

“The voice of the youth work community of practice could serve as a source of inspiration and guidance.” JUGEND für Europa spoke with Joanna Mazur.



Joanna Mazur is a chief expert in the International Co-operation Department in the Ministry of National Education of Poland. She represents her country in the Youth Working Party, where the EU youth documents are negotiated. On behalf of the Ministry of National Education, she is also involved in the National Working Group for the EU Youth Dialogue.

JfE: Mrs Mazur, which successes and strengths in youth work could your country share to enrich the debate and practice in Europe?

Mazur: Youth work in Poland is much diversified; both in terms of form and scope as well as youth work providers, goals and activities. The Polish state is actively working to increase the involvement of citizens and non-governmental organisations in public life. At the same time, an increasing number of grassroots and local initiatives aimed at improving the institutional capacity of civic organisations can be easily noticed. In 2019, at the request of the Ministry of National Education, researchers from the Youth Research Centre of the University of Warsaw prepared the report on the state of youth work in Poland compared to other EU Member States. The report presents the definitions of basic concepts and the main strategic goals of youth work in Poland and the EU. It also includes a comparative analysis of the role of the youth worker - competences, qualifications, career paths - as well as recommendations regarding legislative actions and prospects for the development of youth work in Poland. At the national level, there are several programmes supporting the third sector, including programmes implemented by The National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development, which is the first executive agency in the history of Poland responsible for supporting civil society, public benefit activities, and volunteering. Among the programmes implemented, the following can be mentioned:

- Solidarity Corps – a long-term volunteering programme, which aims to provide comprehensive support for the development of a long-term relationship between volunteers and institutions using their services
- Civil Initiatives Fund – a government grant programme for non-governmental organisations, under which projects aimed at increasing the involvement of citizens and non-governmental organisations in public life are subsidised

- Civil Society Organisations Development Programme for 2018-2030
- Scout Movement Development Governmental Programme for 2018-2030
- Folk Universities Development Programme for 2020-2030 – which is to support the development of social capital in rural areas and small towns
- International Meeting Centres Development Programme for 2020-2030

Due to the difficult situation of non-governmental organisations during the coronavirus pandemic, from April this year a programme of ad hoc support for non-governmental organisations in counteracting the effects of COVID-19 is also implemented.

In order to meet the demands of the youth community, in 2019 the Council for Dialogue with the Young Generation was established. It creates the possibility of civic dialogue between young people, youth workers and the most important state institutions. The main tasks of the Council include expressing opinions on draft legal acts and government programmes related to young people as well as initiating and supporting activities aimed at increasing the level of civic participation of young people in Poland.

Another activity responding to the demands put forward by the youth community is the appointment – in September 2020 – of the Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Policy. This decision aims to create a co-ordination centre for dialogue in the field of youth policy initiatives, including those related to youth work. The recently appointed Plenipotentiary is responsible inter alia for co-ordinating the preparation and implementation of a new multi-annual state policy strategy in the field of youth policy.

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

Mazur: The Polish delegation to the 3rd European Youth Work Convention regarding youth work in Poland in the context of the implementation of the Bonn Process found some challenges, which somehow are applicable at all levels (national, regional, local), for example:

- The need to strengthen the recognition and visibility of youth work as a separated field from social work or the work of educators, i.e. formal education vs. non-formal and informal education,
- The need to strengthen the professionalisation of the youth worker profession - highly recommended support for the training of youth workers,
- The need to promote youth work to increase its visibility and recognition in society,
- The need to take into account the available research on the youth sector, including challenges faced by youth and youth workers, when implementing the European Youth Work Agenda at national level,
- The need for access to a youth work platform with resources to support youth workers, such as contact database, good practices - this is in response to the planned creation of a multilingual pan-European youth work platform,
- Due to the growing workload of youth workers, there is a need for systemic support in the context of mental health, occupational burnout and the impact of changing working conditions, e.g. coronavirus pandemic, including development of digital skills,

- Taking into account the regional level - the role of local governments - when planning the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, for instance the role of youth councils, local youth policies,
- Inclusion of the youth work community of practice in the development and implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda and when developing youth policies,
- The need to analyse and standardise the definition and social role of youth workers as well as the challenges faced by youth workers when planning the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda. With this, we refer to the report 'Youth Work in Poland – diagnosis of the situation 2019', Ministry of National Education.

JfE: Where do you see the greatest need for further development of youth work in your country with regard to the aims of the Agenda?

Mazur: In Poland, now there is no national youth work strategy, nor youth strategy that would include youth work as a theme. In this regard, aim two 'Establishing youth work as an essential part of youth policies' is of particular importance. Consequently, to this aim seven 'Enhancing the promotion and recognition of youth work' is very relevant. Furthermore, there is a need for cross-sectoral co-operation between all stakeholders to develop an understanding of the role and value of youth work and youth workers. This refers to aim four 'Strengthening the common ground of youth work'.

In Poland, preparations are currently underway for the consultation of a new multi-annual state policy strategy in the field of youth policy. Youth work could play a crucial role in this document. As announced, consultations are supposed to cover the broadest possible group of youth, youth organisations, youth workers, youth councils at local government units as well as non-associated young people.

JfE: What kind of support in Europe respectively from Europe would help you strengthen youth work development in your country?

Mazur: In the context of support, what we expect the most is certainly the exchange of experiences and good practices on youth work, education and training of youth workers and the role of youth workers in society as a whole. This is one of the ways to strengthen knowledge-building and evidence-based approaches in youth work in Europe.

Furthermore, at the European level, EU programmes aimed at youth, such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, play an essential role in supporting and promoting non-formal education in the area of youth work as well as in relation to social and civic competences. With this in mind, Poland strongly supports the above-mentioned programmes.

JfE: What are your expectations towards implementing the European Youth Work Agenda in the Bonn Process in your country?

Mazur: In Poland - as stated in point three - now there is no national youth work strategy, nor youth strategy that would include youth work as a theme. The Bonn



Process can contribute to the discussion on youth work - taking into account the national circumstances. The voice of the youth work community of practice reflected in the final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention as well as the European Youth Work Agenda itself could serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for relevant stakeholders and authorities and be included wherever suitable in related policies. At the same time, due to the diversity of youth work in Europe, the solutions proposed at the European level should be adapted to meet the particular needs and conditions in individual member States and allow countries the necessary flexibility in the manner of achieving the goals.