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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	The future role of youth work in the EU *- Exchange of views*

Delegations will find attached a Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the exchange of views at the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) on 19 November 2026.

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ANNEX

The future role of youth work in the EU

The case for youth work in Europe's future

As the European Union looks to the future, young people in Europe will navigate an increasingly complex social, political, and digital environment. Youth dialogues and consultations across Europe have consistently highlighted that young people want to feel supported in how they meet this challenge. Fostering resilience in young people is not enough on its own; it must be underpinned by sustained investment in the supports that young people value and benefit from.

The value of youth work

Youth work is a proven example of support that young people experience as meaningful and often transformative. Youth work and youth workers support young people's personal development, confidence, emotional intelligence, and resilience. Youth work can be considered as a strategic enabler of stronger communities, more resilient democracies, and a more inclusive Europe. The next EU Youth Strategy presents an opportunity to strengthen the awareness, visibility, recognition, and contribution of youth work across all priority areas affecting young people.

As society continues to fragment, with ongoing impacts of disinformation and misinformation and the evolving prevalence of AI technology, access to youth work will become even more valued. Youth work can strengthen individual agency to help young people better navigate the information environment by empowering them to influence the decisions and initiatives that affect their lives, thus reinforcing democratic trust and participation.

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Youth spaces

Youth work however does not simply happen. For young people to engage in youth work, access to youth spaces is fundamental. Spaces where young people feel welcome, feel safe and have the opportunity to be part of something. The output from the EU Youth Conference in Dublin highlighted how young people in Europe value youth spaces and are concerned that they are becoming less common and less accessible.

Youth centres, youth organisations and community-based initiatives with the sustained support will continue to provide safe and inclusive environments where young people build relationships and connect with their communities.

Youth workers

At the same time, youth work will need to continue adapting to changing social realities, including challenges relating to mental health and wellbeing, social exclusion, digitalisation, and evolving patterns of participation. Youth workers, working from a strengths-based approach, create environments where young people feel safe, heard and valued by building trusting relationships with young people.

By providing opportunities for dialogue, community engagement and collective action, youth workers can help build trust between young people, communities, and institutions, while encouraging meaningful participation in public life.

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The digital transformation of society will continue to shape the future role of youth work. As young people learn to navigate complex information environments, youth workers will have an essential role in supporting the development of digital and media literacy skills and helping young people identify disinformation to ensure they can participate responsibly and safely in digital spaces.

Diversity

Reaching diverse groups of young people, including young people in vulnerable situations, such as marginalised youth or youth with fewer opportunities, is a key component of an effective youth policy. Youth work's ability to reach diverse groups of young people positions it as one of the key mechanisms of youth policy delivery.

As democratic systems face growing pressures from polarisation, declining trust, disinformation and misinformation, youth work will continue to have an essential role in strengthening democratic resilience. Such experiences will remain important for fostering intercultural understanding, mutual respect, and social cohesion in an increasingly diverse Europe.

What is needed

Looking ahead, ensuring the sustainability and quality of youth work will be crucial. To enable youth work to respond effectively to future challenges and opportunities, sustained support for youth organisations, youth centres, local youth participation structures and the professional development of youth workers will be essential. Strengthening recognition of youth work as one of the key policy instruments can help maximise its contribution to democratic participation, inclusion, wellbeing, and social cohesion.

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By equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to participate fully in society, youth work and youth workers can continue to play an important role in shaping Europe's future. The future role of youth work in the EU will be determined by its capacity to support young people in responding to emerging societal challenges.

Considering the above, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

1. What actions should the next EU Youth Strategy prioritise to strengthen the role of youth work in responding to the evolving needs and complex challenges of young people across Europe?

2. How can the next EU Youth Strategy support the development of youth work at a national level, including raising awareness and recognition of the value of youth work and the role of youth workers?

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