

A European Charter on Local Youth Work 😊

version 2.0

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INTRODUCTION

A sustainable society needs to welcome the contributions of all its citizens and to secure that everybody is included and valued for who they are. Inclusion, however, is not about fitting into existing structures. Inclusion is a continuous and open dialogue on values and ideas regarding how we should co-exist; how roles, rights and responsibilities should be distributed.

In order to be able to take part in and contribute to this dialogue young people need an arena where they can set their own agenda, parallel to, but not isolated from, the pre-set curriculum of the adult world. An arena outside home and school where they, together with their peers, can explore, articulate and develop their interests and talents, as well as their ideas for the future. An arena where they can get access to stimulation and support to further develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need in order to reach their full potential as individuals and citizens.

Youth work is this arena, and young people are, and must always be, its primary stakeholders.

Young people is, however, not a homogenous group. They have different backgrounds, interests and ideas, they might be organised or not and they will, due to these and other differences, have different needs and contribute to society in different ways. Having this arena, having equal access to youth work, must therefore be the right of all young people.

Youth work is hence a process of learning and development, not only for young people, but also for society as such. It is a win-win investment, and for a society that strives for inclusion and social cohesion, youth work is of crucial importance.

Aim and function of the charter

The aim of this charter is to contribute to the further development of local youth work. It does this through stating what young people should have the right to expect from youth work; which principles that should guide it and how different aspects of it should be designed in order to meet these principles and to secure that the youth work provided is of high quality.

Youth work is, however, characterised by its rich diversity, not only in practice but also in how it is organised, governed and financed. Even if the vast majority of youth work has its starting point and takes place at local level, different actors on different levels in different combinations are responsible for the different issues that are listed in this charter. Local government and administration, youth organisations and NGO's, regional and national networks, support structures and governments as well as European organisations, networks and institutions have different roles and responsibilities. This means that even if all of these stakeholders need to take the statements made in this charter into consideration, none of them can meet all of its requirements by themselves.

Hence, this charter constitutes a common European platform and framework for the necessary dialogue on how all young people should get access to quality youth work. Through stating what is needed to assure quality in relation to different aspects of youth work it will function as a check-list around which stakeholders can gather and discuss how roles and responsibilities should be divided and what measures that might be needed for its further development, securing that no aspect or perspective is left out and that youth work provision is carried out in the best and most efficient way.

Young people are key actors in this dialogue, but governments on all levels and their authorities will together always be responsible for its implementation and for securing that all their young citizens have access to youth work that meets the requirements of this charter. No level of society can achieve this on its own, and no level can withdraw from responsibility.

Background of the charter

The charter is based on the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work, the most important European document on youth work so far, built on the collective experience of youth work in Europe and many previous documents arguing in the same direction.

The recommendation exemplifies the most significant outcomes of youth work. It states that “youth work, often in partnership and co-operation with other sectors, produces a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals, their communities and for society in general. For example:

- it leads to critical reflection, innovation and changes at local, regional, national and European levels;
- it contributes to young people’s well-being, enhancing a sense of belonging and strengthening their capacity to make beneficial choices;
- it supports positive and purposeful transitions in personal, civic, economic and cultural life, enabling the development of competences that facilitate life-long learning, active citizenship and labour market participation;
- it promotes the development of various skills such as creativity, critical thinking, conflict management, digital and information literacy and leadership;
- it enhances diversity and contributes to equality, sustainable development, intercultural understanding, social cohesion, civic participation, democratic citizenship and the upholding of the values of human rights;
- it strengthens young people’s resilience and thereby their capacity to resist negative influences and behaviour.”¹

Furthermore, it states that “Youth work achieves this by empowering and engaging young people in the active creation, preparation, delivery and evaluation of initiatives and activities that reflect their needs, interests, ideas and experiences.”, and that “Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people’s active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision-making.”

Taken together this more than well motivate that “the establishment or further development of quality youth work is safeguarded and pro-actively supported within local, regional or national youth policies, as appropriate”. Using this charter is a way to do so.

This charter transforms the recommendation into concrete guidelines regarding what is needed in order to establish and maintain quality in local youth work. It evolves around the core principles that together constitutes youth work and that must permeate and guide all aspects of it if it is to be successful. These principles are essential to make clear the position, role and boundaries of youth work, making sure that resources intended for youth work are used in the appropriate and most efficient way. The charter and its different sections should therefore be considered as a whole and the different bullet points are not set in order of priority, but in order of logic.

For whom is this charter?

In order to secure an efficient and sustainable youth work development the European Charter on Local Youth Work targets everyone, from policy makers to youth workers and young people, who is engaged in youth work and wants to improve it. This is also why it has been developed through a broad consultation process, engaging youth workers, organisations providing youth work, public administration, young people and politicians on all levels, from local to European, in more than twenty European countries.

In the reader’s guide, you will find both questions that need to be asked and answered in order to support the implementation of the charter, as well as clarifications, explanations and comments related to the different sections and bullet points. Using it will help you in having conscious and fruitful discussions, leading to clear and useful results.

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work

THE CHARTER ON LOCAL YOUTH WORK

Youth work is value based, and the core principles that should guide it are that it needs ...

- to be based on voluntary participation – on young people taking part out of their own will and motivation; (Ref 1.1)
- to be based on and respond to the needs, interests, ideas and experiences of young people as perceived by themselves, thus bringing added value and/or joy in life; (Ref 1.2)
- to be created, organised, planned, prepared, carried out and evaluated together with young people; (Ref 1.3)
- to contribute to the personal and social development of young people through non-formal and informal learning; (Ref 1.4)
- to strive to enhance young people's self-determination, autonomy and access to rights; (Ref 1.5)
- to have a holistic perspective on young people and meet them where they are, as capable individuals and primary resources in their own lives and for society as a whole; (Ref 1.6)
- to promote critical thinking and creativity, as well as human rights, democratic values and active citizenship; (Ref 1.7)
- to work actively inclusive and offer equal opportunities to all young people, regardless of background and living situation. (Ref 1.8)

Youth work needs to be guided by a youth work policy that ...

- is developed: (Ref 2.1)
 - within the framework of, and in compliance with, the core principles stated above; (Ref 2.1.1)
 - in cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, having clear roles and mandates and being engaged in all stages of the process; (Ref 2.1.2)
 - on the basis of relevant and updated knowledge on young people's needs and interests as well as on new research and the different forms and methods of youth work that can be used in order to meet aims and objectives; (Ref 2.1.3)
- is based on clear and measurable indicators regarding what shall be achieved in relation to young people's participation, influence and learning; (Ref 2.2)
- allocates resources that are appropriate in relation to aims; (Ref 2.3)
- contains clear and politically approved local aims and objectives; (Ref 2.4)
- is clearly positioned in relation to broader youth policy on all levels, from local to European; (Ref 2.5)

The organisation and practice of local youth work needs ...

- to be set up in dialogue between all relevant stakeholders; (Ref 3.1)
- to transform aims and objectives into coherent strategies and plans; (Ref 3.2)
- to define and establish the preconditions and work processes needed for carrying out local quality youth work; (Ref 3.3)
- to continuously exchange information about plans and activities with other local actors in the field of youth and actively cooperate through both cross- and intra-sectorial cooperation; (Ref 3.4)

- to counsel and give young people access to a wide range of information regarding their rights as well as their possibilities to take part in different kinds of local, national and international activities; (Ref 3.5)
- to stimulate and support young people: (Ref 3.6)
 - to meet over all kinds of barriers and borders in order to socialise, exchange experiences and ideas, organise and take action; (Ref 3.6.1)
 - to be active citizens and exercise influence in society, including taking part in political decision-making; (Ref 3.6.2)
 - to be open to the world and to engage in regional, national, European and international cooperation and projects; (Ref 3.6.3)
- to articulate, together with young people, learning objectives that they perceive as relevant for their personal and social development; (Ref 3.7)
- to recognize, document and make visible young people's non-formal and informal learning and to support the validation of achieved competences; (Ref 3.8)
- to provide youth workers with information, education, training and support that is relevant and adopted to local needs and to stimulate and support continuous competence development. (Ref 3.9)

Youth workers need ...

- to act within a clear ethical framework, based on the core principles stated above, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights.; (Ref 4.1)
- to be driven by the will to support young people in their personal and social development; (Ref 4.2)
- to create an enabling and trustful environment that is actively inclusive and socially engaging, creative and safe, fun and serious, playful and planned. (Ref 4.3)
- to see the need for, and seek ways: (Ref 4.4)
 - to engage young people in all stages of the youth work process; (Ref 4.4.1)
 - to support young people to self-organise; (Ref 4.4.2)
- to have relevant competence, i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; (Ref 4.5)
- to see youth work as a process of mutual learning and to see the need for constant competence development; (Ref 4.6)
- to be aware of and able to articulate the role and mission of the youth worker, and not to lend him-/herself to aims and activities that fall outside the realm of the core principles; (Ref 4.7)
- to continuously and critically reflect on how his/her own acting, as well as local objectives, methods and ways of organising activities comply with the core principles. (Ref 4.8)

The quality development of local youth work needs ...

- a clear and comprehensive system for documentation and follow up of outcomes, preconditions and work processes in relation to measurable indicators and aims; (Ref 5.1)
- up to date mappings of local realities and needs; (Ref 5.2)
- clear procedures for continuous analysis and reflection on outcomes, how they relate to preconditions, work processes and activities, and the need for further development; (Ref 5.3)

- clear procedures for continuous updating on new, national as well as international, research, trends and methods in the field of youth and youth work; (Ref 5.4)
- common efforts of all stakeholders to cooperate around quality development and adoption of new innovations. (Ref 5.5)
- continuous competence development of youth workers based on a clear competency framework in combination with an analysis of local outcomes, strength and weaknesses. (Ref 5.6)

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