

## “It is an overall aim to build up and improve practice at different levels.” JUGEND für Europa spoke with Edith Balogh from Hungary.



*Edith Balogh is the president of the Hungarian Talentum Foundation for the Support of Volunteering. Until 2020, she was the executive manager of the nationwide Catholic Youth and Adult Education Association for nearly two decades. For the European Youth Convention, she was delegated by the Youth Commission of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops Conference.*

**JUGEND für Europa: Mrs Balogh, what successes and strength in youth work could your country contribute to enrich the European debate?**

**Balogh:** I think it is a great success that Hungary has launched the National Youth Strategy in 2009.

This is a long-term strategy from 2008 to 2023. It gives us the chance to focus on young people and to implement measures with a long-term impact on youth. From the beginning of this period, there were several different measures to reach youth: youth points, youth centres, and youth community spaces. They were funded by the Hungarian state or by the European Union. They involved youth workers to reach youth, the target group, and deal with them professionally. Unfortunately, these structures are project-based and after five to six years, they are changing, which is probably not the best.

Another success in Hungary is regular research on youth every four years, which shows the current situation of the young generation. However, there is no research on youth workers, this is lacking nowadays.

**JfE: What are the three main challenges for youth work in your country?**

**Balogh:** One of the most important things is to find a community of practice in Hungary and define the stakeholders in the Bonn Process at national, regional and local level.

Another challenge is to find a wider audience for the discussion about the qualification system for youth workers. It would be helpful to have more universities involved in the education of youth workers. Currently, there is a BA level degree in higher education called 'community co-ordinator'. This study programme can have a



practical benefit for youth workers. On the other hand, many youth workers do not have a degree, but they are highly experienced, through either the job or voluntary work. These issues should be developed in the future. As the National Youth Strategy contains, we need a future model for career possibilities for youth workers.

At the regional level, it would be very important to reorganise the youth centres. We have 19 counties in Hungary, and the youth centres in the counties do not function equally well. Depending on the staff, some of them are working in an effective way, but others are quite 'silent'. It would be good to vitalise them in the next few years. At local level, co-operation between the different stakeholders – authorities, civil organisations, social service institutes and even business enterprises – is especially important. Related to this exists the need to secure youth work in rural areas, in villages and small settlements.

**JfE: Thinking of the aims of the Youth Work Agenda: Where do you see the greatest need for further development of youth work in your country?**

**Balogh:** For me it is an overall aim to build up and improve practice at different levels: national level, regional, and local level. I find it very important, because this gives us a new uplifting to reorganise many things and to build up co-operation together with the stakeholders.

Another important aim is to enhance the quality of youth work research. I appreciate youth research in Hungary, but other research is lacking. It would be very interesting to have a more detailed picture of the youth workers as well as of youth work.

Research should involve the perspectives and experiences of youth workers, especially of grassroots youth workers, to learn something about their needs.

Another interesting issue is the promotion of youth work - not only in Hungary, but also all over Europe: How can we make youth work visible for stakeholders, for decision-makers and the whole society? It would be helpful if we could measure the social impact of youth work. Maybe in the next few years we can do something to make youth work visible. I am optimistic – we have seen how much has happened since 2008, since the beginning of the National Youth Strategy.

**JfE: Which influence has the European Union on youth work in Hungary?**

**Balogh:** First, it is important to see how youth work is practicing in other European countries. I mentioned research. It would also be interesting to know research from other countries. It should be in English; mostly the reports are in the native languages. This could be interesting, for example, for those who have partnerships in different countries.

Secondly, a code of conduct for youth workers with clear common definitions, as discussed at the Convention, could be helpful for the Hungarian process.

Finally, much co-operation between countries, as being funded by the EU youth programmes, Erasmus+ Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps. These programmes are fundamental just to have contact to other countries.



**JfE: Do you have great expectations towards the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda in the Bonn Process?**

**Balogh:** For me, it would be crucial to see young people and youth workers involved more effectively in the decision-making process at different levels in relevant topics. Although there are some good examples in Hungary – I would not say that there is nothing – but it could be enhanced.

During the implementation period, it would be important that youth services are working more effectively and more systematically, especially in the rural area. There are, of course, some best practices in Hungary, but that is not enough.

Finally yet importantly, the recognition of the youth work, especially in education and in society, is a key demand. Young people should see youth work as a career opportunity. These are my expectations.

**JfE: We keep our fingers crossed!**