



Empowering  
young people



**YES!**

**Youth Empowerment Strategy**

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**About the YES Forum**

Founded in 2002, YES Forum is a European network of organisations working with and for young people facing challenging situations. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create an environment where young people and youth professionals have equally accessible learning and work-related opportunities in Europe and beyond.

## 1. Introduction

2020 was a challenging year for everyone, but it impacted each person differently. Or as author Damian Barr put it: *"We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm. Some of us are on superyachts. Some of us have just the one oar."*<sup>1</sup> Those people who already had fewer opportunities before the global pandemic became even more vulnerable. The general and praised resort to digitalisation with many online meetings and classes hit a wall when it could not reach those who did not have access to the internet, computers or who lacked digital knowledge. All containment measures imposed by countries to avoid the spread of the virus made people limit social contacts outside their immediate households to a minimum. This proves much more difficult however for people affected by cramped living conditions, strained family relationships, poverty and many other factors.

As part of the development of the New Strategy, the Secretariat of the YES Forum revised the organisation's Vision, Mission, and Values. To do so, the last Annual Reports were carefully read and some powerful words were identified. These recurrent words echo for what the YES Forum stands and fights. After discussion with the members of the Board, the new formulation for the Vision, Mission, and Values was presented to the YES Forum's members during the 2020 General Assembly that took place in November 2020. There is no big change in them; however, we believe the wording used now is stronger and more positive and we hope this will further inspire and motivate members and young people alike.

For the YES Forum too, restrictions and changed overall conditions meant that many projects needed to be adapted. However, through the support and solidarity of its members, the YES Forum learnt how to deal with the new circumstances and GROW together.

This new strategy comes at a moment of looking back at the work that was carried out in the previous five years and reflecting on what we want to keep and which new actions should be put forward. We have revised the existing [Strategic Objectives](#) (see p.7), along with the [Vision, Mission, and Values](#) (see p.2), to include more positive wording: we know we have challenges – and they are many –, but together we can overcome them. We also focused on the importance of having a text that can be easily understood by our target group: the young people!

Furthermore, this New Strategy presents the YES Forum's [Sustainable Principles](#). These principles are actually not new, they have always been at the foundation of our work; however, we found it was time to write them down and share them with you! The six principles are at the heart of the YES Forum and represent who we are (see p.5).

This is an open strategy, meaning that it does not have a deadline to finish: it will be used until it is no longer relevant and appropriate to our work. Encounters with youth workers and young people during our different projects as well as working relationships are all incredibly important assets to further

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10272182-we-are-not-all-in-the-same-boat-we-are>

develop and evolve the current strategy. They will also be a good indicator to understand when we will need to update it again.

## 2. Vision, Mission, Values

### Vision

YES Forum desires a society where every young person, regardless of their background, is able to realize their full potential and is given the opportunity to make a positive contribution to society. We long for a participatory culture where young people are encouraged to have a voice and to be involved in decisions impacting their lives, allowing them to fulfil their aspirations.

### Mission

*"Together we can make sure young people's voices are heard"*

YES Forum promotes civic and political education across a more inclusive Europe. We are dedicated to increasing the opportunities and chances in the lives of all young people by providing support for a real participation in society.

### Values

Youth participation is our central value. The guiding question in our work is not "What can we do for young people?" Instead, we are asking "What can we do with them?" Embedded in a culture of listening and meaningful involvement of young people, we acknowledge the diverse ways of how young people can make valuable contributions to projects and activities, by promoting social engagement of young people.

## 3. Opportunities and Challenges

### EU context

Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)<sup>2</sup> are the legal basis for EU action in the youth field. In addition to these articles, young people benefit from EU policies in other fields, such as education, training and employment, health or in relation to the rights and protection of children and young people.

Member States of the European Union collaborate in the development of their youth policies with the support of the European Commission. Therefore instruments such as directives, action programmes, resolutions and the 'Open Method of Coordination' (OMC) are applied. Representatives of the national

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<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>

governments and of the Commission meet regularly to agree on joint policy objectives or common challenges to address.

The EU Youth Strategy provides the overarching framework for this cooperation amongst EU Member States for 2019-2027. The Strategy identifies priorities and establishes instruments to reach the agreed goals.

Following the European Council Resolution on The European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, “Young people should not only be architects of their own lives, but also contribute to positive change in society”.

As stated in YES Forum’s values, youth participation is at the heart of our work. That is why we give a voice to young people in each of the different dimensions of our work. In addition, although youth work is active all around Europe, it comes in different forms and involves different stakeholders and practices. For that reason, YES Forum wants to commit to the objectives of the Council Resolution on the establishment of the European Youth Work Agenda by promoting quality, innovation and recognition of youth work through increased exchanges and collaborations between youth work stakeholders all around Europe.

In our work, we want to promote meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political engagement of young people; promote exchanges of practices, knowledge and experiences to connect young people from the most diverse European countries; and empower young people to make their voices heard.

### **Terminology**

The YES Forum target group ranges from young people with learning and/or educational difficulties, youth from deprived areas (be this certain rural settings or urban neighbourhoods), as well as youth affected by poverty and first generation students. While all these young people struggle with access to certain opportunities, we find it difficult to define general needs and attributes of our target group.

Therefore, we will focus on including ALL youth with various backgrounds and needs into our activities, working to break down barriers to real inclusion and word our communication accordingly. In those cases that we work with a more specific target group this will be clearly stated. We recognise that many activities – and some of our own too – are not open for all youth as they pose often invisible barriers to many young people. However, we are passionate about identifying and breaking down those barriers and therefore target young people that are often left out.

## **4. The way we work – Activities**

### **Activities**

In order to respond to the above mentioned challenges and opportunities and in connection to our strategic goals, the YES Forum creates room for exchange of good practises and critical thinking concerning European youth work and policies; social inclusion and participation of young people with vulnerable background; formal and non-formal education and sustainable development of skills and

competencies. We strongly encourage the involvement of our members in transnational cooperation which engage both young people and practitioners. And we also work to connect with experts and key decision-makers.

The YES Forum does:

#### Transnational projects

- organise and facilitate transnational projects for practitioners to develop and promote innovative approaches in youth and social work
- organise and facilitate transnational projects with and young people with focus on learning mobility and employment;

#### Networking and capacity building

- organise and facilitate networking through various events (trainings, seminars and conferences) to build strong partnerships, work on relevant topics and reach broader groups of young people
- access materials and contributes to external events and consultations facilitates

#### Advocacy

- contributes to policy on youth and social affairs with proposals build upon the grassroots experience of its members and the young people's input
- key messages or recommendations are drawn up based on the lessons learnt following the completion of its transnational projects

#### Interactions within the network

During every project, around five or six partners interact and create a strong bond over the course of approximately two years. The synergies created can lead to new projects being thought of and developed. The YES Forum is a growing network composed of around 40 members. That is why annual events that bring together practitioners and/or young people from all member organisations and that allow informal exchanges are an excellent opportunity to discover common interests, start new partnerships and reinforce old ones.

We believe in the importance of face-to-face meetings, as many relevant discussions can grow from informal settings, during coffee breaks and dinners. However, during 2020 the YES Forum organised many successful interactive online events. We would like to build on the knowledge and skills learnt this year. Therefore we propose the following opportunities for members to come together and exchange:

- Annual General Assembly (in-person)
- At least one Project Planning Meeting (in-person) and / or online
- Periodic online meetings

## 5. The way we work – Sustainable Principles

The YES Forum's [Sustainable Principles](#) are at the heart of YES Forum' work and represent who we are. These principles are not new, they have always been at the foundation of our work; however, we found it was time to write them down and share them with you! The Sustainable Principles reflect the way the YES Forum and it's Member Organisations work to meet their goals and tie into our core Values. They shape our work from network and organisational level to individual project level.



### Participation

As a network, the core of the YES Forum is to connect organisations working with and for a diverse group of young people. However, youth workers and young people from member organisations are not just able to receive support and find like-minded organisations in activities organised by the YES Forum Secretariat and Board. YES Forum relies and thrives from the active participation of its members – letting young people & youth workers decide! Be it in General Assemblies or project-related meetings: We have a culture of listening to our member's needs and meaningfully involving youth workers and young people in everything we do.

### Flexibility

The YES Forum members work with a wide range of young people and in diverse locations around Europe. In our work as a network, it is not possible to have one-size-fits-all solutions that could cover all the specificities. We trust in the young people and youth workers we work with. Therefore, the YES Forum gives a frame and space that ensures that partners can adapt the work to their local settings. This way we get the best results for all parties.

### Support

It is during challenging times that it is important to know on who we can count. Support is a principle that works on different levels. On an organisational level, the YES Forum endows the network and each project with experience and expertise on inclusion and diversity, making sure that all organisations involved can work to a high standard. Furthermore, in each project, YES Forum members provide close mentoring for participating young people by youth and social work professionals throughout the whole project, including travel. Close, professional support leads to successful projects.

### Transparency

A network only functions well if there is mutual trust between the members. That is why a transparent dialogue is essential to ensure that all the participants are on the same page. The YES Forum operates in a way that creates trust and leads to a successful network. Not only during the General Assembly, but

always upon request, the finances of the YES Forum are open for consultation and approval by the members. In its projects, participants are involved at all project levels and from the very beginning, ensuring that participating young people not only know what is going on, but can shape the project, too.

### **Solidarity**

The YES Forum has a continuous commitment to improve the role of young people as active citizens and participants in important processes of social life in society. Tying in to programmes such as the European Solidarity Corps, the YES Forum promotes solidarity in its network activities and projects by bringing together young people and practitioners from diverse backgrounds around Europe to work together and learn from one another.

### **Learning**

The YES Forum believes that fostering exchanges and learning opportunities have a high potential to transform society. Therefore, the YES Forum strives to make knowledge on current youth work topics available to a large audience and promote good practices. We bring young people and practitioners together with policy makers and researchers. In our work with young people we acknowledge that personal development is more than preparing for the labour market. Formal and informal learning can help young people smoothly transition to adulthood, being able to deal with the reality around them with more flexibility and wisdom. All the outcomes produced during projects are made available and disseminated to all members.

Also the secretariat is an important learning space. Here we give young people in education and training the chance not only to learn but actively to contribute to YES Forum's work. We feel young people are invaluable to create authentic results in our work.

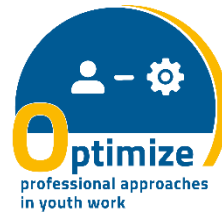
## **6. Strategic objectives: GROW objectives**

The YES Forum strategic objectives for 2021-2025 provide direction for all our activities. In particular, they are the framework to prioritise and organise the work for the secretariat and board, enabling us to be effective in complementing EU initiatives.

The YES Forum believes that each young person should have the possibility to dream about their future and build the steps to reach it. By each of its four strategic objectives, the YES Forum aims to provide tools that allow young people to GROW into the person they want to become.



## GROW objectives



### 1. To GENERATE better prospects for the young generation

Through the work of our members, YES Forum empowers young people to develop skills, qualifications and experience needed for the transition to adulthood and for life in society, especially regarding education, training and employment. The YES Forum's members aim to create flexible learning opportunities, by providing tailored support for the personal and social development of young people.

### 2. To RAISE awareness about youth issues on the political agenda

The YES Forum advocates with Members of the European Parliament, youth practitioners and young leaders to create environments that strengthen young people's potential. The YES Forum works closely with policy makers to increase investments in sustainable structures, services and qualified staff for organisations working with and for young people, and to develop cooperation between the ministries dealing with different aspects of young peoples' lives.

### 3. To OPTIMIZE professional approaches in youth work

YES Forum aims to raise the quality in professional development of youth workers by creating synergies between educational institutions providing training for youth workers and the various stakeholders offering services for young people. By creating lasting tools, the YES Forum promotes innovative practices and effective youth work approaches that acknowledge the different needs of young people in different countries across Europe.

### 4. To WIDEN participation of all young people in decision making processes

Every young person has the capacity to lead an engaged social, cultural, economic and political life. But to be able to develop an effective voice, some young people need specialized attention and support. Supported by our members, the YES Forum strives to develop and implement activities to promote meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes, within families, schools and communities, at the local, national and European level.

## How to evaluate impact

YES Forum acts in a rapidly changing environment. Thus the work of YES Forum is emergent and needs to be reviewed in an ongoing process engaging members and staff. The Strategy is complemented by an annual working plan which focuses on short term goals. At the end of each year, while compiling the annual report, YES Forum secretariat reviews activities carried out using qualitative and quantitative indicators. This helps members and secretariat to understand themes of activities in the context of broader strategic goals and expected impact.

To review our work the following aspects are important:

- YES Forum board and secretariat meet regularly and organise an annual organisation's retreat together.
- We value feedback from participants in our various activities so that we continually improve our work. Therefore we use anonymous feedback systems and internal debriefs.
- Our external impact is monitored through invitations to speak at key events, media coverage, inquiries for information and social media engagement.

## 7. Working together with all our members

### Members

YES Forum is a network gathering organisations committed to improving the life chances of vulnerable young people and fostering their inclusion in society. Prospective members are:

- Local, regional, national organisations acting in the diverse sectors of youth and social work;
- Public institutions and bodies acting in the diverse sectors of youth and social work;
- Youth-led organisations;
- Academic institutions engaged in youth research;
- Universities and training institutes active in the field of education of youth and social workers;

Any organisation committed to our mission, fulfilling the criteria according to the YES Forum constitution, and having its headquarter in one of the EU Member States or EEA can become a member of the YES Forum<sup>3</sup>.

### Structure and management

The YES Forum is governed by its members, who have overall decision-making authority. The EEIG is represented by the appointed Managing Director, who is responsible for running EEIG's business and internal organisation. The management Board elected by the members supervises budget and activities. Planned aims are implemented through our democratic structure with the full participation of members. The diversity of members involved in the YES Forum's work requires multiple ways of engaging with.

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<sup>3</sup> YES Forum is constituted as an EEIG following the Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31985R2137&from=EN>). An EEIG is a flexible structure which enables its members to connect specific activities while retaining their economic and legal independence. The focus is primarily on facilitating transnational cooperation between organisations. Every EU language has its own expression for a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG).

To coordinate the activities and to support effective internal and external communication, the YES Forum is supported by the Secretariat in Stuttgart. In the Secretariat, experienced staff works together with young people in training as apprentices and volunteers in a dynamic environment.

### **Membership development**

Membership development refers to expanding the reach of the YES Forum by contacting organisations that are already familiar with the work of the YES Forum from former partnerships. Membership engagement refers to deepening our contact with associated members that have not been active in past years. Both are important topics for the improvement and further development of the YES Forum network.

Details are outlined in a separate document.

## **8. YES Forum partnership and alliances with other organisations**

YES Forum works in partnership with a variety of actors ranging from institutional, civil society or research. This partnership helps to connect our network with other civil society and institutional actors to enlarge our impact.

YES Forum has a strategic partnership with the European Commission, DG Education and Culture (until end 2021 and is expected to continue) and also works closely with European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, Youth Outreach Unit.

As an active member of the Social Platform, YES Forum plays a role in strengthening the visibility of youth policy in the broader civil society sector advocating for social justice, health, and education policies.

To complement the work, especially in the promotion of research in the field of youth, YES Forum ties with **YES Innovation & Research e.V.**