



The European Dimensions for Child and Youth Welfare – Relevance and Potential of European Policies for Child and Youth Welfare

Discussion Paper by the Child and Youth Welfare Association – AGJ (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe)¹

During the last years, it has become evident how much the European Union (EU) through its social and socio-political fields of work both directly and indirectly effects the living situations of children, youth, and their families as well as the child and youth welfare system in Germany. However, the EU is perceived as a rather abstract structure operating far away from one's own living environment. Due to the crisis over the last years, Europe and the EU are often linked with negatively connoted developments whose causes, however, can only be attributed to a certain degree to EU actions. These developments are for example, increasing youth unemployment and lack of perspective, a growing social gap between regions, national states, and within the states, increasing of right-wing populism, as well as the rejection of traditional forms of political participation and the decreasing confidence in political institutions.

The variety of chances and innovations achieved by the EU through their regulations and instruments at all levels – especially at the local level – are often not directly linked with each other. The European cooperation in the youth field, but also the increasing integration of child and youth welfare issues into other policy fields in recent years, i.e. into the areas of education, social integration, social protection, health, children's rights, and the labour market, had positive effects on child and youth welfare in Germany.

¹ The AGJ – founded in 1949 – is an alliance of approximately 100 German child and youth welfare organizations and institutions at the federal level. Members are the youth organizations and youth councils, social welfare organizations, specialized child welfare organizations, federal-state administrations responsible for child and youth welfare, the working committee of the federal-state youth offices and institutions, and organizations dealing with professionals and qualification. For more information, see www.agj.de.

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Education, provision of support and social cohesion are important issues for the future, particularly at the local level. In particular, the local child and youth welfare assists young people individually from the beginning on. It supports them and their families with target orientated services. In close cooperation with other actors, child and youth welfare, for example, supports the transition from day care to school and later to vocational education and employment. The field provides a variety of services and facilities in the area of pupil, youth, and student exchange, in dealing with social-area segregation, in the field of non-formal education, and in strengthening civic engagement as well as youth work and youth participation.

In various statements and discussion papers², the Child and Youth Welfare Association – AGJ has already pointed out European issues that require further discussion regarding child and youth welfare in Germany. The present discussion paper addresses some of these issues with special emphasis on the challenges of an increased opening of the child and youth welfare sectors in Germany towards European issues. This includes:

- the contextualization of the relevant developments taking place at the European level in the professional discourse in regard to German child and youth welfare,
- the relevance of “the child and youth (welfare) policy in the European context”, with special regard to the competencies of the EU in the areas relevant to the German child and youth welfare,
- a definition of the term “Youth Work” used in European discourse, and
- an explanation of the relevance and potential of European policies and programmes for the German child and youth welfare sector on the basis of the different levels of impact of European politics, especially at the local level.

² See AGJ (2011): “Kinder- und jugendpolitische Anforderungen an die Umsetzung von „Europa 2020“”, Berlin; AGJ (2013): “Umsetzung der EU-Jugendstrategie in Deutschland – Herausforderungen und Anregungen für die zweite Phase (2014-2018) aus der Perspektive der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe“, Berlin.

1. Child and Youth Welfare in an European Context – With Reference to Policy Fields and a Necessary Explanation of Terms

1.1 “The child and youth (welfare) policy in the European context”

The German child and youth (welfare) policy is legally anchored in Volume VIII of the German Social Code (SGB VIII). It looks back on a long tradition of professional social pedagogic in child and youth welfare, and is under the responsibility of the federal state, the *Bundesländer* and municipalities. This is taking into account the principle of subsidiarity and is carried out in cooperation with voluntary service providers in child and youth welfare. A similar system of aid, support, and non-formal education in the sense of an explicit “European child and youth (welfare) policy” does not exist at the EU level. Therefore, the German child and youth welfare sector and its individual fields of action are repeatedly asked to clarify their reference to the policy field as well as their reference system at the European level. This includes a clarification of the division of responsibilities and competencies between the EU and its member states in relation to the policies relevant for German child and youth welfare.

In the EU, there are three different types of competencies: those completely within the competence of the EU, those reserved for member states, and those in which the EU and member states work together. The policy fields relevant to the German child and youth welfare sector are usually beyond the scope of the exclusive competence of the EU. According to the European Treaties, they lie:

- in the field of *shared competencies* in policy fields between the EU and member states or in *competing and parallel competencies* on the one hand (such as economic, social, and territorial cohesion, an area of freedom, security and justice, research and development cooperation, economic, employment, and social policy)
- and in the *coordinating and supporting areas of competency* of the EU with the aim of supporting, coordinating, or supplementing the actions of the member states and the policy-related mutual learning exchange between them on the other hand (such as in the policy fields of protection and improvement of health, culture, general and professional education, sports, and youth. In all these policy fields, the legally binding acts of law must not entail the harmonization of the laws of the member states).

Of particular importance is the Europe 2020 strategy for “smart, sustainable, and integrated growth”, which was adopted by the EU heads of state and government in June 2010. It contains specific objectives to be achieved over the next 10 years in areas such as employment, education, social matters, energy, and innovation. The activities listed in the annually developed National Reform Programmes and National Social Reports are an important contribution of the EU member states to the Europe 2020 strategy. The reports include national targets, adapted to the core objectives of the EU, and an explanation as to how governments want to achieve these and how they want to overcome obstacles. As a founding member of Eurochild³, the AGJ continues to accompany this progress report by analysing these reports with the hope of strengthening the rights and well-being of children and young people.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) acts as a central element in the *coordinating and supporting remit* of the EU. It makes it possible for the EU to become politically active and support the cooperation of the member states based on the EU Treaty and by respecting the competencies of the member states⁴. The OMC is used to come to an agreement between the EU and member states on the basis of consultations and negotiations on common objectives in a policy field where the EU has no legislative powers. Thereby, member states may decide what priorities they set and what instruments⁵ and measures they wish to use in order to contribute to the achievement of common goals. In the area of youth, the OMC gave its concrete expression in the current “Renewed framework for cooperation on youth policy in Europe 2010-2018”⁶, the so-called EU Youth Strategy.

³ In the European Network Eurochild, the AGJ (as a founding member) represents the interests of child and youth welfare services in Germany.

⁴ In the field of youth, the European Commission published the “White Paper of the European Commission. New impetus for European youth” in 2001, for the first time advocating for the application of the OMC in the sense of a new form of “governance”. Based on the White Paper, the “Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework for cooperation on youth policy in Europe”, the Council of the European Union agreed to apply the OMC “in a flexible manner suited to the youth field, with due regard to national responsibilities and the principle of subsidiarity”, see Commission of the European Communities (2001): White Paper of the European Commission. A new impetus for European youth. Brussels; Official Journal of the European Communities (2002): Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States from 27 June 2002 regarding the framework for cooperation on youth policy in Europe (2002/C 168).

⁵ Essential instruments of the OMC are decisions of the Council as well as recommendations and guidelines of the commission to the member states, partially supported by action plans and coverage.

⁶ See Amtsblatt der europäischen Union (2009): Entschließung des Rates vom 27. November 2009 über einen erneuerten Rahmen für die jugendpolitische Zusammenarbeit in Europa (2010-2018) (2009/C 311/01).

On the basis of Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU has an *explicitly described competency* for promoting the development of the cross-border youth exchange, the exchange of youth workers, and the increased participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. As a contribution to the achievement of these objectives, the European Parliament and the Council can, excluding any harmonization of the laws, regulations, and administrative provisions of the member states, enact promotion measures and recommendations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure.

1.2 Youth Work

The term Youth Work, as used in European discourse, cannot be equated with *Jugendarbeit*, the literal translation of youth work in the German context. Youth Work, as used in the European discourse, refers to a much wider range of social, cultural, and educational activities that go beyond the German understanding of *Jugendarbeit* based on §§ 11 SGB VIII. That is why we use the capitalized term Youth Work in this paper, when talking about the term used in the European understanding. Thus, according to the Council's conclusions on the contribution of a high quality Youth Work from 16 May 2013, Youth Work in the European context is "a broad spectrum of activities of a social, cultural, educational, or general political nature (...), carried out by and with young people and for them. Increasingly, these also include sports and services for young people. (...) [Youth Work] belongs to the field of non-formal education and target group-oriented leisure time that is carried out by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders. It is organized in different ways (by youth led organizations, organizations for youth, informal groups, or within the framework of youth services and public authorities). [Youth Work] exists in various forms and types (for example, open access, group-based, programme-based, in the context of social work and separately) and is designed at the local, regional, national, and European level."⁷

Although Youth Work is not a new concept in Europe, the debate on its definition and profile in the EU has not been going on much longer than five years. It is, content-wise, only at its beginning. In recent years, the debate has once again

⁷ Quotation Council of the European Union (2013): Schlussfolgerungen des Rates zum Beitrag einer qualitativ hochwertigen Jugendarbeit zur Entwicklung, zum Wohlbefinden und zur sozialen Inklusion junger Menschen. Brussels.

gained greater importance at the Council of Europe⁸. Professional concepts, traditions, laws, principles, and structures of at least 28 European countries come together in this discourse. Youth Work is not anchored and defined by law in all countries. Where this is the case, there are many different definitions. In the course of further implementation of the EU Youth Strategy at the European level – both politically and practically – the insight into the meaning of Youth Work has grown and created the need to describe, develop, and profile Youth Work as a political and pedagogical concept and as an area with its own standards and quality requirements.

According to the EU's Youth Ministers, Youth Work constitutes an important bridge for marginalized young people and contributes to the promotion of the health and well-being of young people.⁹ Youth work, volunteering, active citizenship, non-formal and informal learning, and street work and / or youth social work is perceived as enriching for young people.

Through Youth Work, bridges can be built to education and employment systems, and the formal education system can be complemented. In regard to young people, self-confidence, well-being, social capital, and independent development can be encouraged and social skills and professional qualifications, which improve the employability, can be strengthened.¹⁰

A recent study from the European Commission on the relevance of Youth Work¹¹ in Europe refers to the operations and effects of Youth Work in the eight fields of action of the EU Youth Strategy, as it has been defined by the decision of the Youth Ministers who have understood Youth Work as a cross-cutting issue that should be considered in all areas. This shows that the action fields relevant for Youth Work are very diverse and go far beyond the classical field of *Jugendarbeit* (see table below). All fields of action have a common focus on young people, their personal development and voluntary participation. The goals of Youth Work are self-determination, self-confidence, self-esteem, and a positive socialization of

⁸ The debate about Youth Work in the European Council gets more attention especially due to the implementation of the “2nd European Convention on Youth Work” in April 2015 by the three communities of Belgium within the framework of the ministerial committee of the Council of Europe.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ European Commission (2014): “Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union”. ICF GHK, prepared by Dunne, A.; Ulicna, D.; Murphy, I., Golubeva, M.

adolescents and young adults. Thereby, Youth Work contributes to participation in democratic life, prevention of risky behaviour, and social integration and cohesion.

<p>Education and training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves non-cognitive skills and better academic outcomes • Provides alternative pathways for dropouts • Provides educational/career guidance • Better opportunities for further development 	<p>Employment and entrepreneurship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops transversal skills demanded on labour market • Opportunity to practice skills in real settings • Supports orientation of young people • Can help matching young people and jobs
<p>Health and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information and trusted advice • Changes in attitudes and behaviours • Raises self-awareness • Improved well-being 	<p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater participation and involvement in democratic processes • Raises awareness • Develops critical thinking • Empowers young people • Provides opportunity for self-expression
<p>Volunteering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth work is frequently volunteer led • Fosters solidarity • Engagement in earlier years is correlated with voluntary engagement later on 	<p>Social inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers socialisation and a safe environment • Prevents exclusion • Targets specific at risk groups • Combats negative perception of specific groups among general public
<p>Youth and the World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops a skill set and attitudes such as self-reliance, global awareness, cross-cultural communication • Raises awareness of human rights, development, global themes • Provides education for sustainable development 	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase cultural participation • Provides space for expression and creativity • Promotes intercultural understanding, health, well-being etc. • Broad personal development impact

European Commission (2014): Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union, Brussels. ICF GHK, prepared by Dunne, A.; Ulicna, D.; Murphy, I., Golubeva, M.

The changing contribution of Youth Work in a changing society in Europe and, thus, the continually changing tasks are at the core of the youth policy cooperation of the EU. One challenge is to qualify Youth Work as a departmental task. At the same time, it is also about an increasing cooperation with other policy fields with respect to these quality standards, practice, and methods.¹²

¹² This means the basic principles, such as the focussing on the personal development of young people (self-determination, self-esteem, selfconscience and positive socialisation) as well as the principle of participation and voluntariness.

2. The Relevance and Potential of European Policies and Programmes to German Child and Youth Welfare, Especially at the Local Level

2.1 European Dimensions in Child and Youth Welfare

The objective to enrich and develop policy and practice in different fields of action of child and youth welfare with European ideas and to promote an overall more European orientation of the child and youth welfare sector, according to AGJ's view, is particularly promoted if such activities take one or more of the following aspects into account (European Dimension¹³):

- Europe orientated educational work,
- unlock the potential of Europe as a place for learning for young people,
- promote European mobility of professionals and their qualification for Europe-related work,
- build and develop European cooperation and networking,
- initiate and promote European processes of learning from each other (peer learning),
- bring experience and knowledge from European debates in the German professional practice – and vice versa,
- aim at a cross sectoral implementation.

Europe-oriented Civic Education

Europe-oriented educational work can be understood as a cross-cutting issue, since almost all national topics can and must be viewed from a European perspective. It means in no way a pure dissemination of knowledge about institutions or of the European integration process. Rather, it is about learning to comprehend and experience Europe not only as a common economic area but as a continent that builds on cultural diversity and, thus, makes intercultural learning essential. All people active in Youth Work and / or training (and all citizens) need to learn that they (have to) contribute daily to the further development and existence of Europe and should disseminate / set an example of this attitude to young people.

Unlock the potential of Europe as a place for learning for young people

Cross-border mobility for young people provides important non-formal and informal

¹³ Based on JUGEND für Europa (2014): „Die Europäische Dimension in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - Ein Handbuch mit Erläuterungen und Praxisbeispielen“.

learning experiences, whose positive effects for personal development are documented in numerous studies. To move freely throughout Europe as a linguistically and culturally diverse learning environment, not only strengthens European awareness and active European citizenship but also the readiness to participate in European policy making and the active participation in the opportunities offered by the EU to young people.

Promoting the European Mobility of Professionals and their Qualification for Europe-Related Work

Volunteers and professionals in child and youth welfare services are important multipliers and role models for young people when it comes to cross-border offers. At the same time, cross-border training measures – such as European trainings, seminars, study tours, and internships – can bring meaningful experiences and expertise to professionals. One's own mobility experience is the starting point for many professionals to stimulate learning mobility for the respective young target groups in their own working environment. In order to do that, they need further education and training to deliver high-quality programmes and measures.

Build and Develop European Cooperation and Networking

A continuous cross-border cooperation of child and youth welfare organizations as well as independent and public bodies or the work in European networks may also be sources for regular input and a stimulating experience, in connection with the development of one's own services and concepts. In that way, reliable networks can further qualify the practice locally and offer alternative views and suggestions for professional work. Beyond that, they also support the development of a common professional understanding between the participating actors in Europe.

Initiating and Promoting European Processes of Learning from Each Other (Peer Learning)

Within the political cooperation between the member states, the introduced principle of cross-border mutual learning is implemented in various ways in so-called peer-learning processes. Peer learning is expressed as a long-term exchange of expertise, which is realized in different areas of child and youth welfare. In various forms of mutual learning (such as expert programmes, job shadowing, strategic transnational projects, cross-border cooperation in the youth field etc.), similar professional challenges and political action are often worked on – always in the

context of different practice and professional understanding.

Bringing Experience and Knowledge of European Debates into the German Professional Practice – and vice versa

European impulses can be generated from the EU policy strategies and the youth policy discourses at the European level and can be incorporated into German professional practice or respectively into other EU member states. Thereby, it is the aim to enrich the national practice in a “European way” and to include European impulses in one’s own actions. Topics that amplify national professional debates, for example, in the course of the youth policy cooperation at the European level, are the participation debates, recognition of non-formal and informal education, and transnational mobility.

Conversely, experience and knowledge from German professional practice can be transferred to the European level. As an example, the action taken in this paper regarding the concept of Youth Work in European discourses in relation to the differentiations of the German system of child and youth welfare. A transfer of the respective impulses to the national or European level can contribute to a common professional understanding of the subject and, thus, can also advance professional and political debates in the EU altogether.

Aiming at a Cross-Sectorial Implementation

For the first time, the EU is pursuing an explicitly cross-sectorial political approach to youth policy with the “Renewed Framework for Cooperation in Youth Policy”. In the EU Youth Strategy, the cross-sectorial approach is described as the “continuous consideration of issues with regard to youth, i.e. initiatives to promote a cross-sector approach that accounts for the problems of youth with regard to the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and measures in other areas of policy, which have a significant impact on the lives of young people”. In particular, the cross-sectorial approach of the EU Youth Strategy allows access to other relevant policy strategies of the EU from a youth perspective such as the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU's Youth Employment Initiative, the EU Strategy for the Implementation of the UN Children’s Rights Convention¹⁴, the European Commission initiative to combat poverty and social exclusion of children and young

¹⁴ A comparable tight cooperation framework in analogy with the youth political cooperation in Europe (the EU youth strategy) does not exist within the area of child policy. However, reference is made to the strengthening of the rights and the promotion of the well-being of children, in the European treaties as well as in the different declarations, news reports, and recommendations of the EU.

people, or the EU cooperation in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. With the increasingly cross-sectorial approach, a conceptual shift can also be perceived – from the promotion of participation and empowerment of young people to the promotion of individual employability, health promotion, and the prevention of early school leaving and social exclusion.¹⁵

2.2 Level of Impact of European Politics¹⁶

In general, European politics have different levels of impact, which open up the various links to opportunities for action in child and youth welfare. One should distinguish between:

- 1) the EU's policy, with its *indirect* impact on the situation of children, young people, and their families and on the corresponding national support systems,
- 2) the EU's policy in the area of childhood and youth as a *cross-cutting policy* of the EU, which tries to take into account the interests of children, youth, and families in other policy areas:
 - For example, actors involved in the *field of youth work*, in accordance with this policy approach, try to take into account the interests of young people, especially in the fields of employment, education, and integration into the labour market. At the same time that the EU Youth Strategy with its cross-sectorial approach is placed, the European Structural Funds with its cross-sectional approach can be situated.
 - In the *area of childhood* (in terms of early childhood education), one tries to take into consideration the interest of children in education, children's rights and social issues.
- 3) the EU's policy in the area of youth as a department policy, which can be seen in the EU Youth Strategy as a framework as well as in the design of the EU "Erasmus+" Programme,
- 4) the EU's policy as a mutual, comparative exchange of information and experience between the relevant actors in child and youth welfare in different European countries (for example, in the field of educational assistance or in the area of child day care).

¹⁵ See Williamson, H. (2015): "Mapping and scanning the horizons for European youth work in the 21st century. Towards the 2nd European Youth Work Convention", Brussels.

¹⁶ With reference to Thimmel, A. (2015): „Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Europa“, in: Böllert (ed.): „Kompendium Kinder- und Jugendhilfe“ (pending).

In the following, the relevance of selected European policies and support programmes for the situation of children, youth, and their families will be addressed. By using the different levels of impact of European policy, its significance and potential with special focus on the local level will be discussed

Indirect Impact of EU Policies – Example: Impact of the European Fiscal Pact on the Facilities of Child and Youth Welfare Services

In order to ensure a sound fiscal policy in all EU member states, the introduction of the European Fiscal Pact was agreed upon, which entered into force on 1 January 2013. The main objective of the fiscal pact is a balanced general government budget or a budget surplus¹⁷. Otherwise, for the first time, there is the possibility of sanctioning financially. The fiscal pact demands from the *Bundesländer* and municipalities in Germany money saving measures beyond the national debt brake as laid down in constitutional law and, therefore, indirectly influence the funding of facilities and services of child and youth welfare.

Departmental and Cross-Sectorial Approach – Example: The EU Youth Strategy

The EU Youth Strategy aims to ensure equal opportunities for young people with regard to education and work access and aims to promote the social commitment of young people. In order to achieve its overall objectives, the EU Youth Strategy proposes a dual approach: Through autonomous specific measures, Youth Work should be further developed and help improve the living conditions of youth (departmental approach). At the same time, by integrating other relevant policies for young people, positive effects are also generated on the living conditions of young people (transversal policy) by the actors.

One has to distinguish between the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy at the national and European level:

In Germany, the specialised policy departments of child and youth welfare have decided on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy together in the three thematic corridors at state and federal level – “encourage participation and strengthen democracy”, “recognition and visualization of non-formal and informal learning in youth work”, and “social integration and successful transitions in the working world”. The three themes corridors relate to the field of actions related to §§ 11, 12, and 13 SGB VIII. Such measures exert their greatest effectiveness at the

¹⁷ See revised Stability and Growth Pact, Art. 3, para. 1 letter a.

local level. Reaching the local level also represents one of the greatest challenges. While the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy in Germany focuses on these thematic corridors, the eight fields of action at the European level include more topics with connection to the practice of local youth welfare: 1) education and training, 2) employment and entrepreneurship, 3) health and well-being, 4) participation, 5) volunteering, 6) social integration, 7) youth in the world and 8) creativity and culture. Next to the previously mentioned European impulses that arise from the thematic corridors in the national implementation process, more valuable impulses generate from the EU Youth Strategy for the practice of local child and youth welfare.

Departmental Approach – Example: Erasmus+

Erasmus+, the EU Programme for General and Vocational Education, Youth, and Sport, with its chapter “Erasmus+ YOUTH IN ACTION”, offers funding opportunities for all young people up to the age of 30 in the field of non-formal education and informal learning as well as for professionals and decision makers. Youth exchanges, the European Voluntary Service, and mobility for professionals as well as strategic partnerships, transnational youth initiatives, and policy actions, such as the Structured Dialogue, can be financed through the programme.¹⁸

Erasmus+ is an integrative programme that combines a cross-sectorial component and a sector orientated component for fields such as university, school, vocational training, adult education, and non-formal education. It is an example of the cross-sectorial approach with particular relevance to the local practice in all its areas. Especially for local youth welfare practice, the programme (as well as in previous programmes) offers a plurality of sector-specific or cross-linking opportunities for the promotion and design of learning for young people within mobility measures in the various fields of child and youth welfare.

Cross-Sectorial Approach – Example: European Structural Funds in North Rhine-Westphalia

Notably, the European Structural Funds can be used for the local child and youth welfare or for relevant measures to improve the living conditions of children and young people at the local level. In the following, this will be concretized by the

¹⁸ See Jugend für Europa (2014): „Erasmus+ JUGEND IN AKTION. 2014-2020. Changing Lives – Opening Minds”. Bonn.

funding support concept from *North Rhine-Westphalia*. In 2014, the new funding period from the European Structural Funds began, until 2020. During this period, EU funding of 352 billion euros is available across the EU. Out of that, North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, receives 2.57 billion. Already in 2012, the state government had decided to pursue the following objectives with all three EU Structural Funds: In addition to strengthening the business location and climate protection, a socially inclusive policy approach should above all, create good starting conditions for all children and young people.

The three EU Structural Funds are the “European Regional Development Fund” (ERDF), the “European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development” (EAFRD), and the “European Social Fund” (ESF). While issues of poverty reduction, child and youth welfare services including family support, or integration have been funded in the past almost exclusively by the ESF, preventive measures for children and young people will be financed from all three funds in the future. The funding is based on the “Operational Programme”, which was approved by the European Commission. On the basis of the programme, the federal state government publishes calls for proposals. A common call is intended, for example, on all three funds for preventive and sustainable development of neighbourhoods and districts, which is aimed at districts in large cities with special needs. The call brings together the social objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the prevention strategy of North Rhine-Westphalia. In the future, urban development will be closely linked with the development of local prevention in problematic neighbourhoods. The call is complemented by guidelines giving cities and institutions an overview of funding opportunities that should be concentrated in neighbourhoods with particular needs.

The ELER offers a whole new funding opportunity for smaller municipalities or youth welfare districts. The approach responds to challenge that poverty reduction and equal opportunities for children and youth also needs to increasingly be addressed in rural areas. It will support action plans that rely on network-based an open services for children and families. A practical example is the *Café Kinderwagen* in the district of Warendorf¹⁹ in which child and youth welfare and the health sector successfully cooperate together.

¹⁹ See <http://www.kein-kind-zuruecklassen.de/praxis/gute-praxis/detail/artikel/cafе-kinderwagen.html>.

The two described strategies for the use of EU funds by North Rhine-Westphalia are examples of how the EU indirectly impact on the situation of children and youth through its funding policy and how EU and EU-programmes can be used for the improvement of living conditions locally. This often can lead to synergies for child and youth welfare at local level.²⁰.

Comparative Exchange of Information and Experiences – Example: Cooperation in the Field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

The political cooperation in the field of ECEC at the European level has been requested by member states in order to allow all children access to care and education and to improve²¹ the quality. Through the exchange of the ECEC, strategies shall be developed to enable all children in the participating countries to have equally good starting opportunities and to counteract disadvantages due to social origin. ECEC is regarded as one strategy contributing to the Europe 2020 goals. Since the policy field of Early Childhood Care and Education falls within the competence of the member states, the EU can only make an indirect contribution to the improvement of the ECEC in the member states and, therefore, uses the instrument of the Open Method of Coordination. With that, the EU wants to support member states in identifying effective policy approaches, analysing them, and assessing their applicability to their own state. Thereby, the member states may use various instruments, such as the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Structural Funds, in order to continue to qualify professionals and to improve the infrastructure. Going beyond that, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Development – Horizon 2020 – can be used to research and develop more effective approaches.

More specifically, a thematic working group on early childhood care and education has been established at EU level. This working group uses the tool of mutual learning to develop proposals for the improvement of the ECEC, which all feeds into a framework for early childhood education and care²².

²⁰ Further information about the operational programmes as well as the already published drafts can be found on the homepage of the Ministry of Economics (about ECEC), the Ministry of Social Affairs (about ESF), and the Ministry of Agriculture (about ECEC).

²¹ See Europäische Kommission (2011): Mitteilung der Kommission. Frühkindliche Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung: der bestmögliche Start für alle unsere Kinder in die Welt von morgen. KOM(2011) 66 endgültig. Download: <http://www.plattformeducare.org/2011/EU%20zur%20FBBE.pdf>

²² This quality framework has already been approved but not yet published.

Conclusion

With this discussion paper, AGJ wants to contribute to a **better understanding of relevant developments taking place at the European level as well as of key concepts used in the European context** in relation to the differentiated system of child and youth welfare in the Federal Republic of Germany.

On the one hand, this shall promote the professional political discourse within the German child and youth welfare sector with regard to the challenges of an increased European orientation of the child and youth welfare services in the Federal Republic of Germany, and further discussions at national level shall be encouraged. Secondly, with this paper, AGJ wants to encourage the political discourse on Youth Work at the European level – in the spirit of one of the European dimensions, to contribute experiences and lessons learned from the German professional practice at the European level (see Section 2.1).

With keeping the definition of Youth Work in mind and based on the conclusions from the Council in regard to the contribution of high-quality Youth Work as well as the current state of the debate at the European level, AGJ recommends understanding Youth Work as a generic term for the field of *Jugendarbeit* and social youth work in the context of §§ 11 to 13 SGB VIII.

On the other hand the “child and youth (welfare) policy in the European context”²³ covers all policy strategies and support programs at the European level that are relevant for child and youth welfare. That also includes sub-sections, such as the areas of early childhood education, care, or assistance, where the policies and approaches also refer to the target group of children.

Despite the here formulated proposals AGJ underlines, that the process of the contextualization of central concepts at the European level and the self-positioning of child and youth welfare services in different reference systems should not be considered as static. The statements made in this paper are rather to be understood as orientation referring to a complex Europe. A Europe based on cultural diversity

²³ While the German child and youth (welfare services) policy is expressed in child and youth welfare services with all the services they offer, which are embedded in law in SGB VIII, and at national levels are under the responsibility of the three central levels, federal, state, and local governments, one shall again be reminded that there is no comparable help subsidies and non-formal education systems in the strict sense of an explicit "European child and youth (welfare services) policy" at the EU level.

and an "organic" European entity and in a continuous process of proximity, rejection, and negotiation between the EU and the 28 EU-member states is subject to constant changes and advancements.

Five years after the first conference in Ghent, the three communities of Belgium under the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers will hold a "2nd European Convention on Youth Work" from 27-30 April 2015. The 2nd conference will continue the discussions on the description of a policy field Youth Work in Europe. Its aim is to find common ground for an understanding of Youth Work as a tool to support the individual, social, and professional development of young people. Within the framework of the conference, the developments of Youth Work during the recent years shall be taken into account. In addition, with the aim of a renewed Youth Work strategy and an agenda for strengthening the position and development of Youth Work in Europe, a message shall be sent to the member states, the European Council, and the EU.

Thus, a constant mutual exchange of experience and professional political discourse is required – both at the European and national level, in research, and between the actors of the different fields of local child and youth welfare. The actors of child and youth welfare in Germany must be more involved in the professional discourse on concept and practice of Youth Work as well as with regard to all policy strategies relevant to child and youth welfare at the European level. Through one's own specialized concepts and standards, the various processes can be shaped and the resulting impetus for one's own work can be developed.

In addition to the contextualization of the relevant developments taking place at the European level and the relevance of the concept of Youth Work, AGJ wants **to clarify the relevance and potential of European policies and programs for the German child and youth welfare** at different levels, especially at the local level.

AGJ emphasizes the fundamental (direct and indirect) role of European policies and support programmes for both child and youth welfare in Germany as a whole and for the living situation of children, youth, and their families. Here, policies and support programmes within the EU Youth Strategy and its implementation at the national level have a specific relevance to child and youth welfare in Germany. In addition, at the European level, a lot of policy developments take place relevant for child and youth welfare addressing children which hardly receive any attention within the

current discourse on European level. Therefore, AGJ believe that child policy developments at EU level will require special consideration and analysis in the future, and which could be promoted fundamentally by the holistic approach to child and youth welfare existing in Germany.

Moreover, the various EU programmes such as “Erasmus+” and the European Structural Funds open up many opportunities to use additional funding for the implementation of projects and activities in child and youth welfare. These should be increasingly included in the agendas of providers and organisations of child and youth welfare. At the same time, it will require political support to relevant framework conditions as well as a focus on application requirements (e.g. cooperation with international partners, qualification for the application) by organisations.

A promotion of a European orientated work in child and youth welfare in the understanding of the **European dimensions** listed in this paper (see Section 2.1) bear added value for children, young people, professionals, and organizations and generates effects on individuals, organizations and systems. The current practice shows that the European dimensions are relevant for all fields of activity in the child and youth welfare sector and can enrich the local practical work. These approaches should be further developed in order to avoid narrow and functionalized handling.

Local and European politics are directly interwoven with each other. Europe's cities, municipalities, and counties are extremely important for the European Commission. In Germany, in addition to the EU and the federal and state governments, they build the fourth administrative level and, therefore, provide direct contact to citizens. Thus, the majority of European laws directly impact local life and more than half of all municipally relevant laws and regulations currently result from EU level. Thereby, the level of Europeanization in municipalities is very different: Many municipalities already have a European focus, are part of European networks (e.g. Eurocities) and benefit to a considerable extent from European funding opportunities.

Other municipalities (which are particularly characterized by a declining population, selective migration, and precarious financial situation) no longer are able to link financial consolidation with strategic steering towards Europe. They are often forced to limit child and youth welfare services to child day care and support in raising children. Thus, promoting the infrastructure for open youth work, youth social work, and international youth work is in danger. For these communities, Europe doesn't create win-win situations. In the field of child and youth welfare, they would need a

conceptual and financial support system, for example, in the form of counselling centres in the state youth welfare authorities and co-financing opportunities for European programmes through the support plans of the national and federal states.

Against this background it appears challenging how the various impulses coming from the European level will connect with community structures and local activities in order to strengthen and give more visibility.

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