we should be **mapping gaps** in youth research in Europe, in order to better focus further endeavors;
- Secondly, we need to know **what the reality of actors** in the field is, what problems they encounter, and what the gaps are from the actors' perspectives;
- Thirdly, we should **use diverse strategies and methods, including knowledge translation and fostering a cooperation of all stakeholders, in particular youth organisations, young people, researchers, policy makers, youth work practitioners,** in all phases of youth policy processes.

The main objective of the event, therefore, is **to devise strategies to strengthen the cooperation among policy, practice, and research in Europe.** Therefore, this event aims at raising and addressing relevant questions, reflections and strategies to further and strengthen the role and capacity of research on youth in Europe.

Considering the priorities identified above, as a first step in addressing these conclusions, particular attention will be paid to the three main questions:

1. **WHY and for what purpose** is the knowledge and research produced within the scope of youth sector, in the light of:
 - cooperation between policy, practice and research, with guidelines and good examples of practice, what works and does not work
 - knowledge translation and management, in terms of guidelines, ethics and the existing stakeholders and national formats
2. **WHAT are the existing resources and WHO are the actors** and their respective realities?
3. **HOW** can we conduct research: what are the qualitative and quantitative youth research methods and approaches, including M&E?

The event will also link to the expert work on youth policy evaluation and on evaluating the impact of youth work and learning mobility, two recent processes managed by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership. Different thematic studies of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership, of the partner institutions as well as other actors such as the RAY network and the European Sociological Association will be referred to wherever needed and relevant, including the EU expert group on indicators in the youth field.

Aims of the Event

The Youth Knowledge Forum will gather different actors from the European youth field to discuss the above-mentioned questions, clarify the related terms, encourage dialogue and facilitate cooperation among the relevant stakeholders. It will consist of a series of online events and webinars in the second quarter of 2020, with a smaller, follow-up event, in conjunction with an annual meeting of PEYR and EKCYP in the second half of the year.

The aims of the event will be to

- analyse the role currently played by youth research in supporting the development of youth policy and youth work, as well as the work of youth organisations, and ways to enhance their cooperation, also looking at good practice examples;
- explore the state of youth research in Europe, map its main actors at all levels and their realities, as well as the nature and usefulness of research currently done;
- identify and assess the available sources of data on youth, furthering the reflections of the two regional seminars on youth research organised in 2018 and 2019 by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership;
- encourage the involvement of research in policy making and shaping youth work while reflecting on the type of knowledge needed for various audiences and how to strengthen structures producing knowledge on national and regional level.

Participants

The Forum, comprised of a series of online events, and a smaller follow-up face-to-face meeting, aims to bring together a mix of providers and users of research, encouraging mutual enrichment:

- Members of PEYR and correspondents of EKCYP;
- Representatives of youth research institutions, independent and state-funded;
- Youth organisations and National Youth Councils;
- National Agencies for Erasmus+;
- SALTO Erasmus+ Resource Centres;

- Youth research users, such as local, regional and national policy-making bodies, NGOs, networks engaged in youth research activities, such as European Youth Capitals, FES, Europe Goes Local networking project, RYCO, the European Youth Forum, and associations of youth workers, of local municipalities;
- Representatives of Member States of the European Union and of Council of Europe, as well as from the Advisory Council on Youth from the Council of Europe;
- Actors in the field of youth research in Europe, such as the RAY Network and the youth network of the European Sociological Association;
- Research consortia working on youth-related themes, such as Partispace;
- Independent youth researchers;
- Representatives of the partner institutions.

Various online events of the Youth Knowledge Forum will be open to all interested stakeholders from research, policy and practice from youth sector and beyond, in wider Europe, and internationally.

Products

This following list of tentative outputs has been discussed with the Steering Group and finalised on the basis of priorities and available resources.

Possible outputs from the Youth Knowledge Forum, based on previous and recent work and products of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership will include:

- A series of webinars, audio and video recordings related to the key questions identified above
- A step-by-step set of guidelines on how to:
 - o foster effective cooperation, among youth policy, practice and research, with attention to participation of young people, including the examples of practice;
 - o support capacity-building on knowledge translation and communicating the results of the research to other stakeholders;
- Mapping of research actors and resources on youth in Europe, connecting local, national and European level, and building on the work already done in the EECA and SEE.

Steering Group

A group of representatives of different actors in the field guides the refinement of the concept of the event as well as its implementation. The members of the Steering Group include the representatives of:

- The two partner institutions, including of the Steering Committee on Youth and of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe;
- National youth policy and research bodies;
- PEYR and EKCYP correspondents;
- RAY and ESA youth network;
- European Youth Forum;
- Consortia of research institutions working on youth research projects;
- Independent researchers and experts on knowledge translation;
- NGOs that have undergone research on youth or worked with youth research actors on specific projects or programmes;
- Experts' groups, coordinated by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership and by the partner institutions;
- The team of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership.

The Steering Group consists of 16 members, plus the team of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership. The role of the Steering Group is:

- to advise the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership on the best format of the event, reviewing its aims so as to cater to the needs of the youth sector from the perspective of the organisations, or categories, they represent;
- to propose possible outputs of the event, and their format;
- to ensure a broad participation of representatives of all categories of youth research actors and users mentioned above in the event, by spreading information about the Youth Knowledge Forum and encouraging participation among their networks and organisations;
- to help identify good practice examples, speakers and contributors for the event;
- to support the organisation and smooth running of the event, by for instance facilitating workshops or parts of the programme;
- to promote and disseminate the final outputs of the event, and to act as multipliers of its outcomes among their respective networks and organisations.

Background

There is a greater awareness of the importance of knowledge-based approach in the fields of youth policy and practice in Europe, and an understanding that research must shape decision-making and be used towards evaluation of policy and practice. In line with this trend, and consistent to its commitment to furthering youth research and constructing links with policy and practice, the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership aims to contribute to the dialogue among researchers from the local, national and European levels, practitioners and policy-makers.

Within this framework, in 2019, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (hereinafter EU-Council of Europe youth partnership) published the document '**Youth research: the essentials**'. This text aspires at answering, in a concise manner, the following questions:

- What is youth research?
- How do we define "youth"?
- What are the theoretical influences of youth research?
- Why do we need youth research?
- What are the main types and methodologies of youth research?
- What is participatory youth research?
- What is the relation between youth research and policy making?
- What ethical elements are we to consider when doing youth research?
- What do the Council of Europe and the European Union think about youth research?
- What are the current challenges in youth research in Europe?

The document, and its authors, concluded that '**Many networks and organisations are working to create a European youth research space, through direct intervention or networking in project [...]**

As most youth researchers remain located at the national or local level, it is important to invite especially, but not exclusively, the younger generation of youth researchers to take part in dialogue at the European level. This can provide motivation for researchers from central, eastern and southern Europe where youth research is either novel, underfunded or limited by reduced possibilities for international co-operation'¹. Moreover, it continued, '**The fields of youth policy and practice in Europe are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of embracing a**

¹ 'Youth research: the essentials', Council of Europe 2019

knowledge-based approach, and that **solid research must sustain decisions and provide evaluation of policy and practice implementation**. Applying stricter methodological approaches, involving more young people in relevant research projects on youth and co-operating with youth researchers in all phases of policy making and practice, from the analysis of needs and designing the guiding questions through implementation to evaluation, may further advance this agenda’.

Consistent to its commitment to furthering youth research and constructing links with policy and practice, **the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership has a function of a “think tank” and a laboratory**, gathering and producing knowledge, translating it for an effective use in youth policy and practice, developing and testing new approaches, considering traditional themes and innovative trends.

Particularly, the **EU-Council of Europe youth partnership aims at developing knowledge on youth to better understand current and upcoming challenges and trends in the lives of young people, and their implications for youth policy and youth work**. It pursues this task by coordinating and with support from groups of experts such as, primarily, the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) and the network of correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCP). The EU-Council of Europe youth partnership cooperates, furthermore, with diverse actors of youth research in Europe, such as the RAY network, SALTO Resource Centres for Erasmus+, National Agencies, and research providers such as universities and research institutions, notably in the context of research on youth within specific projects and contexts. **Paying special attention to participation of young people in youth research**, the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership works in close cooperation with youth organisations and their cooperation platforms, such as the European Youth Forum and the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe.

In line with these reflections, in 2018 and 2019 the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership organised **two events to further knowledge and understanding of research on youth, specifically at regional level**: in 2018, in Chisinau (Moldova) to consider the reality of youth research in Eastern Europe and Caucasus, and in 2019, in Novi Sad (Serbia), through a Regional Youth Knowledge Forum, in South-East Europe. These events concluded, among the rest, that **there is a need of a better understanding of the role of research in youth policy**, and specifically that while a number of reports are commissioned by policy makers, ‘it is not clear if these reports remain an internal exercise or whether they serve the purpose of adjusting policy priorities, strategies and programmes that respond to the reality of young people’². Moreover, the report continued, ‘there is also a lack of monitoring research and the impact of research on policy changes’³.

² ‘An agenda for strengthening investment in youth research in Eastern Europe and Caucasus countries’, Ostrikoval and Borenko, EU-Council of Europe youth partnership 2018.

³ Ibid.

On the occasion of the Regional Youth Knowledge Forum in Novi Sad (June 2019), the following reflections were concluded, also based on background documents commissioned by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership:

- in South-East Europe, there is an apparent gap between academic researchers who produce research inside universities for the academic audience on one side and policy-makers and practitioners who usually do not have access to that research. Therefore, there is limited relevance of produced research on youth for youth policy-makers and youth practitioners. A bright exception being the 'Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018/2019' of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES);
- research on youth often lacks a participatory process with all stakeholders, including policy-makers and young people. There is not enough research focusing on the longitudinal, long-term perspective of young people. However, because the research needs of some youth actors are distinct, they cannot use only existing evidence but have to produce their own. Additional problems include lack of adequate funding for youth research and lack of interest among policy-makers if they do not like the research results;
- on the regional level, cooperation between youth researchers is not sufficient, although the problems in the region are similar;
- Research on youth exist, but it is diverse, different, inaccessible, not relevant for all stakeholders' needs, not systematised and appropriately evaluated, not adequately funded, not generated together with stakeholders, and not targeted, disseminated, and translated in simple language for policy-makers and public to contribute to change.

Recommendations from the Regional Youth Knowledge Forum included:

- **Quality standards for youth research** should be set.
- To address the gap between researchers and decision-makers we need to have **participatory policy-making**.
- We need to **communicate research results to the public using simple language and adjust how research is presented to each audience**, such as in Knowledge Translation.

More specifically, knowledge translation techniques can explain and simplify technical and scientific content into easily understandable information and use it to guide the decision-making process. To be successful in translating the knowledge, we need to understand the needs of users, find the best channels to influence them, select specific and relevant findings, and use the most unambiguous language possible.

Achieving to bring youth research closer to youth policy and youth work practice, in a comprehensive, effective, strategic, systematic and participatory manner is therefore one of the main challenges and reasons for success of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership since 1998, and one of the basis for its absolute relevance and uniqueness within the youth sector in Europe. Among many other relevant activities and good practice examples of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership in the past years in relation to this aspect it worth mentioning the following:

- The study '**Mapping of Educational Paths of Youth Workers**', that fed concretely into one of the main standards of the Council of Europe in the field of youth, 'Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work', and further policy process such as the Council of Europe 'Youth Sector Strategy 2030', approved in January 2020;
- A direct engagement of researchers of PEYR within the Structured Dialogue between the EU and youth people, then followed by the **EU Youth Dialogue**, which helped grounding this unique participatory process on solid methodological basis for ensuring more and better participation of young people, especially through youth organisations, with particular attention to those young people at risk of social exclusion;
- The **Study on Social Inclusion and Digitalisation** (exp. 2020), stemming from the Symposium 'Connecting the dots: Young People, Social Inclusion and Digitalisation', Tallinn 26-28 June 2018;
- The '**Youth Policy Evaluation Review**' (exp. 2020), that contains relevant reflections on different methodologies and approaches vis-à-vis the relation between youth policy (evaluation) and youth research as its mandatory partner.

Some questions are still at stake, such as

- What can research bring into a debate on the condition and needs of young people in Europe?
- How can its findings feed into the policy development and strengthening youth work, and what formats best support that process?
- What terms and conditions are needed to optimise the cooperation?
- Who may and should be involved and in what manner?
- How can such a dialogue be initiated and benefit youth organisations and young people?
- What are the most appropriate methods and how to ensure comparability of data in youth research, wherever required?

RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PUBLICATIONS

- [Regional Knowledge Forum in SEE, Novi Sad \(Serbia\) 2019](#)
- [Seminar on strengthening investment in youth research in EECA, Chisinau \(Moldova\) 2018](#)
- [Youth research: the essentials](#)
- [Mapping the reality of research on youth in South-East European countries](#), by Dragan Mihajlović, 2019
- [Knowledge Translation: Bridging gaps between researchers and policy makers](#), 2019
- [An agenda for strengthening investment in youth research in Eastern Europe and Caucasus countries, Report of the seminar, 2018](#)
- [Background paper on youth research in Eastern Europe and Caucasus Countries](#), by Anna Ostrikova and Yaryna Borenko, 2018

- [Youth research in SEE](#), by Marko Kovacic, 2018
- [Youth Research in the Nordic Region](#), by Ørjan Bergan, 2018