



Working with young people: The value of youth work in the EU

Country report: Dutch speaking community of Belgium

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This report presents the situation as of February 2013

1 Introduction: tradition, definitions and concepts

KEY FACTS	RESPONSE
Definition for youth work	Yes
Legal definition for youth work	Yes
Approximate length of youth work tradition	1850s
Approximate length of formal / professional youth work tradition	1960s
Overview of relative importance of youth work in supporting young people	Remained the same (i.e. important)
Main sectors/fields of formal / professional / statutory youth work	Socio-cultural sector
Main sectors / fields of non-formal / third sector led youth work	Socio-cultural sector

1.1 Definitions

Youth work in Flanders is defined by decree as non-commercial, voluntary socio-cultural work organised in the leisure sphere for or by young people between the age of three and thirty years old and under educational guidance. It promotes the advancement of the full development of young people¹.

The abovementioned definition applies to formal and non-formal youth work as both types of youth work are run by organisations with non-commercial purposes. Generally speaking there exist two sectors in Flemish youth work: universal youth work provision and targeted youth work provision. The universal youth work sector is much larger than the targeted youth work sector.

Universal youth work provision refers to those activities that do not distinguish among the target groups – they are accessible and targeted at all young people. This includes youth movements (e.g. Scouts and Chiro) and a large number of other types of youth work (e.g. playground associations, political youth associations, youth centres or clubs, youth amateur art associations, youth workshops). The youth movements are usually youth organisations (with regular activities for specific age groups) and young people themselves, above the age of 16, run the local groups. This form of youth work is generally volunteer-led with very limited involvement of professional youth workers.

Targeted youth work includes activities aimed at hard-to-reach groups such as young people with disabilities, young people with a migration or ethnic minority background and socially vulnerable young people. The activities are in general developed through self-organisation and volunteering, often supported by professional youth workers. Some of the initiatives organised as part of targeted youth work are referred to as “open initiatives” as they do not require regular or timely attendance and do not demand participation in prescheduled group activities^{2,3}.

1.2 Tradition and development of youth work

Youth work in Flanders has a long tradition with its origins in the 1850s with the emergence of the first Flemish youth movements (e.g. the Roman Catholic youth groups in 1850, the Socialist Young guards in 1886 and the Flemish Student Movement in 1875). These initiatives provided working-class youngsters with healthy recreation and development

¹ Flemish government (2008), Decreet van 18 juli 2008 houdende het voeren van een Vlaams jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_VJKB/decreetVJKB_18072008_officieuze_coordinatie.pdf>.

² Coussée, F. (2008), *A Century of Youth Work Policy*. Ghent: Academia Press.

³ Van de Walle, T Coussée, F and Bouverne-De Bie, M (2011), Social Exclusion and Youth Work – From the Surface to the Depths of an Educational Practice, *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, March 2011, 219-231

activities and were often led by citizens and parish priests⁴. Also youth work activities around political topics were common and youth self-organisations were established by working class people who fought for better living conditions and opportunities.

Youth movements further emerged and developed in the beginning of the 20th century, after the First World War. The movements' focus however shifted from countering social and material inequalities to playful outdoor activities taking place in the participants' leisure time. Over time youth work gradually became a place to socialise, in addition to the family and the school or factory. The latter could partly be explained by the fact that the scouting initiative reached Flanders in 1910. Scouting was seen as a "new" and "innovative" outdoor recreational method for lower-class young people⁵.

Youth movements increased in popularity during the interwar period until the 1960s and were characterised by increased membership. In the midst of individualisation, secularisation, commercialisation and the emergence of new recreational opportunities (e.g. dance halls) new forms of youth work started to emerge. Youth workers experimented with new methods but also less demanding forms of youth work (i.e. "open youth work") to reach the growing number of unorganised (i.e. older and working-class) youth. New youth clubs, hobby clubs, youth sport activities, youth assistance centres and initiatives for the socially excluded arose. Many of these organisations allowed free access at any time and no membership was required. There was also more need for professional youth workers in the open youth work. In that period of time the open youth work also started to target socially excluded young people and Flanders adopted its "universal youth concept". In reality the youth organisations focussed predominantly on the middle-class leisure culture and forms for the hard-to-reach groups were not considered to be a priority⁶.

The emphasis on hard-to-reach groups however started to emerge in the last decade characterised by shift from merely traditional forms of youth work (e.g. youth movements such as the Scouts and Chiro) towards a wider concept of youth work also targeting the hard-to-reach (e.g. young people with a migration background, young people living in poverty). New forms of youth work emerged, such as migrant self-organisations but also experimental youth work for instance on new culture, media and arts (e.g. graffiti, theatre). Overall this led to more diverse youth organisations offering more diverse forms of youth work for broader target groups. It is noteworthy to mention that these forms of youth work occur separate from one another.

In the last decades youth work remained important in Flanders; young people have a strong need to organise themselves but also the government and society recognises the important role of youth work. Additionally, local administration started to organise youth work themselves. Flanders' youth work history, and particularly youth movements, made its mark on the contemporary Flemish youth work resulting in a strong focus on leisure and recreation. From a historical point of view, Flanders always focussed on positive youth work as an emancipatory and empowerment instrument for young people rather than an instrument for prevention.

1.3 The current situation: the delivery of formal and non-formal youth work

In Flanders there is no clear separation between formal and non-formal youth work; instead there is a clear separation between universal and targeted youth work. Universal youth work works predominantly with middle-class young people and offers them meaningful leisure activities. It is mainly delivered by young people occasionally with support of professional youth workers. The role of professional staff in universal youth work relates to supporting the volunteers rather than delivering tasks.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

Targeted youth work works with hard-to-reach target groups and offers them additional or compensatory support⁷, this often has an educational character. This type of youth work is delivered by professionals and young volunteers. The involvement of professionals is essential in relation to activities targeting hard-to-reach groups (e.g. young people with a migration background, unemployed youth, and underprivileged youth) as these activities go beyond offering leisure activities but emphasise additional or compensatory educational support (e.g. homework support, language training). In targeted youth work professional staff is, contrary to universal youth work, engaged with the target group as they require more professional support. Volunteers are also actively involved in this sector.

Overall the Flemish youth work sector as a whole is very much volunteer-led and characterised by limited involvement of professional youth workers.

The youth care sector on the other hand, although not part of the youth work sector, is highly professionalised. The youth care sector focusses on young people with difficulties (e.g. mental, social and pedagogical difficulties) and therefore there is an obvious need for professional staff well trained to support youngsters with more serious difficulties. The youth work sector and the youth care sector are separated yet there exist links to facilitate transitions of young people between the two sectors. There also exist links between youth work and other sectors (e.g. education, youth welfare, prevention, culture) but interviewees pointed out that cooperation is not always evident and could be improved. This country report does not cover youth care due to the fact that it is a distinctive sector.

2 Legislative context and governance

KEY FACTS	RESPONSE
Legislative framework for youth work	Yes
Level of regulation for youth work	Community (i.e. Flanders)
Body(ies) with a responsibility for governing youth work	Flemish Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media

2.1 Legal background

Youth work is regulated by the decree of 18 July 2008 on conducting a Flemish policy on youth and children's rights⁸ which sets out the essentials of the Flemish youth policy. The decree includes definitions for "youth work", "youth worker" and "youth organisation" and it stipulates that the Flemish government is to produce a youth policy plan⁹ with particular emphasis on youth work. The decree also lays down a number of requirements for the allocation of funding to youth organisations operating at Flemish level (i.e. not organisations operating at regional or local level as these receive funding by municipalities). In Flanders funding for local youth organisations is mainly organised at local level as part of the local youth policy but the Flemish government has a separate funding scheme for national organisations and for experimental projects. The Flemish government is responsible for setting the framework and priorities for youth work at Community level.

On 1 January 2013 the decree of 20 January 2012 on a renewed Flemish policy on youth and children's rights¹⁰ will enter into force and replaces the decree of 18 July 2008. The renewed Flemish policy on youth and children's rights brings about a number of changes in order to "fine-tune" several conditions of the decree of 2008. Overall the essentials of the

⁷ In Dutch referred to as "jeugdwerkzorg" which targets vulnerable groups.

⁸ Flemish government (2008), Decreet van 18 juli 2008 houdende het voeren van een Vlaams jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_VJKB/decreetVJKB_18072008_officieuze_coordinatie.pdf>.

⁹ The Flemish Youth Policy Plan was launched in 2010 (see section 3.1).

¹⁰ Flemish parliament (2102), Ontwerp van decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd-en kinderrechtenbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_VJKB/decreet_ernieuwdJKRB_tekstPLEN.pdf>.

decree of 18 July 2008 remain unchanged. The main changes include restructuring of national-level organisations (e.g. merger between Flemish Youth Support Agency (*Steunpunt Jeugd*), Flemish Youth Council and VIP Youth) and restructuring of the allocation of project funding¹¹.

2.2 Governance

Youth work, which is part of universal youth policy, falls under the competences of the Flemish Community and is therefore governed by the Flemish Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media. The Ministry is responsible for setting the legal framework, identifying sector-specific priorities and providing funding to the youth work sector.

The youth work policy was decentralised in 1993 by the decree of 9 June 1993¹² amended by the decree of 14 February 2003 for lending support to and providing incentives for municipal, inter-municipal and provincial youth and youth work policy¹³. This signifies that youth work, in line with the Community-level priorities, is shaped and coordinated by the municipalities and are supported by the provinces. The decree determines the funding conditions applicable to local and provincial authorities and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels regarding the design and implementation of a youth policy plan. Each of these authorities should develop a policy plan thereby clearly describing how these will be developed, implemented and evaluated in consultation with local youth work initiatives, experts, youth councils and young people themselves. Setting up a youth council is one of the funding criteria for local authorities and provinces¹⁴.

The rationale for decentralising youth work policy to local level is because the local authorities are closest to young people and therefore they can tailor their policies to the needs of young people in their municipality. This allows for a high degree of autonomy and flexibility at municipal level which is by many seen as a positive development in order to tailor to the needs of young people and youth organisations in each municipality.

The new decree of 6 July 2012 provided even more autonomy to local authorities. From 2014 onwards, municipalities will no longer produce youth policy plans, instead they are eligible for community-level funding when picking up on priorities set by the Minister of Youth.

3 Policy and programme framework

KEY FACTS	RESPONSE
General level of political commitment to the issue of youth work	Medium-Strong
Dedicated policy / strategy on youth work	Yes
Programmes on the development of youth work	Yes (funding mainly)
Net impact of economic crisis on funding for youth work	Small cut (one-time only) in funding ("cheese slicer" approach - shaving an equally thick slice off the top of all budgets)

¹¹ Flemish government (2012), Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering tot uitvoering van het decreet van 20 januari 2012 houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/regelgeving/Vlaamsjeugdbeleid_wijzigingen.aspx>.

¹² Decreet van 9 juni 1993 houdende subsidiëring van gemeentebesturen en de Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie inzake het voeren van een jeugdwerkbeleid,

¹³ Flemish government (2003), Decreet van 14 februari 2003 houdende de ondersteuning en de stimulering van het gemeentelijk, het intergemeentelijk en het provinciaal jeugd- en jeugdwerkbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_lokaal/decreet_lokaal_provinciaal_gecoordineerd.pdf>.

¹⁴ Caluwaerts, L. (2011) *Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Flanders (Belgium)*. Brussels: Council of Europe.

3.1 Policy commitment

The third Flemish Youth Policy Plan “Towards a Youth Pact 2020”¹⁵ outlines the main priorities of the Flemish government for the period 2010-2014. It outlines 24 strategic goals in order to “provide all children and young people in Flanders and Brussels with the biggest possible scope for development and the opportunities to be part of a democratic, open and tolerant society”¹⁶. The strategic goals set out in this plan are aligned to the eight priority themes of the European Youth Strategy 2010-2018.

Youth work is prominent in the Youth Policy Plan, in addition to, for instance, formal education, employment and housing. The plan does not only set (direct and indirect) objectives to further develop youth work but also highlights how youth work can contribute to the overall development of young people (also in relation to education, culture, youth care, health, employment, mobility). In an effort to mainstream youth policy, the policy plan is linked to other Ministries (and requires action from them) such as employment, education, welfare, urbanisation, and mobility.

In a nutshell, the plan highly encourages cooperation with youth organisations and particularly emphasises the need for the development of a structural policy by the Flemish authorities for youth work for and by young people with fewer opportunities. Societal changes have led to a more diverse population. Flanders considers the inclusion of young people with a migration background into youth work as one of their key priorities as this group is considered to be hard to reach by traditional forms of youth work (e.g. youth movements such as the Scouts). To this end, it is foreseen that more efforts will be directed at developing networks and structures at Flemish level to support youth work for and by this target group (and other young people with fewer opportunities) and for local youth policy to take these types of youth work into account. Moreover, diversity and intercultural competences need to be addressed in youth worker trainings. More efforts are also to be targeted at making youth workers and young people aware of the skills gained in youth work.

The political commitment to youth work is high as it is strongly supported and embedded in society. Another indicator of strong political support for the youth work sector is the government funding programmes at Community and municipal level. Interviewees also felt that youth work is supported by the administration as many officials were once a member of a youth organisation and are familiar with the sector.

3.2 Policies and programmes to develop youth work

With the Flemish Youth Policy Plan and the decree of 18 July 2008 on conducting a Flemish policy on youth and children’s rights the Flemish Community sets out a framework of national-level priorities of youth policy within which youth organisations need to operate. The Flemish government facilitates the development of youth work and of young people in general by funding programmes.

The decree of 18 July 2008 ensures structural support for youth work organisations at community level. It sets out funding conditions for national-level (i.e. Flemish) youth organisations and requires that the organisations operate in line with the national-level priorities. Through this funding programme, the government supports 108 national youth organisations. For these organisations the main funding source stems from the government budget in the form of multi-annual funding programmes. The total youth budget of the Flemish Community for 2012 was set at 69,550,000 EUR of which 32% (i.e. 22,407,000

¹⁵ European Commission (2012) *National report: First cooperation cycle of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2012 (Belgium – Flemish community)*, Brussels: European Commission. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/national_youth_reports_2012/belgium_-_flemish_community.pdf.

¹⁶ Flemish government (2011), *Synthesis of the 3rd Flemish Youth Policy PLAN & Priorities for the governing period 2010-2014*, Brussels: Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults, <<http://www.vlaanderen.be/en/publications/detail/synthesis-of-the-3rd-flemish-youth-policy-plan-towards-a-youth-pact-2020>>.

EUR)¹⁷ was allocated to national youth organisations. Moreover, the decree provides for additional budgetary space to finance new youth work initiatives (e.g. “experimental youth work”) that could gain national relevance or initiatives which correspond to one of the following themes: participation, communication, youth culture and international. In 2012 these initiatives were allocated 8% (i.e. 5,660,000 EUR) of the youth budget¹⁸.

During the interviews it was pointed out by several actors that the governmental funding is strongly organised by Ministry and it is difficult for youth organisations to receive funding from more than one Ministry. This can be explained due to the fact that the Government wants to avoid double-funding. If youth organisations want to receive funding from more than one Ministry, they would need to produce additional policy memoranda or project applications to demonstrate that they indeed target also other sectors.

Local youth organisations are financially supported by municipalities; the activities of the funded youth organisations need to be in line with the local youth policy and tailor to the needs of the citizens. Therefore, the funded activities may strongly differentiate between municipalities. The total youth budget of the Flemish Community for 2012 was set at 69,550,000 EUR of which 29% (or 20,228,000 EUR) was allocated to the municipalities for the implementation of their local youth policy and 2% (or 1,366,000 EUR) was allocated to the provinces for the support of youth work at provincial level¹⁹.

Youth work is strongly embedded into Flemish society and the national authorities acknowledge the important role youth work plays in Flemish society therefore a scenario without or with only limited government funding would be inconceivable. Local youth organisations strongly rely on their government (through the municipalities) as it is the only form of sustainable multi-annual funding available. There exist a limited number of private funds but funding is allocated on a project-basis and therefore rather unsustainable. Youth organisations also gain income through membership fees (and the organisation of events).

The economic crisis has not had significant effects on the funding programmes for youth work. Over recent years the government implemented minor budget cuts according to the so-called “cheese slicer” approach whereby an equally thick slice off the top of all budgets is taken. This approach avoided major budget cuts with serious implications on the youth work sector.

4 Youth workers: training, status, population and profile

KEY FACTS	RESPONSE
Minimum qualifications standards for youth workers	No
Youth worker as a recognised profession / occupation	No
Availability of formal, dedicated qualifications for youth workers	No
Education background of the majority of youth workers	Not data available, most likely social work
Number of youth workers	No data/estimates available
Trend in the overall number of youth workers	Stable

4.1 Training and qualifications

Youth worker as such is not an officially recognised profession in Flanders and therefore no targeted youth work training programmes and qualifications exist. Most youth workers are trained via other professions such as socio-cultural worker (as part of the wider social work

¹⁷ Data provided by the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults (Ministry Culture, Youth, Sport and Media)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid; Decree of 14 February 2003 on Municipal, Intermunicipal and Provincial Youth and Youth Work Policy

bachelor study programme) or pedagogy but they also have other educational backgrounds, mainly due to the non-existence of a youth worker qualification. There is no separate educational pathway for youth workers.

Although formal youth worker qualifications do not exist, youth workers, both professional staff and volunteers, can obtain youth worker certificates²⁰. The certificates are awarded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth Sport and Media after completion of an approved training programme. The training programmes are generally delivered by the youth organisations and are assessed and approved by the Ministry on the basis of a number of criteria. The following types of youth worker certificates are awarded by the Ministry:

- Animator – the animator training programme aims to train candidates in supporting young people in youth work. The programme focusses on developing understanding, attitudes and skills necessary to work with young people. It is based on a theoretical part (participation (60-hours) in a recognised training programme) and a practical part (60-hours internship).
- Senior animator – the senior animator training programme aims to further train candidates in supporting young people in youth work and to take up responsibilities within a coaching team. The programme focusses on strengthening the understanding, attitudes and skills necessary to work with young people. It is based on a theoretical part (participation (30-hours) in a recognised training programme) and a practical part (30-hours internship).
- Instructor – the instructor training programme aims to develop participants in taking up responsibilities in youth organisations. The programme focusses on developing an understanding and skills in group dynamics, in communication skills and conflict management. It is based on a theoretical part (participation (30-hours) in a recognised training programme) and a practical part (60-hours internship).
- Senior instructor - the instructor training programme aims to support participants to take up management-level or final responsibilities in the youth organisation. The programme focusses on developing an understanding of the existing types of youth work in Flanders, the actors and the policy factors in youth policy, and the aspects of youth culture. It is based on a theoretical part (participation (120-hours) in a recognised training programme) and a practical part (producing a report).

Youth workers are not obliged to take part in such training programmes, although it is encouraged by local governments through the allocation of additional funding to such youth organisations.

The Flemish government aims to develop, as part of the Youth Policy Plan, a competence plan for youth work and it is envisioned that the youth worker certificates will be adapted and integrated into the larger framework for the recognition of competences. It also outlines that there are plans to set up a competence profile for youth workers possibly aligned to a qualification profile.

4.2 Status of youth worker profession

Youth worker as such is not an officially recognised profession in Flanders but the notion of “youth worker” is however defined by law. The decree of 18 July 2008 defines a youth worker as any person who takes responsibility in youth work and has demonstrable experience, or makes efforts in the area of education or training in relation to youth²¹. It is noteworthy that the definition does not distinguish between professional or volunteering staff.

The youth work sector is predominantly volunteer-led with limited employment of professional staff; the latter are mainly active in the youth care sector (e.g. social work). It seems that in general there is not a strong need for an official recognised youth worker qualification, and therefore recognition of the youth worker profession, due to the high share

²⁰ Agentschap sociaal cultureel werk, Attesten, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/landelijk_attesten.aspx>

²¹ Flemish parliament (2102), Ontwerp van decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd-en kinderrechtenbeleid, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_VJKB/decreet_vernieuwdJKRB_tekstPLEN.pdf>.

of volunteers active in the sector. Voluntary engagement as well as the high degree of diversity in the educational background of youth workers is by many perceived as one of the main strengths of the sector in Flanders.

Generally speaking, professional youth workers are relatively young and often recent graduates (meaning that they gain their first work experience as a youth worker). It is however very common that youth workers move on to other activities within a few years' time, partly due to lower levels of remuneration in the youth sector compared to other sectors (e.g. social work or youth care sectors). From within the sector this is however not necessarily perceived as a negative development, rather the contrary. It means that there is a regular inflow of new youth workers whilst former youth workers make transitions to other relevant organisations and sectors (e.g. local, regional or national administration, other NGOs). This ensures that there are relevant links between the youth work sector and others.

The youth care sector – not part of the youth work sector - is highly professionalised as they support young people with mental, social and pedagogical difficulties where there is clearly a need for well trained professionals.

4.3 Youth worker population

There are no aggregate data on the number of youth workers, both professional and volunteering staff, in Flanders. Data from Sociare, the Socio-Cultural Employers' Federation, indicates that 1,579 persons were employed by their 149 member youth organisations in the first quarter of 2012. This however does not only include youth workers employed by youth organisations but also other staff such as administrative and management personnel.

Flanders does not collect data on the number of professional or voluntary youth workers but rough estimates from interviewees suggest that the number of voluntary youth workers could be as large as 100 000 persons. The ratio professional versus voluntary youth worker is estimated to be 9:1, meaning that for nine voluntary youth workers there is one professional youth worker. This would suggest that there is between 1000 and 2000 professional youth workers in Flanders. This ratio very well reflects the structure of the sector which is mainly volunteer-led, occasionally supported by professional staff.

With respect to the number of youth organisations, no aggregate data is available. The youth work sector is very large therefore a highly complex issue to measure in numbers. The Flemish government funds 108 national youth organisations but of course many exist even at regional and local level. Overall there are on average 3.57 youth work initiatives per 1 000 young inhabitants in Flanders, which means one youth work initiative per 280 young people. In 2010 the municipal youth services counted 5 802 local youth work initiatives, including the municipal youth work initiatives, across Flanders.²² In municipalities with less than 15 000 inhabitants, youth clubs are a highly popular form of youth work and youth amateur art associations are popular in municipalities between 15 000 to 20 000 inhabitants.

4.4 Profile of youth workers

There is no data available on the profile of youth workers, but as already described above, since there is no academic qualification available to become a youth worker in Flanders, the great majority of existing professional youth workers have an educational background from fields such as of socio-cultural worker (social work), psychology or pedagogy.

5 The role and value of youth work

Interviewees pointed out that youth work has an important role to play in Flemish society: ensure that young people spend their leisure time in a meaningful way whereby they

²² Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel Werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen (2013), Cijferboek Lokaal Jeugdbeleid 2011-2013, p.76, Brussels: ²² Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel Werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen. Available at: http://cjsmcijferboek.vlaanderen.be/download/jeugd2012_anysurfer.pdf.

increase young people's well-being and self-esteem and empower them to make their own decisions. That is an important objective in itself. Subsequently this may result in positive impacts in other areas such as an increase of young people's employability or reduce early school-leaving. Overall interviewees pointed out that youth work in Flanders should not be used to replace the existing welfare system, therefore the clear distinction between youth work and social care.

5.1 Education and training

Youth work focusses primarily on offering informal learning activities in leisure sphere and thereby contributes to the field of education and training and complements what is offered in formal education. Interviewees pointed out that youth work complements formal education by allowing young people to learn and acquire skills and competences in a "fun and playful manner". Moreover, young people with learning difficulties in school learn to discover other abilities and talents.

It is evident that the activities offered by youth organisations are based on informal learning but there are also many youth organisations that offer non-formal learning courses (e.g. courses on how to run a youth organisation or manage book keeping and administrative tasks) to its participants. This equips young people not only with skills relevant for youth organisations but also promotes lifelong learning among young people.

Although links between the youth work sector and formal education are not always evident, there exist a number of youth organisations that address early school leaving. See below two examples of youth projects which contribute in the field of education and training:

- "Time-Out Projects" target young people who are in conflict with their teachers, their peers or those who have difficulties in formal education in general. During the so-called "time-out period" the pupil is taken out of formal education (or in some cases employment) for a limited period of time and instead engages in non-formal learning opportunities. After the time-out period, the youngster returns to formal education.
- "Brede School" is an active network of organisations (e.g. youth work, sport clubs, library, police) around one or more schools that form an alliance for a common goal: the broad development of pupils in school and leisure time^{23 24}.

5.2 Employment and entrepreneurship

Most youth organisations do not explicitly aim to improve their participants' employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. There are however a number of youth organisations, mainly those working with professional staff, which support young people in increasing their employability and guide them on the labour market. Overall youth organisations contribute to developing entrepreneurial skills (e.g. creativity, taking responsibility, organising activities) among their participants. The following two examples make valuable contributions in the area of employment and entrepreneurship:

- "Job Club" is an initiative implemented by the Regional Open Youth Centre in Mechelen and supports vulnerable and unemployed young people in the labour market. Many young people are not comfortable seeking help or being supported by more formal organisations (e.g. public employment services) and there the organisation launched the Job Clubs where young people are supported with any issues they have in relation to the labour market²⁵.
- Youth houses are youth centres run and set by and for young people. Each youth house tailors to the needs of local young people – therefore each youth house is different - and functions as (an easily accessible) meeting space where young people can organise activities (e.g. organise concerts, watch movies) or just play and "hang out" together. Over 400 youth houses existed in Flanders with roughly 7 700 volunteers and almost 54

²³ See: <http://www.comace.org/belgium-flanders/brede-school>

²⁴ See: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/bredeschool/visie/Wat%20is%20een%20Brede%20School.pdf>

²⁵ See: <http://www.allesoverjeugd.be/nieuws/rojm-begeleidt-jongeren-naar-de-arbeidsmarkt>

000 young people had membership of a youth house in 2011. Young people themselves organise the activities they want and therefore youth houses are an environment where young people are allowed to show their entrepreneurial skills by taking leadership, being creative, working together to organise activities²⁶.

5.3 Health and well-being

Although increasing the well-being of young people is one of the main goals of Flemish youth work, there are not many links to the health sector. There exist youth organisations that integrate health issues (e.g. drugs and alcohol prevention, hearing loss) into their activities or set up specific campaigns to raise awareness among young people. The following projects are recent example in the field of health and well-being:

- “Iets Minder is de Max” is an awareness-raising campaign for young people about hearing loss due to loud music. Young people are informed through a website, a short movie and campaign materials which they can order for their youth organisation. It is a partnership between the Ministry of Health, health organisations and youth work organisations²⁷.
- “NokNok” is a campaign launched by the Ministry of Health and implemented in cooperation with youth organisations. It is an awareness-raising and education campaign about mental health issues among young people in the 12-16 age range²⁸.

5.4 Participation

There are a number of youth organisations - especially those focussing on hard-to-reach groups - that promote participation of young people. The participation of the most hard-to-reach groups is a key theme in youth work discussions²⁹. There are however also organisations that focus on other aspects of participation. Below are two examples presented:

- “Youth Houses for and by Young People with a Migration Background” are youth houses run by and for young people with a migration background. These youth houses find it important to also integrate homework support and language classes into their activities in order to help young people with a migration background participate in society. In these youth houses the link with formal education is more evident than in youth houses targeting youngsters without a migration background.
- “Charter 700” is a partnership between the youth organisation Paljas and five Flemish municipalities whereby young people design a game around the theme “the future of our cities and democracy”. Participants need to reflect upon the future of their city and democratic processes. A few young people will then present their game at a local event³⁰.

5.5 Voluntary activities / volunteering

The youth work sector is characterised by volunteerism and is, as described above, a volunteer-led sector; many young participants become volunteers at their youth organisations when they reach the age of 16. Therefore youth work as such can be taken as an example of how to move young people into volunteer youth work. There is however no statistical data available regarding the number of young people who volunteer in youth organisations.

²⁶ See: <http://www.allesoverjeugd.be/nieuws/50-jaar-jeugdhuizen-met-meer-dan-50-000-jongeren>

²⁷ See: www.ietsminderisdemax.be

²⁸ See: <http://www.noknok.be/>

²⁹ Coussée, F. (2009), *Youth Work and its Forgotten History: a View from Flanders*. In: Verschelden, G. Coussée, F. Van de Walle, T. and Williamson, H. (Eds). (2009), *The History of Youth Work in Europe and its Relevance for Youth Policy Today*. Council of Europe Publishing. Ch. 5.

³⁰ Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel werk, Gesubsidieerde initiatieven informatieve en participatie, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/participatie_gesubsidieerd.aspx>.

Two examples of youth work as a means to move young people into volunteer work include:

- “Let’s do it! Belgium campaign” is a project that invites people to help one day to clear all streets and public spaces from illegal waste. The municipalities stimulated young people to volunteer and thus to make their living environment a cleaner place for all.
- “Kom op tegen kanker” is a project that invites people to do all kinds of activities to raise money for cancer research; a large number of young people and youth organisations participate. Fundraising activities organised by young people include selling plants, planting trees, baking cakes for sale.

5.6 Social inclusion

In Flanders services aimed at improving social inclusion mainly fall under the competence of social work sector which is distinct from youth work.

However, in 2011 the youth work sector launched their annual campaign in all youth organisations on the topic of “young people and poverty”. Through informative games young people were made aware of issues related to poverty and social exclusion³¹.

The following two examples are youth work initiatives that promote social inclusions among young people:

- “Open camp” is organised by Scouts and these camps are specifically organised for young people who are generally hard-to-reach or not-reached by the Scouts.
- “UiT-card” was launched in the city of Aalst by Cultuurnet Vlaanderen and it aims to stimulate young people with fewer opportunities to participate in leisure time activities. The UiT-card is a loyalty card for culture and sports, sponsored by the Flemish government. Young people with fewer opportunities pay less for leisure activities but this is not made visible to others which is to avoid stigmatisation.

5.7 Youth and the world

In Flanders there exist a number of youth organisations whose core activities concentrate on topics related to “youth and the world”, such as: human rights, social justice, social rights and nature and the environment. These organisations are perhaps not as prominent as the Scouts and the Chiro, but they certainly exist.

- “Samen Wortels Plukken” is a project based in Ghent and it engages young people in organic gardening in their community. It not only teaches young people about a sustainable world but also shows them the potential of their environment (“the environment as a food supplier”). The project ensures the involvement of parents and the wider community and makes it a meeting place for all³².
- “Music for Life” is an annual initiative organised by the radio station Studio Brussel and the Red Cross Flanders. It is a fundraising event for which many youth organisation organise activities to raise money for developing countries.
- “Nature Study Working Group” set up by the Youth Organisation Nature and Environment allows young people to study and photograph animals and plants. It aims to make young people aware of the environment and study nature in a “fun and active way”³³.

5.8 Creativity and culture

Youth work has a strong role to play in the context of increasing creativity and cultural participation among young people. This is for instance very prominent in youth houses where young people have the space to indulge in their youth culture by, for instance, organising

³¹ See: www.maakerspelvan.be

³² See: <http://www.allesoverjeugd.be/nieuws/kwetsbare-jongeren-tuinieren-gent>

³³ See: <http://www.jnm.be/>

concerts, watching movies or stand-up comedy. Over the past decades new types of youth work have emerged, focussing on new media and arts (e.g. graffiti, poetry, theatre).

- “Experiment” is one of the largest music events in Antwerp which started a number of years ago, as a scouts’ event. The event turned out to be very successful as it is now Antwerp’s largest music event, organised by two eighteen year olds and previous members of the scouts³⁴.
- “Graffiti Youth Service” is a youth organisation aiming to expose children in a creative and experimental fashion to novel forms of communication (e.g. graffiti art, poetry, junkyard blues, theatre, “DJ-ing”, animations). The organisation organises workshops, field trips and courses to allow young people to experiment and be creative with new forms of communication³⁵.
- “Gamelab BXL” is an experimental project launched in 2012 which allowed young people from Brussels youth organisations to design and develop their own computer games. It intended young people to seek for inspiration from their own community and environment. The project is funded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media³⁶.

6 Outcomes and impact of youth work

6.1 Target and reach

6.1.1 Target groups

As said earlier there are two types of youth work when it comes to how the target group is defined: universal youth work and targeted youth work. Universal youth work targets “all young people”. In 2010 the six largest Flemish youth movements³⁷ had in total over 232 000 members and approximately half of their members is below the age of twelve³⁸. Targeted youth work is much more focussed on the hard-to-reach groups such as social vulnerable young people, young people with a migration or ethnic minority background and young people with disabilities. At local level, 184 youth initiatives were running in 93 municipalities and specifically target the “hard to reach”³⁹.

In terms of age groups, interviewees indicated that participation in youth organisations typically starts at the age of 7 until they reach the 16 to 18 age range. Young people between 16 to 21 years are generally involved as a volunteer with sharp declines from the age of 24. The participation of young people in the age range 24 to 30 years is significantly lower.

6.1.2 Reach

Although an increasing number of youth organisations focus on hard-to-reach target groups, it still remains a serious challenge to reach and engage them, especially into universal youth work. In that respect, Coussée (2009)⁴⁰ referred to it as the struggle on “how to reach the hard-to-reach” and pointed out that low-skilled young people, young people from low-income

³⁴ Alles over jeugd (2012), Van scouts tot experiment, <<http://www.allesoverjeugd.be/nieuws/van-scouts-tot-experiment>>.

³⁵ See: <http://www.jeugdwerknet.be/adressen/organisatie/graffiti-jeugddienst>

³⁶ Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel werk, In de kijker, <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/expjeugdwerk_indekijker.aspx>.

³⁷ i.e. Fos, Chiro, KSJ-KSA-VKSJ, KLJ, VNJ, VVKSM/Scouts en Gidsen

³⁸ Vlaamse Overheid (2012) VRIND 2012 - Vlaamse Regionale Indicatoren. Brussels

³⁹ Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel Werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen (2013), Cijferboek Lokaal Jeugdbeleid 2011-2013, Brussels: ³⁹ Agentschap Sociaal-Cultureel Werk voor Jeugd en Volwassenen. Available at: http://cjsmcijferboek.vlaanderen.be/download/jeugd2012_anysurfer.pdf.

⁴⁰ Coussée, F. (2009), *Youth Work and its Forgotten History: a View from Flanders*. In: Verschelden, G. Coussée, F. Van de Walle, T. and Williamson, H. (Eds). (2009), *The History of Youth Work in Europe and its Relevance for Youth Policy Today*. Council of Europe Publishing. Ch. 5.

families and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds participate less than other young people in the youth sector. Interviewees added that young people with disabilities and young people living in poverty are also hard-to-reach target groups. Youth work has a limited reach whereby there are clear indicators that those who seem to be the most in need of organised leisure activities as offered by youth work do not participate⁴¹.

Interviewees suggested that contemporary youth work reaches indeed all target groups, including the hard-to-reach but the level of youth work participation varies significantly and membership is unequally distributed across the population⁴². Universal youth work remains almost exclusively attended by white middle class young people with limited involvement of the hard-to-reach groups. This has also been confirmed by research which suggested that “while youth social work [i.e. targeted youth work] reaches some of the most disadvantaged young people, youth movements ([i.e. universal youth work] have to put in great effort in order to attract only a fraction of young people from socially marginalised groups”⁴³. Recent research⁴⁴ found that among the six largest youth movements, 11.6% of participants are of non-Belgian origin and 10.8% of the instructors are of non-Belgian origin. Approximately 10% of the participants say they have a disability versus 6.5% of the instructors.

Current data suggests that 6.9% of Flemish young people between 14 and 30 years of age is an active member of a youth movement and 5.7% of young people is involved at organisational level in a youth movement. Out of young people between 14 and 40 years of age, 4.6% is an active member of a youth club and 1% is a member at organisational level in a youth club. In the 12-13 age range, 27.9% of young people reported to be involved in a youth movement.⁴⁵

6.2 Outcomes and impact

In Flanders it is a common belief that youth work produces positive outcomes for its participants. Coussée (2009) mentioned in his research that participation in youth work may contribute to academic results, the development of social and cultural capital, mental health, promotes a sense of citizenship and may lead to a stronger position in the labour market⁴⁶.

Although (international) research points to the abovementioned positive outcomes of youth work, the interviewees suggested that youth work in Flanders aims to increase young people’s well-being and self-esteem and empower them to make their own decisions. Subsequently this may well lead to positive outcomes in other areas (e.g. increase employability, reduce early-school leaving) but this is not youth work’s objective in itself. Youth work supports young people in their self-development and equips them with a basic skills-set but it would be incorrect to say that youth work works or should work on the development of young people in relation to, for instance, the labour market or early school leaving⁴⁷.

Another interviewee put forward that youth work fulfils an essential role in allowing young people to be young and engage in activities which are appealing to them. This ideally should lead to young people who can have an impact on their own lives, society and policy. It becomes apparent that the Flemish government and the EU administration put increasing emphasis on outcome-focussed work while interviewees suggest that the strength of youth workers lies in the fact that they consider their work not to be outcome-focussed. In general

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Also found in: Coussée, F. (2009), *Youth Work and its Forgotten History: a View from Flanders*. In: Verschelden, G. Coussée, F. Van de Walle, T. and Williamson, H. (Eds). (2009), *The History of Youth Work in Europe and its Relevance for Youth Policy Today*. Council of Europe Publishing. Ch. 5.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 221

⁴⁴ De Pauw, P. et al. (2012), *Jeugdbewegingen in Vlaanderen: een Onderzoek bij Groepen, Leiding en Leden*. Brussel: Vlaamse Overheid.

⁴⁵ Interviews and Vettenburg, N., Deklerck, J. & Siongers J. (eds.) (2010), *Jongeren in cijfers en letters. Bevindingen uit JOP-monitor 2*. Leuven: Acco.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Source: interviews

youth workers support and empower young people instead of working towards national targets.

6.3 SWOT

Table 6.1 Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the youth work sector in Flanders

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The majority of youth organisations are volunteer-led which shows high commitment from the side of citizens. ■ The government funding (i.e. local or Community level funding) on which the youth sector relies is sustainable and was maintained despite the crisis. ■ Due to its long history, there is strong societal support for youth organisations and strong local embedding. This is in line with the governments' decision to have local youth policies at municipal level as they are closest to its citizens and therefore better positioned to address young people's needs at local level. ■ Youth work organisations are well organised and structured across Community, regional and local level and there is an on-going dialogue between the youth sector and the government administration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Over the past decades more divers forms of youth work have emerged which now leads the sector to explore other forms to attract the hard-to-reach groups. ■ Increasing cooperation with other sectors and professionals working with young people (e.g. teachers, social workers, youth care workers) and also parents. ■ Setting up of stronger partnerships between the provinces and municipalities in order to ensure better local support for youth work. If municipalities have complete autonomy it may turn into a threat for youth organisations in municipalities without a well-functioning youth policy in place.
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Youth organisations are strongly dependent on government funding (i.e. local or Community level funding) and, although funding seems sustainable, some raise questions as to the stamina of youth organisations without or with limited government funding. ■ The limited reach of the hard-to-reach target groups in youth work and particularly in universal youth work (e.g. Scouts). It is essential that more efforts are targeted at these groups and to also explore why universal youth work is less appealing to hard-to-reach target groups. ■ The high number of volunteers in the youth work sectors is considered a positive development, but they lack skills and training to deal with the hard-to-reach groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The legislative (e.g. regulations against noise pollution which requires youth organisations to purchase measuring equipment as well as to use and repair it) and administrative (e.g. book keeping, process payments) burden imposed on youth organisations make it more difficult for youth organisations to be led by young volunteers. ■ Volunteering by young people in general is under pressure as young people need to juggle youth work with other priorities (e.g. school, homework, student jobs, and other forms of leisure time spending). ■ Youth work sector is expected from national and EU authorities to become increasingly outcome-focussed. In some cases this results in the fact that more focus is put on the quantity (e.g. how many young people are reached) instead of quality.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendations to national level authorities

- There is a need for a more integrated and inter-sectoral funding approach; currently funding programmes hinder funding from different sectors (e.g. education, welfare, culture). This signifies that it is difficult for youth organisations to be funded by more than one sector and therefore government funding should become more integrated and inter-sectoral.
- It is essential that national authorities target more efforts towards the inclusion of young people with a migration background and from ethnic minority groups into youth work. This fits in with on-going debates as to whether hard-to-reach target groups need to be stimulated to enter universal youth work whilst others suggest that it is more effective to have targeted youth work for hard-to-reach target groups, completely separate from universal youth work.
- There is a clear need for the collection of statistics on the youth work sector (e.g. the number of volunteers, their qualifications, the youth organisation members, reach).
- Take into account the constraints of the youth work sector when putting in place legislative and administrative requirements that concern the types of activities that youth sector organises.
- Although there is an on-going dialogue between the youth sector and the Flemish government in particularly in relation to education and welfare but there is a need to also cooperate on themes such as employment, politics and the economy.
- During times of economic downturn youth work and informal learning are less of a priority on the political agenda. Nevertheless, the youth work sector strongly advocates that national governments, as well as at EU level, recognise the importance of the sector, also in times of crisis.

Recommendations to the EU

- The EU puts too much focus on youth work as an instrument to tackle social issues; several interviewees suggested that it is an unrealistic point of view to expect youth work to make a significant impact on education, employment related issues. Youth work in Flanders is first and foremost considered to contribute to the well-being of young people and empower them. It should however not be overlooked that youth work, indirectly and informally, could contribute to such issues.
- EU policies should mainstream a youth perspective whereby the implications for young people of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes are assessed.
- There is some concern that the youth work sector is not well represented in the envisioned “Erasmus for All” programme. It would be important to have a separate budget line for youth exchanges and informal and non-formal learning.

Recommendations to the youth work sector

- Due to societal changes and more diverse societies, it is important that the youth work sector and youth organisations in particular continue to evolve and develop new methods to also attract the hard-to-reach target groups in order to ensure that they also have a place in youth work. Particular emphasis should be placed on how to engage young people with a migration background and from ethnic minority groups into youth work.
- Youth sector needs to organise itself better in order to have more influence at Community and Federal level when it comes to topics such as employment, the economy and pensions. Currently the youth sector does not have any impact on these themes, which are also important for the future of young people.
- There is a need for more debate on the recognition of prior learning in order to ensure that young people’s skills acquired through youth work are recognised.

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