

The Council of Europe's ad hoc high-level task force on youth work

There is certainly some momentum, across the globe, producing dialogue about youth work and seeking to position it in the lives of young people, in relation to those who work with them, and in the context of wider public policy for the young. One strand is youth work networks and associations, now anchored through CAYWA. Another is the Council of Europe's new ad hoc high-level task force on youth work. This is a time-limited body (2018-2019) to maintain the initiative and bridge the gap between the confirmation of the Council of Europe's Recommendation on Youth Work (May 2017) and the holding of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (in Germany, some time in 2020). It is part of a formal 'roadmap' to take forward the Recommendation.

The task force meets for the first time in early February. Its overarching remit, predictably, is to strengthen the knowledge and evidence base for youth work in Europe (or 'European youth work', which is somewhat different!). It may be part of the internal roadmap but it is also centrally concerned with putting youth work more centrally on the youth policy map – through strengthening dialogue about youth work across the youth sector, articulating how best youth work can respond to established and emerging challenges faced by young people in Europe, and exploring the nature of youth work (including questions of training and recognition) in different parts of Europe.

This important development has not sprung from nowhere. There has been at least a ten-year project to put youth work on the map at a high (political) level. It started, arguably, with the 'history project' supported by the Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. This has explored the history of youth work throughout Europe through a sequence of seminars and subsequent publications, with a view to understanding its evolution (or lack of it) in different contexts and thereby to inform the ways in which youth work might contribute to today's youth policy challenges. Five volumes are available, a sixth is in preparation, and there will be a final 7th History of Youth Work in Europe, looking at the history of transnational youth work, movements and organisations.

Just under a decade ago (in 2010), aligned to the 3rd history seminar, Belgium's EU Presidency hosted the 1st European Youth Work Convention. This produced a professional European Youth Work Declaration, celebrating the diversity of youth work. A short while later, the European Union agreed a Resolution on Youth Work.

Five years later, during Belgium's chairmanship of the Council of Europe, a 2nd European Youth Work Convention took place, exploring the 'common ground' of diverse forms of youth work. This produced a second professional European Youth Work Declaration and it was this document – through the instruction of the CoE's Joint Council on Youth (comprising civil servants and youth organisations) and a dedicated working group – that was converted into a proposed Recommendation on Youth Work, ratified by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe last year.

The political momentum remains strong but youth work across Europe is a fragmented mosaic in many respects – including, for example, political advocacy, resource allocation, professional status and styles of practice. The CoE's task force is an important platform for strengthening professional knowledge and understanding of youth work in order to effectively fuel political interest and support.

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