

The European Youth Work Agenda for high-quality Youth Work – in Europe and in Germany

**Position paper by the Child and Youth Welfare Association – AGJ
(Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe)¹**

The Council of the EU and the Council of Europe are aspiring to advance Youth Work as part of a European Youth Work Agenda. The Child and Youth Welfare Association (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – AGJ) believes that the European Youth Work Agenda will make it possible to introduce effective stimuli from the European debate into the German child and youth welfare system. As the forum for German child and youth welfare, the AGJ also wants to incorporate the expertise of the German child and youth welfare system, in particular youth work and youth social work, into the development of the European Youth Work Agenda and thus bring its principles and quality standards into play on the European level.

In order to contribute to the success of this, in this position paper, the AGJ discusses the announced European Youth Work Agenda and maps out its demands with respect to its structuring and the European and German implementation process.

1. The European Youth Work Agenda - Introduction²

From July to December 2020, the Federal Republic of Germany will assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). Furthermore, from November 2020 to May 2021, Germany will preside over the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie,

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

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Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ) has promised that one focus of its activities will be the topic of youth. In terms of youth policy, since the EU Youth Strategy was recently passed in 2018 and the first Youth Strategy of the Federal Government in 2019, the second half of 2020 and beginning of 2021 promise to be exciting and eventful for European and German youth policy. With its focus on children, young people and young adults, Youth Work will be one of the topics in the spotlight. While both the Council of the EU and the Council of Europe have named the advancement of Youth Work one of their priorities, the discussion in Germany is currently more restrained. The Child and Youth Welfare Association (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – AGJ) is therefore full of expectations for the coming year and hopes that European discussions about Youth Work will be incorporated into the professional discourse in Germany and that Youth Work will be strengthened on a national level.

While recognising the variety and dissimilarity of the various organisational structures in the member states of the EU and the Council of Europe³, the term "Youth Work" originates from efforts on the European level to develop a common understanding of a sector, which deals with the work of, for and with young people. In the context of the German child and youth welfare system, this encompasses the areas of child and youth work⁴ and youth social work within the scope of §§11-13 SGB VIII.

The BMFSFJ intends to advance the development of a "European Youth Work Agenda" during the German presidency of the EU Council. The objective of the Agenda is to form a strategic framework for the further development and recognition of Youth Work in the EU and also to develop this beyond the EU in cooperation with the Council of Europe. In this document, the term European Youth Work Agenda refers to the interrelationship between the three Agenda components – the basic political principles including the decisions yet to be taken on the EU level, the existing decisions of the Council of Europe and a joint political agreement between both institutions, the deepening of the content and anchoring of the Agenda in the institutions and structures of Youth Work on the various levels surrounding the third European Youth Work Convention in 2020, and a subsequent joint and structured implementation process born by a wide range of stakeholders on a European level and in the respective member states. In the past, the AGJ has actively participated in the discussion about Youth Work⁵ and therefore welcomes this plan during the German presidency of the EU Council and the developments in the Council of Europe.

1.1 The current professional and political discourse on Youth Work

The BMFSFJ plan is embedded in the current developments on the subject of Youth Work on the European level, in both the EU as well as in the Council of Europe. In this context, the two European Youth Work Conventions, which took place in 2010 under the Belgian presidency of the EU Council and in 2015 under the Belgian presidency of the Council of Europe, are

³ Hereinafter "member states".

⁴ Hereinafter "youth work".

⁵ AGJ (2018): Europäische Jugendpolitik in einem sozialen Europa; AGJ (2019): Umsetzung europäischer Jugendpolitik in Deutschland ab 2019 – Nach vorne schauen und Weiterentwicklung fördern! AGJ-Positionspapier; AGJ (2015): Die europäischen Dimensionen in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – Relevanz und Potential europäischer Politik für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. AGJ-Diskussionspapier. [AGJ (2018): *European youth policy in a social Europe*; AGJ (2019): *Implementing European youth policy in Germany from 2019 – Looking ahead and promoting further development! AGJ position paper*; AGJ (2015): *The European dimensions in child and youth services – Relevance and potential European policy for child and youth services. AGJ discussion paper.*]

particularly significant.⁶ While the first Convention in 2010 focused on the heterogeneity of Youth Work on the level of concepts and practice in Europe, the objective of the second Convention in 2015 was to develop a European common ground for Youth Work. A further result of the second Convention in 2015 was the demand for a European Youth Work Agenda to further develop the concept of Youth Work on the European level, and its conversion into a concrete action plan. This objective was included in the EU Youth Strategy for 2021-2027, and the EU member states and the EU Commission were called upon to “*develop and implement a European Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. In order to unleash the full potential, it is necessary to integrate the expertise of youth representations, youth organisations, youth workers and researchers. Further synergies with the work carried out by the Council of Europe in this area should be encouraged.*”⁷ Following on from this, the Work Plan for the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021 stipulates that a European Youth Work Agenda be developed during the German presidency of the EU Council.

In addition to the Council of the EU, the Council of Europe also discussed the topic of Youth Work in depth, and in 2017 adopted a comprehensive recommendation on the further development of Youth Work.⁸ In its “*Youth Sector Strategy for 2030*” adopted in 2020, the Council of Europe also mapped out the expectations for strengthening Youth Work by “*recognizing and advancing youth work policies and practices by embedding youth work within youth policy frameworks, notably through the common European youth work agenda*”.⁹

1.2 The development of a strategic framework for the advancement of Youth Work

The aim of the announced European Youth Work Agenda is to strengthen the synergies between both institutions and to contribute jointly to a Europe-wide advancement of Youth Work. The third European Youth Work Convention in December 2020 will use the overlapping period of the German presidency of the Council of the EU and the German presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe to launch the implementation process of a European Youth Work Agenda.

The European Youth Work Agenda is intended to influence the implementation processes on a European level, as well as the processes in the respective contexts of the member states. Creating the following processes will be of central importance for the success and the influence of the European Youth Work Agenda. The desired political framework and resolutions on the European level, the additional funding and development of the sector at the third European Youth Work Convention and the, hopefully, subsequent processes in the member states, are of crucial importance in terms of youth policy.

⁶ With approx. 500 participants each, these European events currently represent the largest discussion forums for the further development of youth work on a European level. As a result of the discussions, each of the conventions made a declaration.

⁷ Council of the European Union (2018): Resolution on the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

⁸ Council of Europe (2017): Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work and explanatory memorandum. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017 at the 1287th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. CM/Rec(2017)4.

⁹ Council of Europe (2020): Resolution on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 January 2020 at the 1365th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. CM/Res(2020)2.

2. Youth work – a European concept with relevance for Germany

As part of the European professional debate about Youth Work, it has been possible to develop a common ground for Youth Work that describes the general principles and foundation of Youth Work in Europe without providing a conclusive definition of Youth Work.¹⁰

On the European level, the term 'Youth Work' encompasses a variety of usually group-related activities of and for young people in the extracurricular environment, in leisure, in participation and volunteering, and in activities for helping with life management.¹¹ Both voluntary and full-time employees in the Youth Work sector (youth workers, youth leaders, etc.) offer and perform youth work services. Together with stakeholders from specialist policy areas and science, the field is undergoing constant development.

The European term Youth Work does not have quite the same meaning as the German term "Jugendarbeit" as defined in §11 SGB VIII, as it also includes a spectrum of social, cultural and educational or general pedagogical activities that are performed by, for and with young people in youth education settings. The differentiated German child and youth welfare system covers open child and youth work, European and international youth work, municipal youth work, youth association work, youth education work and youth social work, including school social work and youth employment assistance as defined by §§11-13 SGB VIII, which all come under the umbrella term "Youth Work". Furthermore, in other member states, specified services are included under "Youth Work" for example, which in Germany are classified as social services or youth resocialisation.

Following on from the two European Youth Work Conventions and the current professional debates on the European level, it can be said that a common ground for Youth Work has been developed in the professional discourse. In 2017, the Council of Europe stated accordingly that: "*Despite different traditions and definitions, there is a common understanding that the primary function of youth work is to motivate and support young people to find and pursue constructive pathways in life, thus contributing to their personal and social development and to society at large*".¹²

According to this, the aim of Youth Work is to empower young people to self-determination and to stimulate and lead them to joint social responsibility and to social participation. Furthermore, Youth Work is also associated with the hope of achieving societal objectives in the sense of an inclusive, committed and tolerant society. Youth work is a concept based on democratic and rights-based values, which supports young people on their way to becoming active citizens. "Critical youth citizenship" represents a new overarching concept in this regard.¹³ Non-formal and informal education foster the skills of self-determination, self-confident development and critical thinking among young people. Central for the concept of Youth Work is its fundamental orientation towards the interests, ideas, experiences and needs

¹⁰ See: Hofmann-van de Poll/ Pelzer/ Riedle (i.E.): The European Discussion on Youth Work 2015-2020; Williamson (2019): Cornerstone Challenges for European Youth Work and Youth Work in Europe. Making the Connections and Bridging the Gaps. Some preparatory thoughts for planning the 3rd European Youth Work Convention and implementing the European Youth Work Agenda.

¹¹ Thimmel (i.E.): Jugendbildungsarbeit in Europa. In: Bollweg/ Buchna/ Coelen/ Otto (Pub.): Handbuch Ganztagsbildung. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. p. 1219 -1232.

¹² Council of Europe (2017): Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work and explanatory memorandum. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017 at the 1287th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. CM/Rec(2017)4.

¹³ Ohana (2019): What's politics got to do with it? European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship.

of the young people. Free spaces available to be shaped by the youth to shape oneself, access to the private and volunteer-based youth work services on offer and the mutual respect between young people and adults play an essential role in this respect. Insofar as Youth Work places the needs of young people centre stage, Youth Work also takes on the function of mediating and representing the interests of young people within society and in relation to the interests of economic stakeholders and policy-makers, and thus strengthens the social significance of the perspectives of young people. Despite the changing socially relevant objectives of Youth Work, the personal development and enabling of children, youth and young adults is always in the front. This means that objectives related to the employment market or education may almost certainly cover an aspect of Youth Work, although Youth Work should not be captured by this.

3. Designing the European Youth Work Agenda – a strategic framework for the development of Youth Work

The European Youth Work Agenda is a project that is intended to culminate in a multi-year implementation process on a European, national, regional and municipal level, and which is expected to mould the Youth Work sector. In order to meet these high expectations, the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including the young people themselves, in the development and implementation of the Agenda is essential.

As a relevant stakeholder in child and youth welfare in Germany, the AGJ would like to contribute to the success of this project. The AGJ will therefore map out below its requirements and expectations for the development process of the Agenda, for its objectives and for the content of the European Youth Work Agenda.

3.1 Requirements for the development process of the European Youth Work Agenda

The AGJ attaches great importance to the fact that the European Youth Work Agenda will be developed with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, politics and research on the various levels, and young people. The AGJ therefore takes a positive view of the dialogue process launched in December 2019 in Germany for the German presidency of the EU Council and points out that the discussion results must be taken into consideration in a transparent process within the Agenda's development process. Comparable processes are also desirable in other member states. Furthermore, suitable participation processes for the involvement of young people must be set up.

The European Youth Work Agenda is a mutual ambition of both the EU and the Council of Europe. Both institutions should use strong political decisions to commit themselves to promoting the Youth Work sector within the context of a European Youth Work Agenda, and likewise use their respective means to accelerate its implementation within their respective areas of responsibility. A mutual agreement or declaration of intent would emphasise a cooperative approach.

3.2 The objectives of the European Youth Work Agenda

In the view of the AGJ, the European Youth Work Agenda, while observing and taking into consideration the variety of Youth Work¹⁴, should pursue three main objectives:

1. The Agenda should create a solid foundation for Youth Work in Europe. This includes further developing and consolidating the common ground of Youth Work in Europe. Building on the results of the first two European Youth Work Conventions and the general professional debate, common principles for high-quality Youth Work must now be found and their implementation supported. In doing so, the diversity of Youth Work in Europe must be given sufficient consideration.
2. The European Youth Work Agenda should help strengthen the Youth Work sector in Europe. The advancement and further development of the three sub-areas of Youth Work – youth work practice, youth work policy and youth work research – including their interrelationships, play a particular role in this regard.
3. The European Youth Work Agenda should offer a strategic framework for the further development of high-quality Youth Work in Europe, which will contribute to the joint advancement and expansion of Youth Work. Innovative methods and approaches must now be looked at and new topics considered.

During the drafting of the European Youth Work Agenda, the AGJ furthermore regards the orientation on the interests of the target group, namely young people, and their participation in the process as the highest priority.

3.3 Contents of the European Youth Work Agenda

With respect to the substantive design of the European Youth Work Agenda, the AGJ considers the following points particularly relevant:

➤ Improving the structures and resources for Youth Work

The European Youth Work Agenda should contribute to establishing sustainable structures for Youth Work, which support the substantive and institutional anchoring of the youth work sector on all levels and develop the municipal infrastructure of Youth Work. This requires the provision of adequate and sustainable resources on all levels (financial resources, personnel, spaces, enabling structures, etc.). The youth work structures must therefore be designed so as to ensure that the youth work sector contains sufficient freedom and autonomy for its work. Financial resources for the youth work sector should be structurally anchored and secure in the long term, instead of only being granted in the form of project financing. In such instances, the conditions for awarding financial resources must be transparent and their receipt as unbureaucratic as possible.

It is also of key importance that Youth Work is not exploited for other objectives – be this through eligibility conditions or other means. Although Youth Work can help combat societal challenges (e.g. youth unemployment, radicalisation or the promotion of physical health), these or other challenges must not be its primary aim. Instead, the enabling, self-determination and development of young people must always have priority.

¹⁴ European Youth Work Convention (2010): Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention.

Furthermore, the AGJ believes that it is worthwhile taking into consideration the principles of Youth Work in line with the German understanding in the European Youth Work Agenda. Over and above the basic principles already stated in the common ground of Youth Work above, these principles encompass protection of the principle of subsidiarity, protection of the plurality of values, protection of provider autonomy and provider plurality, and the plurality of youth organisations, which is supported in Germany and anchored in its laws.¹⁵

➤ Strengthening the visibility and recognition of Youth Work

In addition to structural and financial resources, the youth work sector in all member states requires greater visibility within child and youth welfare, research, science and politics. In this respect it is expedient to name the instruments in the European Youth Work Agenda, to facilitate visibility on the European level and within the individual states in the three areas of practice, research and policy, and to develop an appropriate implementation strategy.

Within the respective systems of working practices with young people in the member states, a stronger visualisation of Youth Work is achieved by youth work stakeholders firstly being informed about the Youth Work sector, secondly conducting active public relations above and beyond the Youth Work sector and thirdly being brought together on all levels to promote community building. Furthermore, the competencies of youth workers must be recognised, including those from non-formal and informal learning settings. In order to achieve greater visibility for the youth work sector, it is likewise the task of the youth work community to better perceive and present to others their own self-image as a socio-political stakeholder.

Research can contribute to greater visibility of Youth Work by placing a greater focus on the sector and the associated questions and topics, and publishing research results. A further function is the collection and compilation of research results and provision of this knowledge.

Policy-makers can also help make Youth Work more visible by firstly strengthening this sector structurally and financially on all levels, secondly offering youth work stakeholders on all levels opportunities to network, thirdly providing the sector with political recognition and support, and fourthly organising youth participation in political processes which is based on the model of a jointly and equally managed structure (e.g. the co-management in the youth sector in the Council of Europe) when possible.

➤ Fostering the exchange of practical experience

In order to advance the youth work sector over and above this, it is essential and helpful to expand the exchange of practical experience of youth work stakeholders on all levels. This requires the creation and consolidation of appropriate structures for cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders on all levels.

On the European level, one action is to continue with the European Youth Work Conventions on a regular basis. Another is to support the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda and the further development of the sector in Europe through additional physical and

¹⁵ In Germany, public and non-statutory child and youth welfare organisations work together in a partnership. While the public child and youth welfare is overall responsible, it has to give priority to the services offered by non-statutory organisations, where legally possible (principle of subsidiarity). Non-statutory organisations can work autonomously according to their values and philosophy. These principles are defined in the social code (SGB VIII).

digital platforms for youth work stakeholders. Within the scope of such platforms it is possible, among other things, to exchange concepts, strategies and good practice, as well as opportunities for youth workers to obtain youth work qualifications and to further develop the youth work sector in this way.

It is also now necessary to strengthen peer-learning methods in order to facilitate the exchange of practical experience between youth work stakeholders from the various states and thus further develop the Youth Work sector.

➤ Strengthening the skills training of youth workers

Developing competencies and skills of youth workers is of central importance for the quality and recognition of Youth Work. The common ground of Youth Work illustrates that high demands are placed on it. In order to do this justice, youth workers, whether on a full-time or voluntary basis, must have specific competencies. This requires systems for training which provide a sufficient amount of professional, high-quality support and skills training for Youth Work, and – taking into consideration the specific needs and conditions in the respective member states – the possibility of offering training for professional employment in the youth work sector. This is the case in many, but not all, states.¹⁶

On the one hand, it is possible to develop qualifications systems by improving financial structures, which should be established and structurally secured as part of the European Youth Work Agenda. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen and develop the training as part of formal educational qualifications, and to provide a reliable range of advanced and further training options in non-formal and informal learning settings.

In order to develop and implement a European Youth Work Agenda and strengthen the European youth work community, it would also be helpful to incorporate learning content on Europe, European and international Youth Work and European funding programmes within the national curricula.

➤ Establishing Youth Work policy as a part of youth policy

High-quality Youth Work must – as an integral part of youth policy – be supported by an effective youth work policy. As already described in the section on structures and resources, the youth work sector must also be given a place in youth policy and become an integral part of its existing structures. In this regard, Youth Work must now be recognised as a central and independent component of youth policy.

In order to drive forward the further development of the Youth Work sector in a sustainable manner and also be able to resolve structural problem areas, it is necessary to develop an explicit youth work policy as part of a goal-oriented youth policy on the European level. This requires that all political levels (municipal, regional, national, European and even possibly international) are always taken into consideration together. For example, when implementing the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Youth Goals contained therein, a stringent implementation would be desirable, which has been thought through from the European level, across national level all the way down to the municipal level. The same applies to the implementation of the

¹⁶ O'Donovan/ Cairns/ Sousa/ Valcheva (2018): Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers. Report. Publisher and editor: Youth Partnership.

“Youth Sector Strategy 2030” of the Council of Europe, which should be conducted in the same manner across all political levels.

When introducing a common policy area such as the youth work policy, it is necessary to ensure that it is furnished with effective common decision-making bodies and formats. It is therefore necessary to ensure the participative inclusion of young people and other relevant stakeholders along the entire political policy-formation and decision-making process and in all decisions.

➤ Fostering youth work research and science in the context of youth (welfare) research

Research and science must also be embraced more seriously by the youth work sector. Initial publications are already available. To this end, the field of Youth Work must be expanded and boosted in research and science as part of the European Youth Work Agenda. The object of research in this instance is the youth work sector across all levels (e.g. various types of Youth Work, the values associated with Youth Work and the effects and impacts of Youth Work) using a variety of methods. Potential future topics for research include youth work concepts and practice in Europe, a comparative youth work research project and a European non-formal education research project. The (further) development of youth work theory should also be given greater focus in research.

Furthermore, the task of youth work research should contribute to a scientific and professional reflection on the youth work sector and to a science-based development. There is a considerable lack of information on and an overview of the comprehensive practice and concepts in the youth work sector in Europe, and continuous monitoring, as well as analysis of the data on the developments and challenges of this field of work.

4. European process – requirements for successful implementation at the European level

The main opportunity of the European Youth Work Agenda is to further enhance the value of Youth Work for enabling young people and to create the prerequisites for its further development. This potential must now be used to achieve sustainable effects. A comprehensive European Youth Work Agenda, as outlined above, can only then contribute to the strengthening of Youth Work if it is supported by implementation processes on both a European level and in the member states. The European process is key to determining how influential the Agenda will be. The AGJ therefore supports a structured and integrated approach to shaping the process and ensuring the participation of young people, child and youth welfare, the professional public, and science and research. New structures must now be established, existing structures consolidated and the tailwind of the Agenda used together in an active and constructive manner.

In the following section, the AGJ highlights the relevance of a European process for the youth work development process in the respective member states and lists the success factors which must be fulfilled to successfully implement the European Youth Work Agenda.

4.1 The relevance of the European process

In the youth sector, the function of the Council of the EU – with the exception of the legislative measures of the EU funding programmes – comprises support, coordination and complementary measures, which have no binding effect on the member states. The objectives, principles and priorities of this collaboration will each be agreed upon by the Council of the EU for a fixed period, and included in national contexts on a voluntary basis. For the European Commission, the decisions of the Council of the EU are guiding principles and they are implemented with its support. The focus of the content of the EU youth programme Erasmus+ will thus be significantly influenced by the decisions of the EU Council. In comparison to the EU, the decision-making powers of the Council of Europe are significantly more restricted and in the youth sector they are only effective on the level of recommendations and suggestions. With its youth centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, it has the possibility of driving forward specific actions and developments. With the collaboration in the “Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth” (Youth Partnership) and the resulting workshops and research projects on Youth Work, the EU Commission and the Council of Europe set clear priorities in the European youth work sector.

Building on the previously described common ground of Youth Work, the European Youth Work Agenda can be used to initiate a common development process on the European level. The European Youth Work sector can profit from a strategic framework through the European Youth Work Agenda, in that the interrelationship between professional debate, resources and recognition is strengthened conceptually. In addition to further broadening and establishing the common ground of Youth Work, the mutual exchange of information and knowledge can transfer ideas and concepts on the national, regional and local level. This can stimulate the further development of youth work policy, practice and research that is aligned to the needs of the respective levels.

The examination of Youth Work on a European level increases awareness and visibility of the topic in the individual member states. The AGJ hereby not only wants the European Youth Work Agenda to be understood as a discussion stimulus, but also as a call to action for each of the member states. The European Youth Work Agenda should be recognised as part of the implementation process of the EU Youth Strategy and the work, coordination and reporting tools of the EU Youth Strategy – e.g. the Future National Activity Planner (FNAP) and the EU Youth Report – used to implement the European Youth Work Agenda.

The AGJ would also like to use this opportunity to request that the BMFSFJ, as the initiator of the development of the European Youth Work Agenda, take responsibility during the German presidency of the EU Council and presidency of the Council of Europe for the Agenda process in Europe and in Germany and follow the implications of the Agenda in order to deliver specific action plans as part of the Youth Strategy of the Federal Government, which will lead to a reassessment of the youth work sector and its sub-areas in Germany. The further development of Youth Work must now become a focus of implementing the EU Youth Strategy and an active part of the Youth Strategy of the Federal Government.

4.2 Requirements of the European implementation process

The European process for implementing the European Youth Work Agenda will begin during the time frame of the German presidency of the EU Council with the European Youth Work Convention as the kickoff event in December 2020. In order to contribute to the success of the

implementation process of the European Youth Work Agenda and to support the European Youth Work Agenda in the unfolding of its potential, the AGJ will map out below the requirements for an effective implementation process on a European level.

The European Youth Work Convention, which is intended to be a European event in Germany, should be used as a discussion forum for the further structuring and development of Youth Work in Europe and to launch the implementation of the Agenda. In order for this to succeed, it is necessary to include the key stakeholders from policy-makers, science and practice, who should come from both the youth department, as well as all policy areas in the sense of it being a cross-sectoral task. With such an exemplary launch, the implementation process will begin on both a European and a national level.

In order to achieve a sustainable process, establishing new implementation structures on a European level is of key importance. Facilitating the exchange between the various stakeholders from practice, politics and science, as well as young people, will require reliable, continuous structures. This exchange can be facilitated in the form of regular conferences, such as the European Academy on Youth Work, the European Youth Work Convention, the German Child and Youth Welfare Congress, and the Federal Congress on Child and Youth Work. At the same time, new exchange formats are required, which will also integrate young people within the process to an even greater degree. A fourth European Youth Work Convention in 2025 would be appropriate for evaluating the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda achieved up to that point. In the digital space, online platforms are conceivable where the stakeholders come into contact with one another, initiate dialogues, exchange practical examples and knowledge about Youth Work, and work together to identify challenges.

Supporting the respective implementation processes on the member state level requires structures that will be concomitant, advisory and supportive. This is particularly relevant in those member states in which Youth Work is only in its infancy or, as is the case in Germany, the intention is to create a stronger tie between individual fields of work and the differentiated sub-areas.

The long-term, sustainable implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda also requires continuous monitoring and regular evaluation of the results of the implementation process on both the European and member state levels. Stakeholders from youth work practice, research and policy should all be involved in the joint evaluation process.

The expansion of a joint knowledge base on Youth Work should also be part of the implementation process, as a component of youth work research described above. This includes a systematic comparison of the respective national youth work concepts. It also includes raising the level of knowledge on modes of operation, appropriate methods and the competencies required of youth workers in order to be able to make empirically based statements. Furthermore, developments in policy, practice and research in the Youth Work sector must now be pursued, and the quality of Youth Work further developed on a scientific basis.

Throughout the entire process, on both a European level and member state level, the inclusion of and orientation towards the interests and circumstances of young people must take centre stage. This requires the creation of appropriate participation mechanisms which will allow young people to actually exert influence.

In order to support the created implementation structures, the youth work community should initiate a cross-sector discourse on the values and recognition of Youth Work. A European discourse on Youth Work can also bring new European weight to the discussion on a national

level. As part of any strategic further development of Youth Work on a European level, the youth work community must therefore also regard itself as a representation of interests with regard to the development in the respective states and actively support the discourse on all political levels.

4.3 Collaboration between the Council of Europe and the EU

One of the greatest potentials of the European Youth Work Agenda is the more in-depth cooperation between the youth sectors of the EU and the Council of Europe. The European Youth Work Agenda should lead to the EU and the Council of Europe continuing to ensure in the long term on the European level the strengthening and further development of Youth Work in Europe through a sustainable and strategically aligned policy in their respective areas of competence and as part of common initiatives. Establishing a joint European Centre for Youth Work Development as a central coordination office and continuing the cooperation of the Youth Partnership could be helpful in this regard. Adopting the principle of the co-management system, which up until now has formed the basis of the successful cooperation in the youth sector in the Council of Europe with civil society, should be taken into account in the further development of Youth Work within the context of the EU.

5. The implementation process in Germany – requirements and expectations

The individual fields of Youth Work – largely youth work and youth social work – have a long tradition in Germany and, in contrast to many member states, they are statutory and institutionally organised. Therefore, when it comes to implementing the European Youth Work Agenda in Germany, the aim cannot be to develop the youth work sector from scratch or to restructure it comprehensively. Rather, the value of the European Youth Work Agenda for German child and youth welfare lies in driving the European debate towards strengthening and developing the existing structures and creating a better network among the individual fields of work.

5.1 Requirements of the implementation process in Germany

To successfully implement the Agenda in Germany it is necessary to observe the same requirements as for the European process. This needs binding structures, institutionalised forms of exchange between the European, federal, state and municipal levels, and between the relevant stakeholders, the advancement and connection of research and science to Youth Work and the transfer of this into practice and policy, and orientation to the needs of young people.

Broad participation of the stakeholders of the child and youth welfare must be ensured in all phases of the Agenda creation process and its implementation, as must the subsequent participation of young people. This is also important because the German (professional) public is primarily able to participate in shaping the European process by shaping the process in Germany. In the sense of bottom-up logic, professional knowledge of youth workers in Germany flows via an open process into the European process. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure the transfer of the European discussion to Germany and into the German debates and discourses.

As outlined above, one of the objectives associated with the European Youth Work Agenda is to strengthen the recognition of Youth Work in the German context. In order to develop this effect, the European discourse on Youth Work must be embedded in the German discourse.

This will make it possible to use synergies and transmit a strong and consistent picture. This will allow the European concept of Youth Work to gain a foothold in Germany and enrich the debates about European youth policy in this country.

Within the meaning of the principle of subsidiarity, the responsibility for the implementation process of the European Youth Work Agenda lies both with the BMFSFJ and with the federal states, municipalities and private organisations. As the designer of the youth policy of the Federal Government, the BMFSFJ – in close collaboration with the other federal ministries – bears the responsibility for embedding the European Youth Work Agenda in the Youth Strategy of the Federal Government. The European Youth Work Agenda is a key component of the EU Youth Strategy and should also incorporate this position in the Youth Strategy of the Federal Government. In addition to the federal level, the federal states and the municipalities are requested to take on the responsibility for implementing the European Youth Work Agenda and making it an impetus for further developing Youth Work in the regions and municipalities. On a regional and municipal level, too, it is necessary to initiate concrete implementation processes and define the specific local role of the European Youth Work Agenda.

In addition to the governmental stakeholders, the non-governmental stakeholders will also be responsible for shaping Youth Work. This is addressed at, among others, the youth associations and youth umbrella organisations, youth work organisations, youth social work organisations and youth education organisations, private organisations and other civic stakeholders, along with science and research. They are called upon to participate actively and constructively in the youth work debate and to accept the European Youth Work Agenda as support for strengthening the field. This concerns both the active shaping of Youth Work as well as being open to European stimuli for their own work. Even though Germany has a long tradition of youth work and youth social work, European stimuli can contribute to diversification, cooperation and the qualified further development of the field.

The implementation processes of the European Youth Work Agenda depend on having sufficient funding. This must be comprehensive, adequate and structurally secured, so that the quantity and quality of Youth Work does not depend on the cash flow of the respective municipality and so that an equivalence in living conditions can be achieved. Within the German context, this includes to strengthen structural funding of youth work and youth social work on all administrative levels – in contrast to the often present project funding. A major factor in this respect is increasing the federal Child and Youth Plan (Kinder- und Jugendplan des Bundes), and the corresponding funding plans on a federal state level in all fields of action.

Discourses, debates and exchanges require spaces in which to take place. It is therefore important that the youth work discourse on a German level is incorporated in professional events and discussed in context with the German debate. Particularly suitable for this purpose will be the third Bundeskongress Kinder- und Jugendarbeit (Federal Congress for Child and Youth Work) in September 2020 in Nuremberg, and the Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendhilfetag (German Child and Youth Welfare Congress) in May 2021 in Essen. Apart from these major events, the concept of Youth Work can also be incorporated in smaller, more local conferences and congresses and understood to be a key component of the debate about youth work and youth social work.

5.2 Further developing the content of Youth Work in Germany

The AGJ demands of the European Youth Work Agenda and subsequent processes that, in addition to developing the general conditions and structures, the content is also developed further. As a starting point, a joint assessment of the current situation and the challenges faced by Youth Work in Germany would be helpful and necessary. This includes the various services, the variety of fields of action and the content orientation of the respective youth work services. Reviewing the current situation can be regarded as an opportunity to strategically establish Youth Work in Germany and enable a targeted further development, without damaging the subsidiarity principle or the requirement for a partnership approach. Subject to the findings of such a joint assessment of the current situation, the AGJ currently considers, among others, the following topics relevant.

The topic of training for youth workers takes up considerable space in the European context. In the national context, however, the debate about qualifications and the need for skilled professionals concentrates principally on other fields in child and youth welfare, in particular on the field of early care and education and social work. As part of a national process, a public discourse on this topic should be strengthened, which picks up on the European debate, prepares competence profiles and further develops curricula in universities and training institutions. The concept of Youth Work should be included in these amended curricula. In the context of the professionalisation and enhancement of this sector, this likewise includes the fields of research and teaching, and the recognition of volunteer workers.

An additional topic is anchoring Youth Work in rural areas.¹⁷ Adapting the development of Youth Work to the respective areas is just as necessary as integrating Youth Work in the regional development plans.

In order to embed Youth Work within the national discourse, it is necessary to europeanise and internationalise youth work and youth social work. International and European youth work services must become a stronger component of municipal and local youth welfare services than they have been up until now. This requires municipalities and local providers to be more aware of their responsibility and ability to shape the sector, and to allow young people to gain European experiences.¹⁸ Meetings between European professionals can enable the incorporation of experiences from other youth work models in the German context.

Youth Work is considered part of the field of non-formal and informal education. When strengthening and further developing the youth work sector is discussed, it also touches on the debate about education. In its function as a voluntary component of the education system that is orientated towards the interests of young people and to enabling their independence, Youth Work can initiate a debate about the role of Youth Work and non-formal and informal education in the educational system. In this respect, the task and remit of Youth Work must now be agreed upon and its role in overcoming societal challenges discussed. It is also an opportunity to support the recognition of non-formal and informal education and highlight its significance for society.

¹⁷ AGJ (2019): "Anders als Ihr denkt!" Ländliche Räume als Gestaltungsaufgabe für die Sozialen Dienste und erzieherischen Hilfen. AGJ Position Paper. [*"Different to what you think!" Rural areas as a development task for social services and educational support. AGJ position paper.*]

¹⁸ AGJ (2019): Politisch und engagiert: Für eine Stärkung der europäischen Idee in der lokalen Kinder- und Jugendarbeit. AGJ Recommendations. [*AGJ (2019): Political and involved: strengthening the European idea in local child and youth work. AGJ recommendations.*]

5.3 The role the AGJ will play in the advancement of Youth Work

As the forum and network for child and youth welfare in Germany, the AGJ wants to continue to play a part in the process of further developing Youth Work and use its role to increase European stimuli in the structures of child and youth welfare and to help the youth work sector gain visibility. Current developments and debates on the European level can be introduced via the AGJ and fed into the national professional discourse. As a representative of the interests of German child and youth welfare, the AGJ would similarly like to strengthen the voice of German child and youth welfare in the European discourse and continuously support the subsequent development and implementation processes of the European Youth Work Agenda.

As an interface between policy-makers and child and youth welfare, the AGJ also considers it its duty to speak out in favour of the advancement and strengthening of Youth Work in the political arena. The AGJ has already pointed out that Youth Work in Germany is under financial pressure and increasingly also under political pressure.¹⁹

The AGJ will continue to campaign for this area in the future. With this position paper, it is introducing the prospects of German child and youth welfare into the development process of the European Youth Work Agenda. The subsequent processes while preparing for and during the German presidency of the EU Council will be tracked in depth by the AGJ panel of experts on "Child and Youth (Welfare) Policy in Europe" and current developments fed into the child and youth welfare structures. As part of the AGJ panel of experts on "youth issues", in 2020, the AGJ will also be dealing in depth with youth social work, and as part of an event at the Federal Congress on Child and Youth Work with the topic "Inclusion in child and youth work". In 2021, the AGJ will continue to focus on the topic of Youth Work at the 17th German Child and Youth Welfare Congress.

6. Summary of the expectations and requirements

In order to contribute to a successful further development of Youth Work on the European level and in Germany, the European Youth Work Agenda must, in the opinion of the AGJ, in summary meet the following expectations. It generally applies in this respect that all relevant stakeholders, including young people, must be included in all phases of the development and implementation of the Agenda on a European level and in Germany, and that their perspectives are taken into consideration:

The AGJ expects from the European Youth Work Agenda that:

- In all phases of the development and implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda there will be close and cooperative collaboration between the Council of Europe and the EU.
- A strategic framework for the further development of high-quality Youth Work in Europe will be developed, which will enable the ambitious further development of the youth work sector.
- The youth work structures and resources will be strengthened and sufficient funding and a reliable financial framework ensured.
- The visibility and recognition of Youth Work will be increased and promoted with suitable measures.

¹⁹ AGJ (2017): Politische Bildung junger Menschen – ein zentraler Auftrag für die Jugendarbeit. AGJ Position Paper. [*Civic education of young people – a central remit for youth work. AGJ position paper.*]

- The opportunities for the exchange of practical experience on all levels will be improved and long-term exchange platforms implemented.
- The training and qualification of youth workers will be strengthened and expanded.
- Youth work policy will be recognised as an independent and central component of youth policy and embedded in the youth strategies of the respective member states.
- Youth work research and theory will be promoted and implemented as an independent field of research in the context of youth (welfare) research.

The AGJ expects from the European process that:

- The member states will be called upon to follow the specific actions of the European Youth Work Agenda and to regard them as an integral component of the EU Youth Strategy.
- New and sustainable implementation structures will be established for the Agenda on a European level.
- Suitable participation instruments will be developed to allow the inclusion of the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders.
- A cross-sector discourse will be initiated on a European level on the values and recognition of Youth Work.

The AGJ expects from the implementation process in Germany that:

- Youth Work will be systematically incorporated in the German youth policy context and the European Youth Work Agenda embedded in the Youth Strategy of the Federal Government.
- The European discourse on Youth Work will be integrated in the German discourse.
- Specific implementation processes will be initiated on a regional and municipal level, and the role of the Agenda determined in the respective municipalities.
- The youth work stakeholders in Germany will accept their responsibility to actively participate in the youth work debate.
- Youth Work will be provided with comprehensive, adequate and structurally secured funding.
- International and national events will be used to further develop Youth Work.
- An analysis of the current situation and challenges facing Youth Work in Germany will be undertaken and used as the starting point for further developing Youth Work strategically.
- There will be a debate about the training and qualification of youth workers and this field developed further.
- Youth Work in rural areas will receive systematic support and be incorporated in the regional development plan.
- There will be an understanding on the role of Youth Work in the context of education and other societal challenges.

Board of the Child and Youth Welfare Association - AGJ (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe)

Berlin, 5th/6th March 2020