

Professional Open Youth Work in Europe on the proposal of a **new EU Youth Strategy 2019 2027**

Young people are assets with potentials and talents

We welcome the in general expressed intentions and efforts in the new EU Youth Strategy to engage, connect and empower all young people. In times where in some parts of Europe professional youth work is facing cuts and/or sometimes a hostile political climate towards their work and/or parts of our target groups, we especially appreciate a supportive signal coming from the EU Level.

POYWE is a member based and bottom up European network established in 2012 for the representation of the profession of open youth work in Europe. We believe that Professional Open Youth Work is a profession that is practised by trained and educated workers who commit to codes of ethic and quality standards and are paid for their work. It is a practice of non-formal and informal learning, offered on a universal basis and open for all young people who voluntarily choose to participate. It is based on pedagogical concepts that aim to raise the emancipation and empowerment of young people as well as their critical awareness.

In this light we are very pleased to see that the Communication is based on an idea of young people being assets, instead of problems - wishing to foster and support their potentials and talents and to co-create European Societies with them. A positive approach and co-creation are two essential guiding ideas of professional open youth work as for example described in the [POYWE Principles of Professional Open Youth Work](#).

We also are very happy to see that the better recognition of non-formal learning is once again stressed firmly in the document since professional open youth work is a part of young peoples leisure time, where they learn a lot in a non-formal yet pedagogical sound way.

Youth Workers to be part of developing a Youth Work Agenda

Of course we are especially interested in the plans to create a Youth Work Agenda and call for consultation and participation of youth work(ers) associations/structure in the development of this new feature, since we are convinced that different forms of youth work bring diverse view points and experiences to the table. In this process we would like to add the voice of professional youth workers and the young people they advocate for to the debate.

We need to stress at this point also that with the term youth organisations used throughout the whole Communication in many realities professional youth workers will not feel addressed, because they have a different role in the field of youth work than for example active young people, volunteers or even paid staff in youth organisations. Of course youth organisations and thus ideas from young people themselves like the Youth Goals must be the first reference point of any Youth Strategy. Nevertheless we would like to see professional open youth work(ers) mentioned alongside those because when it comes to inclusion, quality and innovation in youth work our profession has a lot to offer, and would appreciate the opportunity to contribute and the recognition of the profession.

Even more so we would wish to see a clear recommendation to Member States to involve also youth work(ers) associations/structures when drawing up the National Action Plans. Also in many countries youth work structures are financed mainly by municipalities and thus their role can also be a link to the better involvement of the local level when it comes to implementing such an ambitious plan as the new EU Youth Strategy.

A valuable link to be used best

Professional youth work(ers) are in many cases the link to diverse groups of young people – disadvantaged or not - and thus can play an important role when it comes for example to helping to prevent youth social exclusion and in widening the range of young people involved in democratic participation like the new EU Youth Dialogue. Maintaining online consultations and Youth Conferences in the portfolio of activities is important but will not necessarily attract the young people that professional youth workers are in contact with. There are methods and concepts how young people who face social exclusion could engage in the Youth Dialogue via professional open youth work. Answering to the need to broaden the Youth Dialogue and open it up for diverse groups of young people we would therefore propose the creation of a third pillar in the Youth Dialogue: the low-threshold consultation. We would highly appreciate to support the creation of this additional consultation mechanism.

Professional youth workers create stable, respectful and meaningful relationships with young people and support their participation in their community and wider society. Therefore we know and understand the needs, worries and dreams of the individuals and groups we work with and since one of the principles of our work is to take an active role in advocating and promoting the needs and interests of young people, we would like to join our voice to the discourse.