

BON(N) APPETIT

ENJOY OUR MICHELIN STAR YOUTH WORK



The Bonn Process is a joint effort to bring the European Youth Work Agenda to life in each of the National contexts. Not only does it give us an opportunity to shine a light on the amazing youth work we do here in Ireland, but it also gives us an opportunity to identify areas for further improvement and investment.

The aim of this report is to give voice to the breadth of youth work happening in Ireland and the diversity of existing youth work, and to share evidence of best practice in the sector to a wider audience as well as to identify the challenges facing the sector.

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CONTEXT

The Bonn process is a joint effort across Europe to bring the European Youth Work Agenda to life in each of the national contexts. The European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) is the strategic framework for strengthening and developing youth work in Europe. It was called for in 2015 during the 2nd European Youth Work Convention (EYWC). Conventions are the central platform for stakeholders of the youth work community of practice to come together every five years to discuss the development of youth work policy and practice. The next Youth Work Convention will take place in Malta in May 2025. The European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) represents a strong step in the recognition of youth work. It is the result of years of focused youth work development from local to regional, national and European levels, all cooperating to bring youth work to the next level. The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) was appointed national contact point for the EYWA Bonn Process in Ireland.

The Bonn Process is about growing youth work throughout Europe. To do so, it has several priority areas:

- develop and expand the youth work offer;
- quality development;
- a common direction for the youth work community of practice;
- beyond the youth work community of practice;
- promotion and recognition;
- innovation and emerging challenges;
- policy frameworks
- a strategic framework for youth work development.



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INTRODUCTION

This report highlights the unique ingredients of Irish youth work using a menu as a metaphor i.e. starters is relationship building, main courses are the developmental youth work we deliver with young people, for those who dip in and out of the youth service “tapas” is on the menu and dessert is what we do next e.g. young people want to stay involved in their own communities as well as European and global communities. No menu is complete without all courses and none of it would be possible without the chefs, which is of course the collaborative approach between the voluntary sector, educators, and all those who contribute to the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of youth workers.

To further bring this report to life, we asked our colleagues in the youth sector to submit good practice examples under each of the eight thematic priorities (listed above). As you read through the report, you will find references to the virtual gallery which will bring the content of the document to life in a real way when you view it.

Methodology

Part 1: Bonn Appetit Report

A key objective of this report was to consider the existing work that is ongoing by youth organisations in Ireland. To achieve this, we drew on five key sources for data: (i) a survey of Irish youth workers; (ii) in-depth interviews with youth workers, youth leaders and those in the sector; (iii) discussions with youth worker alumni, or those who have left the sector having been involved in the youth work sector in Ireland for a significant time; (iv) webinars with those in the sector discussing the current landscape of Irish Youth Work; and finally (v) a literature review of existing youth work policies, strategies and other youth work related documents.

Part 2: Bonn Appetit Virtual Gallery

The virtual gallery is an opportunity to capture some of the work that has happened and is happening under each of the eight thematic priorities of the EYWA Bonn Process. A call for submissions, a link to the survey of youth workers in Ireland and promotion of the webinars were sent through various NYCI channels and networks, for example the Clár Newsletter. As was The Alumni coffee morning which was established through our existing network.



BON(N) APPETIT



This Youth Work Menu captures the diversity, adaptability, and inclusivity of youth work, highlighting how it serves as a nourishing, multi-faceted experience for young people.

Enjoy Your Meal!

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Starters

The foundational elements of youth work, where initial connections are made and trust is built. These are the essential first steps that set the tone for a supportive, inclusive, and youth-centred experience.

Options

Ice-Breaker Platter: A selection of games and activities designed to build rapport and break down barriers, helping young people feel at ease and ready to engage.

Empathy Sampler: A conversation that encourages listening and sharing, promoting understanding and emotional safety among youth and youth workers alike.

Finger Food: Small, accessible activities that introduce young people to the values and purpose of youth work, making everyone feel part of the group.

Goal-Setting Tapas: Individual and group exercises to explore personal goals, aspirations, and intentions, setting the stage for growth and development.

Community Pick 'n' Mix: Activities that introduce young people to peer-led interactions and foster a sense of belonging and mutual support.

THE CORE PRACTICES THAT NOURISH & EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE

Main Courses

The central components of youth work practice—the key programmes, activities, and experiences that provide nourishment, skill-building, and empowerment.

Options

Leadership Lasagne: Layered with opportunities for self-expression, confidence-building, and responsibility, this dish represents programmes that empower young people to lead.

Resilience Risotto: A slow-cooked, comforting main course that builds emotional strength and adaptability, helping young people cope with challenges and setbacks.

Skill-Building Spice Box: A dynamic mix of practical skills training and soft skills development, from communication to critical thinking, preparing youth for life beyond the youth work setting.

Mental Health Hamburger: Carefully prepared to offer support, tools, and resources that promote mental wellness and resilience, this dish is essential for youth dealing with stress or anxiety.

Inclusion Burrito: A rich and diverse mix of programmes and activities that create an inclusive environment, celebrating diversity and ensuring everyone feels seen and valued.

SUPPORTIVE ELEMENTS THAT ENHANCE YOUTH WORK EXPERIENCE

Side Dishes

The complementary components of youth work that support and enrich the core practices, offering flexibility and customisation based on individual needs and circumstances.

Options

Peer Mentorship Fries: Light, and supportive, these represent peer-led support programmes that foster shared learning and peer mentorship among young people.

Resource Salad: A varied and nutritious mix of informational resources (brochures, online tools, helplines) that youth workers can provide to young people for continued growth and learning.

Volunteer Support Greens: Fresh and sustaining, these represent support systems for volunteer youth leaders, helping them feel valued and equipped to contribute meaningfully.

Feedback Focaccia: A chance for young people to give feedback on programmes, fostering a sense of agency and making sure that youth work remains youth-centred.

Belonging Bread Rolls: Simple but essential, these represent check-ins and small moments of connection that build trust and rapport between youth workers and young people

CELEBRATION, REFLECTION, AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Desserts

The joy of the youth work experience—celebrations of achievements, moments of reflection, and looking forward to the future with hope and confidence.

Options

Achievement Sundae: Layered with recognition of individual and group achievements, this dessert represents the celebration of progress and accomplishments in youth work.

Reflection Cheesecake: A rich and thoughtful dessert that allows young people to reflect on their growth and experiences, drawing insights from their journey in youth work.

Gratitude Gelato: A sweet, refreshing way to acknowledge and appreciate the relationships and community built through youth work, fostering a sense of mutual respect and care.

Future Flavoured Fudge Cake: An imaginative dessert where young people explore their dreams and aspirations for the future, symbolising goal-setting and forward-thinking.

Legacy Layered Brownie: Packed with layers of memories, skills, and friendships, this dessert represents the lasting legacy and impact of youth work on young people's lives.

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT, CONNECTION AND INSPIRATION

Beverages

The ongoing elements of support and connection that sustain young people and youth workers throughout their journey. They offer flexibility, refreshment, and continued growth.

Options

Empowerment Espresso: A bold, energising drink that provides a boost of confidence and motivation, reminding young people of their strengths and potential.

Resilience Refresher: A cooling, revitalising drink that supports mental health and self-care, especially during challenging times.

Community Collaboration Coffee: A warm, communal beverage that symbolises partnerships and cross-sector collaboration, supporting young people through a holistic approach.

Mentorship Mocha: A comforting blend of guidance and support from mentors, sustaining young people on their journey and encouraging continued growth.

Innovation Infusion: A dynamic, inspiring drink that represents the innovative and creative spirit of youth work, encouraging young people to explore their creativity and think outside the box.

Chef's Specials: Responsive & Emerging Programmes

Innovative and emerging areas of youth work that address new challenges and evolving needs. These specials adapt based on current social, economic, and environmental issues, ensuring youth work remains relevant and responsive.

Climate Action Carbonara: A hearty, socially-conscious dish representing programmes focused on environmental awareness and activism, encouraging young people to lead climate action initiatives.

Digital Engagement Dim Sum: A selection of digital tools and programmes that help youth workers and young people connect in virtual spaces, bridging geographical divides and offering support online.

Social Justice Stew: A bold and spicy option that symbolises youth work's engagement with social justice issues, from tackling inequality to fostering inclusive communities.

Smart Youth Work Sushi: A fresh, forward-thinking programme focusing on smart youth work practices, integrating technology and innovation to engage young people in new ways.

Trauma-Informed Tacos: Carefully crafted programmes that incorporate trauma-informed care, ensuring that youth work provides a safe space for healing and resilience-building.

Meet the Youth Work Team

Each practitioner plays a unique role in creating a well-rounded “menu” of support, guidance, and inspiration for young people. Just like a restaurant team, they bring their distinct skills, styles, and approaches to serve up a holistic youth work experience.

Building on our Bon(n) Appetit metaphor we present the different roles needed in the youth work team. Read on in this section for a detailed description of what is required in each role of

The Head Chef: Setting the Vision and Leading the Team.

The Sous Chef: Supporting Youth Programmes and Mentoring Team Members.

Senior Cooks: Delivering the Core Experiences with Enthusiasm and Compassion Pastry.

Chef: Creative Programmes lead.

Banquet Host: Engagement specialist

Host/Hostess: Outreach specialist

THE HEAD CHEF: SENIOR MANAGER/CEO

Setting the Vision and Leading the Team

Role: Responsible for overseeing the overall direction and strategy of the youth work programme, ensuring each element aligns with the mission of empowering and supporting young people.

Skills: Visionary thinking, strategic planning, leadership, adaptability, and strong communication.

Impact: They set the tone, provide guidance to youth workers, and ensure that all programmes meet quality standards and address the needs of young people

Key Responsibilities:

Design and coordinate programme offerings, ensuring they are aligned with youth needs.

Support youth workers, acting as a mentor and guiding the team to deliver cohesive services.

Advocate for resources and build connections with external organisations and communities.

THE SOUS CHEF: OPERATIONS MANAGER

Supporting Youth Programmes & Mentoring Team Members

Role: Works closely with the Head Chef, assisting in programme development and delivery, often taking the lead on specific projects or youth work initiatives.

Skills: Organisational skills, leadership, mentoring, programme planning, and adaptability.

Impact: Provides critical support to the Head Chef, taking charge of certain areas while also ensuring the team has what they need to succeed.

Key Responsibilities:

Lead specific programmes (e.g., mental health initiatives, leadership training), ensuring alignment with overall goals.

Mentor newer youth workers and volunteer leaders, helping them build skills and confidence.

Manage day-to-day challenges and adapt programmes as needed to meet youth needs.

SENIOR COOKS: PROGRAMME LEADS

Delivering the Core Experiences with Enthusiasm & Compassion

Role: Frontline youth workers, interacting directly with young people and delivering the main content of the youth work programmes, from daily activities to personal one to one sessions.

Skills: Empathy, flexibility, communication, resilience, and creativity.

Impact: They bring the programmes to life, forming strong, supportive relationships with young people and adapting activities to suit their needs and interests.

Key Responsibilities:

Engage young people in activities, workshops, and events, building trust and providing a safe space.

Serve as mentors, listening to and supporting youth with guidance and resources.

Adapt and personalise programmes to meet the unique needs of individuals and groups.

PASTRY CHEF: CREATIVE PROGRAMMES LEAD

Focusing on Creativity, Expression, & Building Connections

Role: Brings a creative approach to youth work, often focusing on activities that encourage young people to express themselves, reflect, and connect with others.

Skills: Creativity, emotional intelligence, innovation, group facilitation, and a talent for engaging youth.

Impact: Adds a layer of depth and expression to youth work, helping young people explore their passions and form meaningful connections.

Key Responsibilities:

Develop creative programmes (e.g., arts-based workshops, reflection sessions) that allow young people to explore their identities.

Foster a sense of community, creating opportunities for young people to connect with each other in supportive settings.

Use innovative methods to keep youth engaged and motivated, particularly in reflective or expressive activities.

BANQUET HOST: ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

Providing Support & Connection to Youth in Their Communities

Role: Often volunteers, helping to deliver programmes and provide additional support for young people. They bring enthusiasm and a peer-based approach to youth work.

Skills: Enthusiasm, community connection, mentoring, empathy, and reliability.

Impact: By being peer-like figures, they often help young people feel more comfortable and connected, providing support alongside professional youth workers.

Key Responsibilities:

Assist in running programmes and activities, engaging with young people as approachable role models.

Provide mentorship and listen to young people's concerns, offering encouragement and a supportive presence.

Connect with communities, bringing local knowledge and insights to ensure programmes are accessible and relevant.

HOST/HOSTESS: OUTREACH SPECIALIST

Engaging Young People and Making Youth Work Accessible

Role: Responsible for outreach and engagement, making sure young people know about youth work programmes and feel welcome to participate.

Skills: Outreach, community engagement, communication, social media and organisational skills.

Impact: Ensures that young people are aware of the programmes available to them and feel welcome to join, playing a critical role in outreach efforts.

Key Responsibilities:

Develop and implement outreach strategies, including street work, digital and community-based engagement.

Build connections with schools, community organisations, and families to promote programmes.

Ensure that all youth feel welcomed, informed, and ready to participate in youth work services.

Support Staff (Finance, Fundraising, Evaluation)

Essential elements within the scaffolding of a youth work Organisation

Skills: Financial management, fundraising and partnerships, evaluation and impact assessment.

Knowledge: Non-profit financial management, grant writing, programme evaluation frameworks, community resources.

Attitudes: Detail-oriented, strategic, supportive of youth work mission.

Values: Integrity, transparency, accountability, commitment to supporting youth empowerment.

Nutritional Value of Youth Work

Youth work can be seen as a nutritional powerhouse essential for the critical developmental phase of adolescence, offering the “nutrients” young people need for emotional, social, and personal growth.

Just like a well-balanced diet fuels physical health, youth work provides the psychosocial nourishment that supports well-being, resilience, and empowerment during a pivotal life stage.

Just as proper nutrition lays the foundation for a healthy body and mind, youth work lays the foundation for resilient, empowered, and socially connected individuals.

Emotional Vitamins

Essential for Mental
Health and Resilience

Connection

provides safe spaces for young people to form meaningful relationships with peers and trusted adults, building a strong social network that supports mental well-being.

Developmental Support:

Exposure to consistent support, mentorship, and encouragement helps adolescents build confidence and self-esteem, promoting mental resilience.

Belonging:

Feeling included and accepted in a community reduces stress and anxiety, essential for overall emotional health.

Social Minerals

Building Blocks for Social Skills and Community Engagement

Identity Formation

Youth work encourages young people to explore their identities, values, and aspirations, supporting a grounded sense of self that is resilient to peer pressure and societal challenges.

Community Connection

Just as calcium strengthens bones, a sense of belonging to a community reinforces young people's connections to their society, fostering social responsibility and civic engagement.

Mentorship

Like magnesium, which supports relaxation and mental calm, mentorship from youth workers provides guidance and support that stabilises adolescents' social development.

Cognitive Carbohydrates

Fuel for Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Cognitive Development

Programmes that focus on leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving feed young people's cognitive skills, preparing them for responsible adulthood.

Focus and Persistence

Youth work activities that encourage setting goals and overcoming challenges promote focus and perseverance, supporting young people's ability to stay committed to their personal growth.

Proteins for Personal Growth

Essential for Skill-Building and Self-Efficacy

Skill-Building Activities

Youth work provides a diverse "diet" of skill-building programmes, from communication to practical life skills, that help young people feel capable and prepared for real-world challenges.

Agency and Empowerment

These foundational elements promote self-efficacy, enabling adolescents to make decisions, advocate for themselves, and take control of their lives, building confidence in their



Healthy Fats for Emotional Resilience

**Fuel for Critical Thinking
and Problem-Solving
Skills**

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence

Youth work emphasises empathy, self-awareness, and relationship skills, supporting young people's ability to understand and manage emotions—a key to mental health.

Adaptability and Flexibility

By teaching young people how to cope with change, uncertainty, and adversity, youth work helps them develop the emotional flexibility needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



Mental Hydration

Keeps Minds Fresh and Clear

Reflection and Self-Care

Opportunities for self-reflection and self-care are as vital as hydration, allowing young people to process their experiences, make sense of their emotions, and develop healthy coping strategies.

The Balanced Diet of Youth Work

Youth work offers adolescents a balanced “diet” of psychosocial nutrients, meeting the developmental needs of young people at a crucial life stage. By providing “emotional vitamins,” “social minerals,” “cognitive carbohydrates,” “proteins for personal growth,” and “healthy fats,” youth work nourishes the full spectrum of young people’s development.

Just as proper nutrition lays the foundation for a healthy body, youth work lays the foundation for resilient, empowered, and socially connected individuals. In this sense, youth work is not just beneficial but essential “nutrition” for the healthy development of Ireland’s future generations.

Chef's Essentials:

In the youth work restaurant, the Chef's Essentials menu section represents the foundational training that unites all staff, equipping them with the "core ingredients" necessary to deliver high-quality, inclusive, and impactful services to young people. These essentials ensure that practitioners are prepared to create a safe, empowering, and nourishing environment.



Chef's Essentials:



Ethics & Values Seasoning

A carefully balanced blend of inclusivity, empowerment, confidentiality, and respect for youth agency. This seasoning is essential for fostering trust and authenticity in every interaction.

Cultural Competence Spice Rack

A vibrant collection of flavors designed to ensure cultural responsiveness and anti-oppressive practices, helping staff create respectful and inclusive spaces for diverse young people.

Trauma-Informed Stock

A rich and sensitive base that supports understanding and care for young people's mental health, ensuring all staff are equipped to respond to trauma with compassion and professionalism.

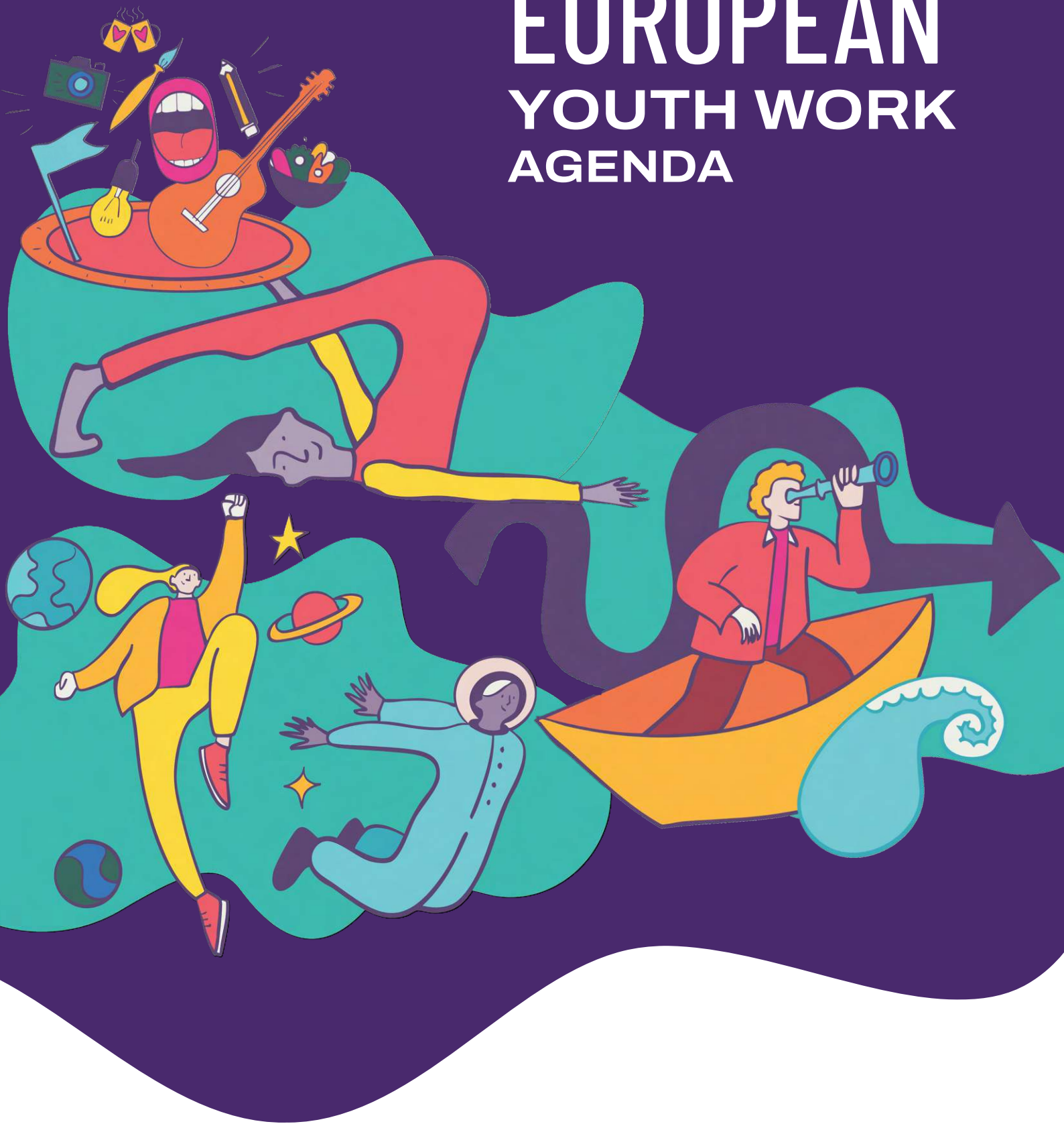
Safeguarding Glaze

A protective coating that highlights youth safety, child protection protocols, and the creation of secure environments for all participants.

Reflection & Resilience Blend

A restorative mix that encourages reflective practice, emotional resilience, and self-care, ensuring the well-being of all staff and preventing burnout.

EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK AGENDA



8 Thematic Priorities in the Irish context

Strengthen the provision of youth work in Europe and further develop a quality local youth work offer in Ireland?

Strengths of the Irish Youth Work Sector:

Multiple National Organisations, Education & Training Boards in every County, Leargas (National Agency), Youth Information Centres, Youth Affairs department within a Government Ministry and an independent National Youth Council of Ireland. Diverse and inclusive programme offerings, reaching a wide variety of young people in communities across the country. Existing focus on empowerment and skill-building, creating pathways for young people's personal growth. Youth Engagement & Participation models and practice.

Emerging Challenges:

Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility across all regions and demographics. Balancing innovation in new areas, like digital engagement and climate action, with traditional relational youth work practices.

Adapting to rapidly evolving needs, such as mental health support, polarisation, drug use and social media influence.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Policymakers:

Expand funding and resources to ensure sustainable recruitment and retention across the paid and voluntary youth work sector.

Youth Workers:

Continue innovating while staying connected to the relational roots of youth work.

Young People:

Engage actively in new programmes that connect you to broader social issues and life skills.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

Should youth work prioritise service provision, or should it evolve toward a model focused on collective empowerment and social change? How can digital engagement and remote access be a feature without sacrificing the relational essence of youth work? To what extent should youth work be responsible for adapting to emerging trends and rapidly shifting realities like polarisation, xenophobia, social media influence?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Better outreach and information about existing support structures and mechanisms.

Strengths of the Sector:

The North/South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) is responsible for the professional endorsement of youth work programmes on the island of Ireland (including Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland). Commitment to continuous professional development and upskilling of youth workers. Existing professional networks that support sharing best practices across organisations.

Emerging Challenges:

Standardising training for diverse roles, including both volunteer leaders and paid professionals. Measuring the impact of relational work, which can be difficult to quantify but is critical to youth work. Ensuring trauma-informed care and mental health support across all youth work services. The National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) ensures a standardised approach to quality in youth work adopted in 2011; they have yet to be fully implemented throughout the youth work sector.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Youth Workers:

Embrace continuous learning to keep pace with emerging challenges like trauma-informed care.

Policymakers:

Recognise relational outcomes in evaluation frameworks to reflect youth work's unique impact.

Training Bodies:

Develop standardised training programmes that address both traditional and emerging areas, like mental health and digital engagement.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

How can youth work prove its value within a results-driven framework without compromising relational integrity? Should trauma-informed care be a foundational training requirement for all youth workers? Is the sector ready for a standardised certification path, and how would this impact volunteer engagement?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Spaces to explore, exchange, and build on practice examples across different styles of practice for youth work to move in the same direction

Strengths of the Sector:

A shared commitment to inclusion, empowerment, and youth-centred values across organisations. European Youth Work, International Youth Work, Global Youth Work. Established networks and forums for knowledge-sharing and collaboration. E.g. The #YouthWorkChangesLives #YouthWorkForAll #YouthWorkersChangeLives. Dedication to continuous professional development that strengthens the community of practice alongside a mapping of the youth work workforce.

Emerging Challenges:

Aligning diverse organisational goals and approaches while preserving unique missions. Overcoming competition for funding, which can limit cross-organisational collaboration. Establishing a unified professional identity that values both paid professionals and volunteers in youth work.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Youth Work Organisations:

Prioritise collaboration and shared learning to unify the community of practice.

Youth Workers:

Engage actively in cross-organisational dialogues to strengthen professional identity.

Funders:

Support collaborative initiatives that foster knowledge-sharing and alignment.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

Is a unified professional identity possible or even desirable for such a diverse sector? How can youth work organisations navigate competition for funding while fostering collaboration? Should cross-organisational learning be formalised, and what impact might this have on individual organisations' missions?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Communicate the value of youth work and engage effectively with different sectors

Strengths of the Sector:

Growing recognition of youth work's role in mental health, social inclusion, and community development. Established partnerships with schools, healthcare, business and social services. Policy-level support that acknowledges youth work as a valuable societal contributor. E.g. Skills Summary.

Emerging Challenges:

Integrating youth work across sectors without losing its unique identity and relational approach. Ensuring that youth work is valued equally within multi-sector partnerships. Bridging the gap with mental health services to provide holistic support for young people.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Policymakers:

Integrate youth work into cross-sector policies to strengthen its impact and reach.

Funders:

Prioritise initiatives that promote collaboration between youth work and other essential services.

Youth Workers:

Build connections with other sectors to create holistic support and opportunities for young people.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

How can youth work retain its core identity while collaborating with other sectors? Should youth work take on more formal responsibilities in mental health support, or is the youth worker role already stretched? Is there a risk that youth work will be undervalued in partnerships with larger sectors such as the private sector, and how can this be mitigated?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

More strategic and coordinated efforts are needed to make youth work better understood, visible, and credible as a distinct work arena.

Strengths of the Sector:

A wealth of impactful stories and outcomes that demonstrate youth work’s transformative impact. Local, Regional, National, European, Global Growing professional networks and sectoral associations that advocate for youth work. Increasing recognition in policy circles of youth work’s critical role in social cohesion.

Emerging Challenges:

Raising public awareness about youth work’s developmental value, not just its recreational aspects Establishing formal recognition and professional pathways for youth workers along with Occupational Standards. Overcoming stigma that youth work is only “recreational” or “fixing broken kids” rather than a pillar of development.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Youth Work Organisations:

Share success stories that highlight youth work’s impact on individual and community well-being.

Policymakers:

Recognise and formalise career pathways for youth workers, increasing the sector’s appeal and stability.

Funders:

Invest in public campaigns that raise awareness of youth work’s critical developmental impact.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

How can youth work overcome public misconceptions about its role and impact or even its existence? Is it time for youth work to explore the apprenticeship model and what impact would this have on the sector? Could a national campaign that showcases youth work’s developmental impact help to change public perception?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Ensuring that in order to be a safety net for all young people in times of uncertainty, more resilient youth work structures are required based on long-term thinking, reflexivity, and strategy-based youth work.

Strengths of the Sector:

A flexible, adaptable approach that enables quick response to new issues, such as mental health and social justice. Strong focus on inclusion and addressing youth-centred social justice issues. Increasing emphasis on mental health and dynamic approach to Digital Youth Work.

Emerging Challenges:

Effectively supporting mental health within youth work's resource constraints.

Embracing digital innovation without losing youth work's relational core.

Responding to climate action and social justice movements, which require new skills and programme adjustments.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Youth Work Organisations:

Stay adaptable to social change movements while maintaining youth work's relational essence.

Policymakers:

Recognise and support youth work's potential in tackling climate and social justice issues.

Youth Workers:

Embrace training in new areas like digital engagement and climate action to stay relevant.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

Should youth work fully embrace digital platforms, or is there a risk of diluting meaningful engagement? How far should youth work go in supporting mental health, and should it involve more formalised training? Should youth work play a central role in climate and social justice activism, and what new competencies would this require?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Youth Work should be an integral part of youth policy, systematically incorporating the needs of and measures relating to youth work into youth policies, vertically and horizontally.

Strengths of the Sector:

Integration within national policies:

Youth work is embedded in frameworks like "Young Ireland" and "Opportunities for Youth," highlighting its importance in national strategies.

Alignment with EU priorities:

Irish youth work aligns with the Bonn Process, ensuring its relevance in the European context.

Supportive legislation & guidelines:

Tools like the National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) and Lundy Model provide structure and accountability.

Emerging Challenges: Fragmentation in policy implementation:

Variability in how policies are applied across local and regional levels affects consistency in youth work delivery.

Limited recognition of relational work:

Policies often emphasise measurable outcomes, overlooking the value of informal and relational youth work. Risk of becoming welfare oriented rather than learning and development-focused.

Competing priorities in government:

Youth work must compete for resources with other pressing societal needs, risking underfunding and lack of prioritisation.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Policymakers:

Prioritise youth work as a cornerstone of national development and align cross-sectoral policies to integrate its contributions.

Youth Organisations:

Advocate for youth work to be systematically incorporated into youth-focused policies, ensuring long-term funding and stability.

Funders:

Recognise the strategic importance of youth work and provide funding streams that align with national and EU priorities.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

Should youth work aim to influence broader national policy priorities (e.g., health, education) beyond youth-specific frameworks? How can policymakers better integrate youth work's qualitative impacts into evaluation and funding decisions? Is the current alignment with EU frameworks sufficient, or is there a need for greater autonomy in shaping Ireland-specific youth work policies?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Priority addressing the European Institutions to further align their visions for youth work within their respective strategies to even better support the growth of youth work throughout Europe.

Strengths of the Sector:

Existing national strategies:

Frameworks like “Vision for Youth Work” developed by the youth sector and “Opportunities for Youth – a national strategy for youth work 2024–28” provide a vision for advancing youth work in Ireland.

Sector-wide commitment to collaboration:

Strong networks exist for collective action, particularly in advocacy and knowledge-sharing.

Alignment with global trends:

Irish youth work reflects themes of sustainability, inclusion, and empowerment highlighted in international strategies like the European Youth Work Agenda – Bonn Process.

Emerging Challenges:

Coordinating diverse stakeholders: Aligning the priorities of organisations, volunteers, policymakers, and young people can be complex.

Addressing systemic barriers:

Challenges like short-term funding cycles and limited career pathways and the absence of Occupational Standards hinder the long-term growth of the sector.

Balancing innovation with sustainability:

Ensuring new approaches do not compromise the sector’s foundational strengths.

Messages for Stakeholders:

Youth Workers:

Actively contribute to the national/regional youth work developments by participating in consultations, collaborations, and leadership opportunities.

Youth Work Organisations:

Build partnerships that strengthen the sector’s collective voice and ensure alignment with national and EU strategies.

Funders and Policymakers:

Commit to a robust strategic framework that prioritises youth work as a pillar of community and societal development.

Thoughtful Talking Points:

Should Ireland adopt a more centralised strategic framework for youth work, or would this risk stifling local innovation and ownership? How can stakeholders ensure that strategic frameworks are not just aspirational but actionable and measurable? Is the sector ready to advocate for legislative reforms? If so, what is required?

Please refer to our virtual gallery under this thematic priority for good practice examples which will bring this priority to life in our National context.

Food for thought

The Sustainable Development of Youth Work: Focuses on balancing professionalism with grassroots values, addressing retention issues, and developing occupational standards to ensure the sector's long-term viability.

The Purpose of Youth Work: Explores youth work's role in empowering young people, supporting their development, and addressing social challenges, emphasising the value of revisiting its definition and scope.

The Practice of Youth Work: Highlights innovative, community based, youth centred approaches, the integration of mental health support, and the growing use of digital tools while stressing the importance of trauma-informed and inclusive practices.

The Role & Identity of the Youth Worker: Examines the evolving responsibilities of youth workers, the balance between volunteer and professional roles, and the need for clear training & professional pathways and recognition.

The Policy Paradigm of Youth Work: Consider the alignment of Irish youth work policies with current realities for young people, synergies with European frameworks, emphasis on the importance of long-term funding, cross-sector collaboration, and relational outcome indicators.

Together, these areas provide a foundation for dialogue and action, inviting stakeholders to reimagine youth work's potential as a transformative force in young people's lives and Irish society.



BON(N) PROCESS

The Bonn Process is a joint effort to bring the European Youth Work Agenda to life in each of the National contexts. Not only does it give us an opportunity to shine a light on the amazing youth work we do here in Ireland, but it also gives us an opportunity to identify areas for further improvement and investment.

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