

Youth work in Europe: large variety with a firm foundation

From Thessaloniki to Tartu and from Braga to Bratislava: youth workers all over Europe work with young people on a day-to-day basis. There is a lot of knowledge and experience in youth work in Europe, from which we could also benefit in the Netherlands.

Youth work has been high on the agenda at European level for a long time already. In 2018 the European Youth Strategy was launched. Strengthening youth work is one of its three core objectives. In 2020 the European member states jointly drafted a European Youth work Agenda. They agreed to exchange knowledge and experiences, to cooperate and to learn from each other throughout Europe.

Variety in youth work

A large number of European countries do not have an official national definition of youth work. Often a legal basis is also lacking. During the European Youth Work Conventions a joint foundation for youth work at European level has been developed. It contains two elements: offering space for the voice and autonomy of young people and building bridges to allow young people to take the next steps in their lives.

In all European countries youth work consists of both professional (paid) youth work and voluntary (unpaid) youth work. In most countries local or regional authorities are responsible for youth work. Usually there is a difference between publicly financed youth work and youth work by civil society organisations. Youth work may have several aims, for instance preventing social problems, promoting youth participation or the empowerment of young people.

Online youth work

Development and quality improvement of online and digital youth work take place all over Europe. Finland has a lot of experience in this field. Since 2020 it has a specific expertise centre for digital youth work. In addition quite a lot of international projects are taking place in which organisations from various countries cooperate to stimulate online youth work. These projects are often supported by the European Erasmus+ programme.

Quality of youth work

In many European countries work is being done to improve the quality of youth work. Various competence frameworks, professional standards and quality standards have been developed. In Austria for instance a competence framework was designed as a binding standard for the training of youth workers. In several places in Europe studies are taking place into the effectiveness and impact of youth work. Organisations in Estonia, Finland, France, Italy and the United Kingdom joined forces to achieve this. Projects are also being set up to disseminate the knowledge gained.

Cooperation between youth work and other fields

Various initiatives exist to promote the cooperation between youth work and other services and fields. In a number of countries education proves to be a sound partner to cooperate with youth work. For instance in Germany, where youth work services work together with schools to create after school care or all day education.

Youth work also cooperates with partners in youth care. An important objective is prevention or early detection of youth mental and social problems. In some countries youth work cooperates with organisations in the field of safety. In Sweden for instance schools, social services, police and leisure activities join forces to detect young people who are at risk of ending up in crime.

More information

- [Youth Work in Europe](#): an elaborate selection of interesting developments and activities in youth work in various European countries. The article is written in Dutch.
- [Youth Wiki](#): information on youth policies in 33 countries in Europe

This article is part of a series. It is meant to inspire all persons working with young people in the Netherlands. The articles introduce Youth Wiki to them as a source of inspiration regarding youth policies in Europe.