



# CALL FOR ACTION

## HELP YOUTH WORK RECOVER



## THE CONTEXT OF THIS CALL FOR ACTION

In June 2022, the *Youth Work Recovery Conference* brought policy, practice and research together to discuss the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and crisis on the field of youth work, and its respective actors, across Europe.

The *Youth Work Recovery Conference* explored the evidence on the needs for support of youth work in Europe, on the one hand, and the available support options for youth work in Europe, on the other hand. It identified key gaps in the obtainable support measures, as well as specific and concrete support mechanisms needed in addition to existing ones.

The more than 100 attendees of the *Youth Work Recovery Conference* formulated clear calls for action. In a group of colleagues active in European youth work, we have distilled five core actions to help European youth work through and beyond recovery.

### **Here is what [you](#) can do to help European youth work to recover:**

1. Ensure access of youth work to recovery funds
2. Support peer mental health services for young people
3. Bolster digital skills and infrastructures in youth work
4. Reform and sustain youth work funding
5. Implement the European Youth Work Agenda

On the following pages, these five core actions are introduced in some more detail – and it goes without saying that we are gladly available to discuss their operationalisation with you at any time.

Sincerely yours,



*Irmeli Karhio*  
RAY Network Coordination



*Carmen Teubl*  
RAY Network Coordination



*Andreas Karsten*  
RAY Research Coordination

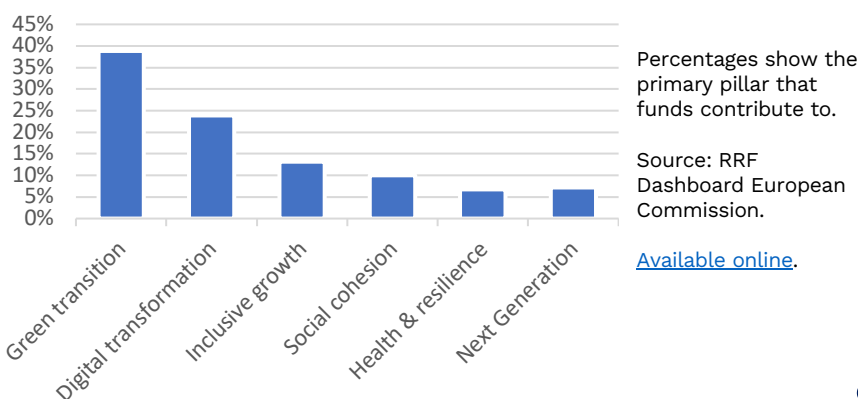
**ACTION 1**

**ENSURE ACCESS OF YOUTH WORK  
TO RECOVERY FUNDS & PROGRAMMES**

There is an urgent need to set up low-threshold resilience funds for youth work. The majority of youth work structures and networks have little or no access to current pandemic recovery programmes. Youth work is falling through the cracks.

Funds that contribute to the pillar “Policies for the next generation” of the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF)	<b>11,3%</b>
Funds that contribute to the RRF pillar “Policies for the next generation” as the primary pillar of impact	<b>7,2%</b>
Country with the highest share of national measures with a focus on children and young people (France)	<b>14,6%</b>
Country with the lowest share of national measures with a focus on children and young people (Estonia)	<b>2,2%</b>

**The six RRF pillars**



- A. The main instrument of the EU – the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) – has six pillars. One of them, “Policies for the next generation”, is dedicated to children and young people.
- B. The pillar is the smallest of all six pillars, and the majority of the actions, milestones and targets focus on formal education and employment.
- C. In a survey conducted in summer 2022, 84% of youth work organisations and networks said they have no access to any kind of recovery funding, whether European or national or local.
- D. The main challenges are the foci of the current recovery funds, which do not extend to youth work, and to a lesser extent the eligibility of youth work’s occasionally informal structures.

**Key impact of this action**

Low-threshold resilience funds will, with comparatively little effort and investment,

- ensure that youth work has access to some recovery funding,
- fix an unintentional omission of the existing recovery instruments,
- enable youth work to continue supporting young people through recovery.

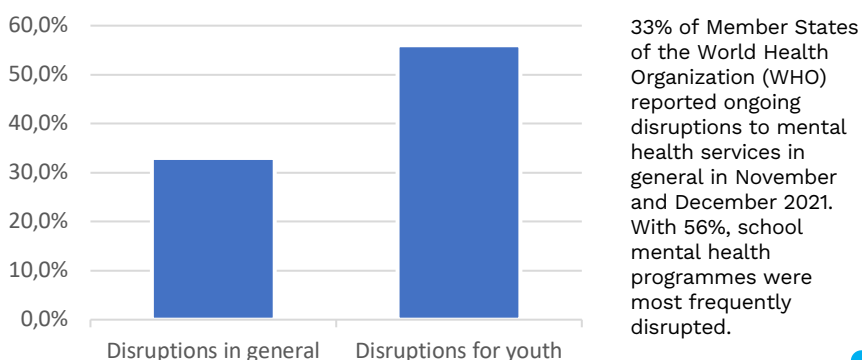
## **ACTION 2**

# **SUPPORT PEER MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people, and youth workers, need easily accessible mental health support channels that are familiar with how young people, and youth workers, experience this pandemic – and how these experiences differ across backgrounds and contexts.

Anxiety disorders among men (18-29) in Belgium in March 2020	<b>22%</b>
Anxiety disorders among women (18-29) in Belgium in March 2020	<b>33%</b>
Anxiety disorders among men (18-29) in Belgium in December 2021	<b>26%</b>
Anxiety disorders among women (18-29) in Belgium in December 2021	<b>46%</b>
Anxiety disorders among men (65+) in Belgium in December 2021	<b>9%</b>
Anxiety disorders among women (65+) in Belgium in December 2021	<b>16%</b>

### **Ongoing disruptions to mental health services**



- Pandemics have larger effects on children and young people, compared to other age groups. The World Health Organization (WHO) speaks of a “youth-specific mental health crisis.”
- Stress, anxiety, and depression all have strong gendered and socio-economic dimensions.
- Access to mental health support has been extremely patchy for young people, and mostly non-existent for youth workers, already before the pandemic. Where it existed, it has been heavily disrupted.
- Peer-support channels have proven particularly effective and are easy and cheap to replicate. Young people, and youth workers, can operate support channels in tandem with and be trained by mental health professionals.

## **Key impact of this action**

Easily accessible mental health support will, inexpensively and efficiently,

- help bridge the ongoing interruptions to existing mental health support,
- involve young people and youth workers in supporting their peers,
- bring a gendered response to a heavily gendered challenge.

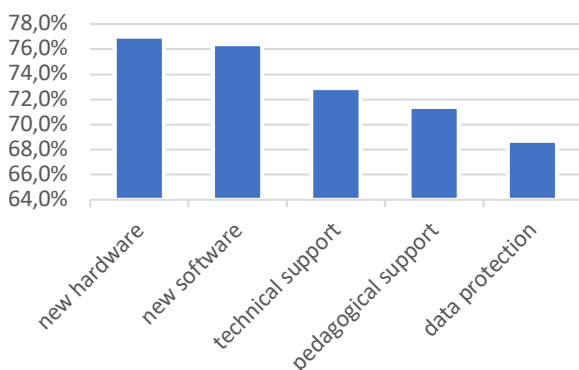
**ACTION 3**

**BOLSTER DIGITAL SKILLS AND INFRASTRUCTURES IN YOUTH WORK**

Youth work needs wide-ranging structural and educational support for thoughtful digitalisation. Youth work was broadly overstrained with the digital challenges during the pandemic, and still lacks an authentic online voice and pedagogy.

Youth workers who say that they were able to transfer all of their youth work into online settings	<b>5,5%</b>
Youth workers who say that they were able to transfer 2/3 or more of their youth work into online settings	<b>28,8%</b>
Youth workers who say that they were able to transfer between 1/3 and 2/3 of their youth work into online settings	<b>31,3%</b>
Youth workers who say that they were able to transfer 1/3 or less of their youth work into online settings	<b>31,9%</b>

**Youth workers could use distinct help with**



In a survey of youth workers across Europe in the winter of 2020/2021, the RAY Network asked what kinds of support youth workers could use for their digitalisation efforts.

- A. The vast majority of youth workers struggled with the transfer of their youth work formats into the digital realm during the pandemic.
- B. This is not a challenge caused by the pandemic, but enflamed by it. Youth work has needed support to develop a distinct online voice and pedagogy for a long time.
- C. Youth workers need support with the purchase of adequate hardware and software, with their setup and installation, and with developing sound pedagogical approaches for using them.
- D. There are great examples of digital youth work that can be used as a starting point. Youth work needs resources to scale this up across contexts and countries.

**Key impact of this action**

Digital scaling programmes for youth work will, with sufficient resources,

- tackle a long-standing challenge of youth work across Europe,
- help youth work to develop a distinct online voice and pedagogy,
- ensure that youth work formats remain accessible and successful.

## **ACTION 4**

# **REFORM AND SUSTAIN YOUTH WORK FUNDING**

Youth work urgently needs a reform of its funding. The pandemic has brutally exposed how fragile youth work funding has become. In most parts of Europe, it is entirely built around project funding, with little or no structural funds. This has to change.

Youth work organisations <b>at local level</b> whose budget has, with covid-related support, decreased	<b>31,1%</b>
Youth work organisations <b>at regional level</b> whose budget has, with covid-related support, decreased	<b>35,7%</b>
Youth work organisations <b>at national level</b> whose budget has, with covid-related support, decreased	<b>43,3%</b>
Youth work organisations <b>at inter-national level</b> whose budget has, with covid-related support, decreased	<b>59,5%</b>

### **Financial impact of the pandemic**



In surveys of youth work organisations across Europe in the winter of 2021 and the summer of 2022, the RAY Network asked about the financial impact of the pandemic.

- There is a long, unfortunate history of keeping youth work funding evasive. The result: almost one third of youth work organisations had to reduce their staff time just months into the pandemic. Nearly one fifth had to let staff go.
- The dependency of youth work on project funding has long been criticised. To this day, however, it has persisted.
- International youth work has been hit hardest: 60% of youth work organisations active in international youth work have seen their budget shrink due to the pandemic.
- At local level, the problem is less pronounced, but far from fully resolved: nearly one third of youth work organisations active at local level saw their budget shrink, too.

## **Key impact of this action**

**A reform of youth work funding, and the introduction of structural funds, will**

- increase the resilience of youth work structures during upcoming crises,
- make youth work as a profession more attractive and more sustainable,
- increase the effectiveness and efficiency of projects run by youth workers.



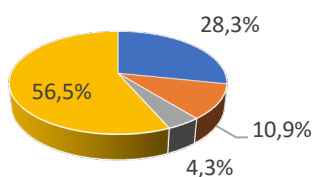
## ACTION 5

# IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK AGENDA

Youth work needs a long-term perspective and a coherent framework. It is held back by scattered education pathways, patchy professional recognition, and scattered research. It needs continuity and perspective, which the European Youth Work Agenda provides – if implemented with sufficient resources.

Number of European countries with a competence-based framework for youth work (out of a total of 46)*	<b>21</b>
Number of European countries with a mechanism to recognise competences from another country (out of a total of 46)*	<b>1</b>
Number of European countries with a standard occupational profile for youth work (out of a total of 46)*	<b>22</b>
Number of European countries with a recognised, professional registry for youth workers (out of a total of 46)*	<b>10</b>

### Key figures



- Association of youth workers exists
- Network of youth clubs/centres exists
- Both: association & network exist
- Neither association nor network exists

More than half of the European countries \* have neither a youth worker association nor a network of youth work centres. Just two countries have both.

Data is from 2020 and may have changed during the pandemic.

- A. Education and training for youth workers is scattered. Just 14 EU member states have university degree courses for youth work.
- B. Recognition of youth workers remains patchy. There are few standard occupational profiles, and career paths for too many youth workers are obscure.
- C. Youth work research is too scattered. It lacks academic integration and infrastructure.
- D. The European Youth Work Agenda provides a long-term policy framework for youth work. Institutional support is readily available to implement the Agenda in your context\*\*.
- E. Reach out at any time!

\* Member states of the Council of Europe  
 \*\* Support can be provided by the European Service Centre for the Bonn Process, by the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, and others.

## Key impact of this action

Implementing the European Youth Work Agenda will, over time and with resolve,

- offer youth workers quality education and attractive career paths,
- let youth work grow into a truly European profession and practice,
- ensure that you will not receive another call for action during a crisis.

## SOURCES

### ACTION 1

- 1.1. RRF Dashboard: [https://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html)
- 1.2. RAY Survey Summer 2022: <https://www.researchyouth.net/reports/>
- 1.3. Context on the RAY COR research project: [researchyouth.net/projects/cor/](https://researchyouth.net/projects/cor/)

### ACTION 2

- 2.1. Belgium anxiety numbers: Dixième enquête de santé COVID-19: <https://www.sciensano.be/en/biblio/dixieme-enquete-de-sante-covid-19-resultats-preliminaires>
- 2.2. OECD Briefing Paper: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/>
- 2.3. WHO Scientific Brief on Mental Health and COVID-19 (March 2022): [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Mental\\_health-2022.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Mental_health-2022.1)

### ACTION 3

- 3.1. RAY Survey Winter 2020/2021: <https://www.researchyouth.net/reports/>
- 3.2. Context on the RAY COR research project: [researchyouth.net/projects/cor/](https://researchyouth.net/projects/cor/)
- 3.3. Developing an online voice: learning from the pandemic. [https://www.bonn-process.net/downloads/publications/22/80dda97f51bec2d834736e8108435466/EYWC\\_RAY%20Resource%20Paper\\_Final%20Version\\_20201122.pdf](https://www.bonn-process.net/downloads/publications/22/80dda97f51bec2d834736e8108435466/EYWC_RAY%20Resource%20Paper_Final%20Version_20201122.pdf)

### ACTION 4

- 4.1. RAY Survey Winter 2021: <https://www.researchyouth.net/reports/>
- 4.2. RAY Survey Summer 2022: <https://www.researchyouth.net/reports/>
- 4.3. Context on the RAY COR research project: [researchyouth.net/projects/cor/](https://researchyouth.net/projects/cor/)

### ACTION 5

- 5.1. Youth worker education in Europe. Policies, structures, practices. Knowledge book by the Youth Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-worker-education-in-europe>
- 5.2. Annexes to the Youth worker education research project, in particular Tables 4, 9, 12 and 14: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/expert-group-researching-education-career-paths-youth-workers>
- 5.3. Official resolution on the European Youth Work Agenda by the Council of the EU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2020:415:FULL>
- 5.4. Context on the European Youth Work Agenda and its framework and process of implementation: <https://www.bonn-process.net>

## CONTACT

RAY Network Coordination, Irmeli Karhio, [irmeli.karhio@oph.fi](mailto:irmeli.karhio@oph.fi)  
RAY Network Coordination, Carmen Teubl, [carmen.teubl@oph.fi](mailto:carmen.teubl@oph.fi)  
RAY Research Coordination, Andreas Karsten, [andreas@researchyouth.net](mailto:andreas@researchyouth.net)