



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Opportunities for Youth

## *National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services*



“The group gives me the chance to be with my friends, as otherwise I would have to stay home. In the group we do activities like baking, cooking, programmes, hiking, crafts, trips and we love listening to music... I used to go to the centre as often as I could as it was somewhere I could go to get out of the house, if I was stressed, see my friends or to talk to the youth worker if I needed someone to talk to.”  
– A Participant

“We lived for the Zoom cookery and bingo and got to the other end of COVID... but then having learned to wash hands, be socially distanced and avoid people, we found it hard to deprogramme our thoughts. Then came the nature and well-being programme, taking us into nature physically and digitally to access the calming affects that helped de-stress the members and volunteers and give their anxiety a break... I got a view to being happy and safe again.” – A Participant and Volunteer

“I have been involved in youth work for years, and I have seen first-hand how young people can make a difference. Through many activities like community clean-ups, and workshops to teach older community members how to use aspects of their devices like Netflix and WhatsApp, we are building self-confidence and shaping future leaders.” – A Volunteer Leader

“When we asked the young people for their feedback, the number one answer was ‘making friends, and meeting people who are like me’. This shows the power of youth work – building a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth to develop the skills and confidence to make a better, more equal Ireland for all of us.”  
– A Youth Organisation

“I have had many things happens to me throughout my life. My grandfather passed away, my youth workers were always there for me. I had school struggles throughout my life, my youth workers were always there for me. I had relationship breakdown throughout my life, my youth workers were always there for me. They helped me rebuild my self-confidence, supported me through my most difficult times and helped empower me to become the woman I am today.” – A Participant

“Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my job is the ability to interact with a varied range of young people, each with their own set of hopes, difficulties, and goals. Whether connecting during activities or exchanging stories around the bonfire, I learnt to value human connection in all of its forms. Through these experiences, I developed empathy, resilience, and a better awareness of the many challenges facing young people today.” – A Volunteer

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## Foreword by Minister



I am delighted to present *Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy on Youth Work and Related Services 2024–2028*.

This publication delivers on a commitment in *Young Ireland: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028*, which recognises the important role of youth work services in improving outcomes for young people and includes an action to develop and implement a document setting out a strategic direction for the delivery of such services during the lifetime of the Framework.

The vision of my Department is of a fair, equal and inclusive society where rights are respected and where everyone can achieve their potential. Youth work services have a crucial role to play in contributing to the realisation of this vision by creating spaces for young people of all backgrounds to belong and to thrive.

In developing this strategy, we have listened carefully to young people who have told us the difference participation in youth work services has made to them, by equipping them with useful skills; by helping them to develop their voice and agency; by supporting them to navigate challenges; by providing safe spaces in which they can flourish; by encouraging positive relationships with others; and by promoting a sense of belonging to cohesive and thriving communities. Youth work enables young people to reach their potential and take up their role as essential citizens, contributing to positive change in Ireland. For those young people who may not have other spaces in their lives where they feel safe, where they feel listened to, where they have a trusted adult to turn to and where they are given opportunities to try things out and to broaden their horizons, youth services can be a lifeline.

Young people, and those working with them, today navigate an increasingly complex social and global landscape, involving digitisation, the rise of mis-and-dis-information, changing demographic patterns, a decline in rates of mental well-being among some young people and the climate crisis. We also know that young people continue to need support with the more familiar challenges of adolescence, including making informed and healthy choices and remaining engaged with

education, training, employment or other positive pathways. In this context, the challenge to us all is to ensure that we have the policies and services in place that effectively engage young people and enable them to thrive.

Not all groups of young people currently experience the same opportunities in Ireland. Some young people face significant barriers to developing their full potential and to their active participation in society. These include young people who are migrants, who belong to the Traveller and Roma communities or other ethnic minority groups. They also include young people with a disability and young people experiencing poverty or not in education, employment or training. It is essential that young people from these groups, in particular, are able to fully benefit from youth work opportunities and that youth spaces are experienced by young people of all backgrounds as places of belonging.

The wider consultation to develop *Opportunities for Youth* has underscored the many strengths of Ireland's youth work sector. Across the sector, there is a strong commitment to the delivery of quality services that are fundamentally shaped by an ethos of partnership with young people and dedication to creating space for the voice of young people and empowering them as active citizens. Youth workers are highly valued, too, across other sectors for their expertise in engaging and building trusting relationships with the most seldom heard young people and they often play a

pivotal role in interagency approaches to support young people in crisis. We also have in Ireland a vigorous network and tradition of committed volunteers that enable many more young people to participate in youth work activities than would otherwise be possible, who act as positive role models and mentors and help to connect young people to their communities.

I am very proud that through the efforts of so many youth organisations, youth workers, volunteers and other key partners such as the Education and Training Boards, and supported by Government, we are able to create transformative and empowering spaces for young people throughout Ireland. In recent years, we have made significant progress in updating a number of the legacy funding schemes that support much youth work activity in Ireland, which will ensure that we have a strong platform for high-quality service provision going forward. I have also been delighted to have been able to increase my Department's overall funding allocation to the youth sector by 26% since Budget 2020.

But the consultation process has also highlighted that there is much more to be done. Young people want more diversity of choice and a strong range of options to meet their different needs and interests, including at different ages. They also want enhanced channels to influence the content of youth work programmes and for opportunities and services to be more visible and accessible to all their peers. Moreover, we don't yet have the

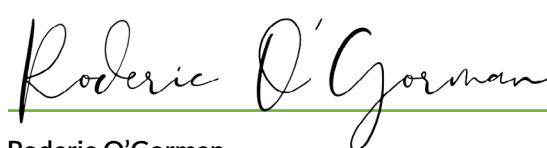


critical data we need on who is currently benefitting from youth services and where the gaps are. Challenges in recruiting and retaining youth workers and volunteers are impacting on service-provision. While many services adhere to the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work, we do not have in place a sector-wide approach to measuring and enhancing quality and impact. Similarly, although collaboration and co-ordination is strong in some areas, we must do more at all levels, including within Government Departments and agencies, to work together to better leverage the capacity of youth work services to deliver better outcomes for young people of all backgrounds and across multiple domains, from community safety to climate action.

*Opportunities for Youth* provides a clear Vision and set Strategic Objectives to guide a collective approach to developing youth work services over the coming years. In what is a highly dynamic and diverse service-delivery landscape, the strategic approach set out, which has been shaped in close consultation with stakeholders, provides a shared touchstone to help us move forward together. But it is equally important that we have in place the right structures and enabling environment for effective youth work services. This not only means having services that are visible, attractive and inclusive; but also having the right data and research; strong youth participation structures; an agreed framework to support quality; suitable physical and digital spaces and capacity for outreach; services that are visible,

engaging and accessible; a well-equipped and supported youth workforce, paid and voluntary; and effective structures for co-ordination and collaboration, including shared policy goals. For this reason, there is a strong focus in the Strategy on measures addressing these key areas.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone, in particular the young people as well as the youth workers and volunteers, who participated in consultations and took the time to help shape this ambitious strategy. I look forward to working with all of our stakeholders as we begin implementation. I believe the actions taken will make a significant difference to the lives of young people and will bring us another step forward in realising our vision of Ireland as a place where all young people can reach their full potential.



**Roderic O'Gorman**  
Minister for Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

## Introduction

*Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services* sets out Ireland's key policy ambitions for youth work and related services. It describes the measures we will take in the period 2024 - 2028 to move us closer to an Ireland where all young people who wish to are able to participate in enriching and developmental out-of-school opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential.

This publication delivers on a commitment in *Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028*, which recognises the important role of youth work services in improving outcomes for young people and includes an agreed action to develop and implement a document setting out a strategic direction for the delivery of such services.

Informed by extensive consultation and review, *Opportunities for Youth* builds on successive policy efforts to maximise the role of youth work in delivering improved outcomes for young people, including through the *National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (2011)*, the *National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 (2015)* and the *UBU Your Place Your Space Policy and Operating Rules (2019)*. It will provide a platform to harness and further develop the role of youth work services in addressing current and emerging policy priorities for children and young people and a basis for an improved cross-government and cross-agency approach.

*Young Ireland* states that realising the rights and improving the outcomes of children and young people is a responsibility shared across society, sectors and Government Departments. Within this wider space, youth work and similar services have an important developmental role to play, one that is especially important for young people experiencing particular barriers to opportunity. Investment in this area is intended to support young people across the 5 National Outcomes for children and young people, including by improving young people's educational, employment and health outcomes; supporting them to feel safe, respected, included and equal; and empowering and making space for them to actively contribute to their communities and wider society.

*Opportunities for Youth* is intended to strengthen the capacity of the youth work sector to support the delivery of these outcomes and to address new and emerging challenges for young people, such as navigating the digital environment and the growth of disinformation. Delivering on its vision and strategic objectives will, however, require collaboration beyond the youth work sector into all areas of life affecting young people.

# Definitions

The focus of Opportunities for Youth is on the role played by youth work services in the lives of young people and on strengthening that role in the context of wider national policy-making and service delivery for children and young people.



## Definitions

The focus of Opportunities for Youth is on the role played by youth work services in the lives of young people and on strengthening that role in the context of wider national policy-making and service delivery for children and young people.

Youth work is defined in the Youth Work Act, 2001 as:

*a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.*

Youth work services are also often referred to as 'youth services'.

The specific methods and activities involved in youth work delivery are wide-ranging, in response to the needs and interests of young people, and can include, for instance, sporting and recreational activity, indoor and outdoor; local volunteer-led youth clubs; participation in uniformed groups such as the Scouts and Girl Guides; artistic, creative

and cultural activities; activities focused on health and well-being; activities focused on digital skills; civic engagement and youth volunteering programmes; issues-based activities, such as climate action projects; mentoring; outreach and detached or street-based youth work; intercultural or integration projects; international youth projects and exchanges; and youth work with a particular pre-stated outcome, such as youth employability initiatives.

Across this variety of formats, youth work services focus above all on supporting and empowering young people to develop their full potential. They achieve this through building mutually trustful and respectful relationships with and between young people and by providing out-of-school opportunities that are engaging, developmental, educational, challenging, supportive and creative, and are designed to extend young people's agency over their own lives and within their wider community. They can also play an important role in supporting young people through challenges and risks that may impact in damaging ways on young people in their communities and wider society.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA, 2013) Youth work: A systematic map of the research literature, pp. 7–9; DCYA (2019) UBU Your Place Your Space Policy and Operating Rules pp. 13–15; National Youth Council of Ireland (2023) Vision for Youth Work, pp. 6, 8.



# Vision and Strategic Objectives

Our vision is that all young people in Ireland are able to reach their full potential and positively shape their own future.



## Vision and Strategic Objectives

Young people are diverse, with different opportunities, interests and strengths. They face different challenges and need different supports to thrive and pursue positive pathways. Youth work policy and service provision must therefore be shaped by the complex, varying and dynamic situations, needs, interests, strengths and views of young people themselves. Special attention should be paid to young people who experience particular barriers to opportunity, while recognising that the capacities and vulnerabilities of individual young people fluctuate over time.

This policy vision is directed at young people during the critical developmental period between childhood and adolescence. The National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 defines this period of youth as that between the ages of 10 and 24 years. As they develop from childhood to adulthood, young people experience a range of transitions, notably between different stages of education; from education to employment; and from childhood to independent living and full participation in society.<sup>2</sup> This trajectory differs from individual to individual and some young people experience particular challenges and additional barriers to flourishing.

This is also a period when young people are developing autonomy and learning to be active agents in their own lives. It is important that they are provided with sufficient opportunities to experience supportive relationships and to acquire the personal and social competencies needed to thrive and to contribute to society. Timely investment during this period of young people's development can yield significant long-term benefits for young people and for wider society.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, in order to be able to positively shape their own futures and contribute to our shared Sustainable Development Goals, young people must be equipped to navigate a rapidly evolving global context of climate change, digitalisation and demographic shifts.

In addition, it should be remembered that young people are not simply adults-to-be; they are also current rights-holders who may experience particular challenges to fully enjoying their rights, and therefore require particular policy efforts and supports.<sup>4w</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See OECD (2022) Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People.

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2017) Evidence-based Policy Making for Youth Well-being: A Toolkit, OECD Development Policy Tools, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> See Council of Europe (2016) Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on research on young people's access to rights.

# Strategic Objectives

To deliver on its vision, Opportunities for Youth identifies 3 Strategic Objectives that will shape the future direction for youth work opportunities and services over the lifetime of the Young Ireland framework.

**Strategic Objective 1:** The role of youth work services in enhancing the lives of young people is strengthened, more visible and better aligned with other services. This means that:

The main priority in all youth work policies, schemes and services is delivering better opportunities and outcomes for young people.

All delivery partners ensure that there is a strong range of offerings and flexible approaches to attract, engage and meet the interests and the developmental needs of young people at different stages and in different circumstances.

Young people, their families and the wider community are aware of and able to access the local, national and EU/international opportunities available to young people.

Youth work services are recognised and supported to be a part of the wider eco-system of statutory and non-statutory services, with strong linkages between youth work services and other services and pathways for young people.

There are mechanisms in place to identify and coherently address cross-sectoral youth policy priorities, with strong collaboration across the youth sector to maximise opportunities, and outcomes.

**Strategic Objective 2:** An equality and rights-based approach is embedded across all youth work services and supporting structures. This means that:

Youth work services reflect the diversity of the Irish youth population.

Universal and targeted provision work alongside each other effectively to enable the participation and flourishing of young people from all backgrounds and communities.

Young people are able to meaningfully shape the content of youth work services, schemes and policy.

Youth work services are experienced by all young people as places of belonging, safety and empowerment.

There are measures in place to ensure that youth work services are actively inclusive and accessible to all young people, including through active outreach to engage cohorts experiencing particular barriers to opportunity.

There are measures for capacity-building within the youth sector on rights, equality, outreach and inclusion.

**Strategic Objective 3:** Youth work services are high quality, accountable, sustainable and shaped by relevant data and evidence. This means that:

Schemes, organisations and services support and promote quality, innovation, collaboration and the sharing of best practice.

All those working with young people, both paid and volunteer, have the right skills, training and supports to deliver high-quality youth work services to young people.

Decisions about planning, development and investment in community facilities and infrastructure are responsive to the needs of young people and youth work services.

There are clear, effective and proportionate reporting processes in place, including tools to measure outputs and outcomes.

Youth services and schemes should reflect and support Ireland’s commitments to promoting equality, including gender equality, and to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Youth work services and supporting organisations have access to reliable local and national data about different cohorts of young people and their needs.

Investment is transparent, data-driven and evidence-based and delivers impact for young people while addressing known gaps in service-delivery and avoiding duplication.

There is strong accountability for delivering and reporting in line with agreed priorities.

There is strong dissemination and uptake of EU and other opportunities for strategic partnerships, best-practice sharing and peer learning.



# Service – Delivery Context

The role of youth work services in the lives of young people in Ireland



## Youth work services in Ireland

Data from the Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Survey, a study started in 2006 which follows two cohorts of young people, indicate that 36% of girls and 32% of boys aged 13 years reported having participated in a youth organisation in the previous year, while 14% of those surveyed aged 17–18 years reported having participated in the previous year.<sup>5</sup> Information provided by funded youth organisations indicates that approximately 380,000 young people currently participate in youth work services.

Youth services fall into two main categories: universal services open to all young people and targeted services aimed at particular cohorts of young people identified as experiencing particular barriers to opportunity. The delivery of universal services is strongly dependent on volunteers; while targeted services are generally delivered by professional youth workers. Whether universal or targeted, the provision of youth work services relies on the voluntary engagement of young people and therefore on providing a range of engaging

and attractive youth-centred developmental activities and opportunities. As highlighted in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs report (2013) titled *Youth work: A systematic map of the research literature*, “The fact that young people engage in youth work of their own volition, and actively seek out and inform the development of such work based on their interests and needs, is a central dynamic in how youth work works.”<sup>6</sup>

Youth work services and opportunities are primarily delivered within communities by voluntary youth organisations and services, operating at local, regional or national level. Voluntary youth organisations play a key role in the delivery of both universal and targeted services. They employ the youth workers and support the volunteers who directly deliver services to young people. These organisations also provide a range of support and developmental functions, including coordination with other services, working to build capacity, developing a quality and enhanced evidence base within the sector, and advocating for young people’s interests.

<sup>5</sup> DCEDIY (2023) Statistical Spotlight on Young People’s Participation in Youth Organisations.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Youth work: A systematic map of the research literature*, p. vi.



The 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), formerly the Vocational Education Committees, hold statutory responsibility under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 to “support the provision, coordination, administration and assessment of youth work services in [their] functional area and to provide information as may be requested by the Minister for [Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth] in relation to such support”. The ETBs are responsible for the distribution and oversight of the majority of the State’s funding for youth work at a local level. They work to identify and target youth work provision to the needs of young people in their ETB area, including through effective coordination with the Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSCs) and other local structures. They also have an important role to play in local governance of youth services and in supporting the quality of youth service provision.

In recent years, a substantial reform process has taken place to consolidate a number of youth funding schemes, leading to the launch of the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme in 2019. The services funded under this reformed scheme, which is managed at ETB level and delivered by professional youth workers, are aimed at young people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or otherwise vulnerable. A total of 250 youth services throughout Ireland are currently supported under this scheme.

At a national level, the Youth Services Grant Scheme was established in 1986 to support regional and national-level voluntary youth organisations providing planned programmes, activities and services open to all young people. This scheme is currently being reformed and modernised in order to better address the needs of young people today and to provide a more robust and transparent funding and governance infrastructure.

In addition to the above bodies, Gaisce – the President’s Award, which is an aegis body of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), provides nationally recognised non-formal learning opportunities for young people aged 14–25 years from all backgrounds to undertake personal and civic development challenges and to contribute to their communities.

Another important element of this service delivery context is the significant funding available at European Union (EU) level under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes to support both international and national-level youth work and civic engagement opportunities for young people, and to build youth work capacity and quality at all levels. This funding is managed within Ireland by the national agency Léargas, which works closely with delivery partners to promote participation in these programmes, particularly among young people with fewer opportunities.

National funding to support youth services and youth organisations is provided by a number of Government Departments and agencies. These include DCEDIY; the Department of Justice (DoJ); Tusla – Child and Family Agency; the Health Service Executive (HSE); the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD); the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC); the Department of Social Protection (DSP); the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA); the Department of Education (DoE); the Arts Council; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM). The largest funder among these, DCEDIY, has allocated more than €80 million to the youth sector in 2024.

The number of funders involved reflects the role played by youth services in delivering improved outcomes for young people across a range of policy domains, such as employment, climate action, mental health, family welfare, and community safety.

A timeline capturing important milestones in the development of youth work services in Ireland is included at [Appendix 1](#).

## Benefits to young people and society

Participation in youth work services and opportunities is associated with improved outcomes for young people and society across a number of studies.<sup>7</sup> The benefits identified include improved outcomes in the areas of agency, resilience, creativity, empathy, communication, leadership and problem-solving skills. Participation in youth services can boost young people's sense of well-being, safety, trust and belonging and enhance their civic engagement and active citizenship. It can also improve young people's educational, employment and health outcomes. At a societal level, participation in youth work has also been linked to improvements in the areas of social and community cohesion and cultural awareness.

In consultations with young people, including those carried out to inform *Opportunities for Youth*, young people have reported these benefits and highlighted the positive difference that involvement in youth work has made to them.

The benefits of participating in youth work are especially relevant for marginalised young people who face more barriers and have fewer opportunities. In recent years, youth workers and volunteers have played an important role during successive crises in supporting young people at risk, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in providing supports for migrant young people from Ukraine and other countries, helping to integrate newcomers into their communities.

All young people, however, can benefit from dedicated youth spaces that provide safe opportunities to have fun, try new, enriching and developmental experiences in a safe setting, learn new skills, make friends, receive support to overcome challenge and adversity, connect with positive mentors and role models and the wider community, and have their views sought and respected.

## Young People in Ireland

At the time of the last Census in 2022, there were more than 1 million young people aged 10–24 years living in the State, an increase of 13.7% since 2016. Ten per cent of these were living in Dublin city. Almost one-quarter were of an ethnicity other than White Irish. More than 10,000 young people were recorded as members of the Irish Traveller community and more than 3,600 as belonging to the Roma community. More than 90,000 young migrants aged 10–24 years were living in Ireland. More than 168,000 young people aged 10–24 years were recorded as having a disability. Almost 58,000 young people aged 15–24 years were not in employment, education or training. A total of 6,482 children aged 10–17 years had caring responsibilities, as did almost 10,000 young people aged 18–24 years.

Figures from the 2016 Census show that 37% of people aged 10–24 years were living in rural locations and 63% of this age cohort were living in urban areas. While we do not have population data for young people's sexual identity, the Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Young People found that 13%

of those surveyed who were aged 20 years in 2018 or 2019 identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning or other, with 87% identifying as heterosexual or straight. A total of 3,500 young people aged 10 to 17 years were in the care of Tusla – the Child and Family Agency in 2023.<sup>8</sup>

Key themes affecting the lives of young people in Ireland have been captured across a number of significant recent pieces of research as well as in consultations carried out with young people over the past number of years.<sup>9</sup> Foremost among the issues cited are the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on the mental and social well-being of young people; growing opportunities and risks associated with young people's digital lives; the priority placed by young people on climate issues; young people's attitudes towards and opportunities for democratic and civic engagement; and continuing disparities and inequalities among different cohorts of young people in access to opportunities, including spaces and activities at a local level, and across the five National Outcomes for children and young people.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, 'Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes', paper by the Centre for Effective Services commissioned on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth (2014) pp. 160–164; Brady, B., Silke, C., and Shaw, A. (2022) A Rapid Review of the Benefits and Outcomes of Universal Youth Work. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department for Culture, Media and Sport UK (2023) Youth Provision and Life Outcomes: A Study of Longitudinal Research.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, State of the Nation's Children, 2023. [gov - State of the Nation's Children: Key Findings](https://www.gov.ie) ([www.gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie))

<sup>9</sup> Young Ireland indicator set 2023; State of the Nation's Children 2023; Analysing child and youth outcomes on Ireland from a comparative perspective, OECD (2024); Civic and political engagement among young adults in Ireland, ESRI (2023); Consultation on Ireland's draft state report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, DCEDIY (2021); Consultation on Creative Youth 2023 – 2027; Report on the consultations with minority ethnic young people, Deirdre Fullerton Insights Health and Social Research (2022); Russell, H. and Smyth E. (2024) Caregiving among Young Adults in Ireland, ESRI Research Series 168, Dublin: ESRI, <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs168>; Andersson, Y., Timmons S. and Lunn P. (2022) Youth Knowledge and Perceptions of Climate Mitigation, ESRI Research Series 153, Dublin: ESRI, <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs153> | BibTeX: Laurence, J. and Smyth E. (2023) Civic and political engagement among young adults in Ireland, ESRI Research Series 171, Dublin: ESRI, <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs171>; OECD (2024) Together for Children and Young People in Ireland: Towards a New Governance Framework, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/12f4dfb2-en>; my world survey; Deirdre Fullerton Insights Health and Social Research (2022) Report on the Consultations with Minority Ethnic Young People; Deirdre Fullerton Insights Health and Social Research and Sheena McGrellis Independent Research Consultant (2022) Report on the Consultations with Children and Young People for the Family Justice Oversight Group; Annabel Egan (2023) Report on the Consultations with Young People for the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use.



### Youth Work in Action

## Youth-led Community Action in Cork

A youth service in Cork highlights the difference their youth council makes to their community. The group said:

“From organising food appeals to managing Santa’s Grotto and assembling food hampers for local families in need, our youth council’s commitment to community welfare is evident. Their creative contributions to cultural events such as the St Patrick’s Day Parade, Mallow Arts Festival, Halloween Festival, and Christmas Festival have added vibrancy and richness to our town’s cultural tapestry.

Their international involvement in the Erasmus Exchange highlights their interest in global collaboration and cultural exchange, further emphasising their well-rounded engagement.

On top of this, their achievements, such as receiving Gaisce awards and visiting the Dáil, demonstrate their commitment to civic engagement and recognition within the broader community.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this group is their diversity, which fosters inclusion and integration within our community. Collaborative efforts with various community agencies have yielded remarkable results, garnering

overwhelmingly positive feedback from both social media and in-person interactions.

The vibrancy, fun, colour and passion that the youth council brings to our community initiatives have been widely praised. Their inclusive approach has prompted interest from other young individuals and parents, reflecting a growing enthusiasm within our community to actively involve and engage its younger members.

In summary, the youth council’s contributions epitomise the essence of community spirit, social responsibility, and inclusive engagement. Their tireless efforts have not only enriched our community but have also inspired us all to strive for a brighter, more connected future.”



### Youth Work in Action

## The No Shame Game: Starting Conversations on Traveller Mental Health

The No Shame Game was designed by young people in a youth project in Meath to start conversations around mental health – specifically Traveller mental health. This youth project specialises in providing out-of-school non-formal learning opportunities to young people in the Traveller community, including homework space, seasonal programmes, sport and creative programmes, and European youth work activities and exchanges.

The No Shame Game is a mental health board game designed by young people for young people. It involves discussing emotions, positive affirmations and developing coping skills. The game was the result of years of initiatives by the young people, who also organised a mental health conference and workshops

The project said:

“In May 2022, we got a giant version of the game (7 m x 7 m) to use as part of the Erasmus Youth Exchange in July. In August, young people came to Center Parcs for leadership training and to become

mental health ambassadors. Then, between September and December 2022, we facilitated workshops in schools and youth projects in Meath with the game. The game was officially launched in November 2022.”

Since then, the youth project has continued to promote the game, while also launching the No Shame Podcast, which was made available on Spotify in 2023.

The young people in Trim and Navan continue to work to break down the stigma around mental health in the Traveller community through the game and podcast.



# The National Youth Policy Context

Youth work policy and provision should reflect Ireland's wider policy goals for children and young people



## Young Ireland: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028

Youth work policy and provision should reflect Ireland's wider policy goals for children and young people. Ireland's national policy objectives for all children and young people aged under 25 years are set out in *Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028*. The vision of Young Ireland is for "An Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of children and young people". It aims to create a robust ecosystem for the realisation of children and young people's rights, in which children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda. This in turn relies on developing an enabling environment "in which the voices of children and young people are amplified, where policy-makers can access the data and research they need to put children and young people's needs at the centre of policy-making, and where services ensure those needs are met."

Young Ireland also places a particular focus on young people facing additional challenges and who may need additional support. This is described as follows:

Groups who may face additional challenges include those with a disability; with mental health challenges; living in or at risk of poverty including homelessness; who are members of the Traveller or Roma communities; who are members of the LGBTI+ community; who have suffered abuse or neglect; seeking international protection; from minority ethnic backgrounds; migrant children and young people; living in a single parent household; living in Care or Aftercare; who are young carers; living in a household with substance misuse; or have a family member in prison.

*Young Ireland* provides a platform to allow all partners to work together, including through a series of cross-government 'spotlights' to address the most serious issues being experienced by children and young people, which are identified as child poverty; mental health and well-being; and disability services.



*Young Ireland* retains the five National Outcomes for children and young people and identifies priority areas under each Outcome where further work is needed. The identified priority areas across the five National Outcomes that are particularly relevant to youth work services in the coming period are:

**Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing**  
(National Outcome 1)

**Prevention and early intervention**  
(National Outcome 3)

**Employment Activation**  
(National Outcome 4)

**The Digital Environment**  
(National Outcome 5)

**Participation in Democracy**  
(National Outcome 5)

## Child Poverty and Well-being

The youth work sector has an important role to play in delivering on the Government's commitments in the areas of child poverty and well-being, as set out in *From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Poverty and Well-being 2023-2025*. Particularly relevant to youth work services is the focus on ensuring that children have access to supports and services which promote physical, mental, emotional and social well-

This new policy context provides a renewed impetus to ensure that **the rights of children and young people** are at the heart of youth work policy-making and service delivery and to review the effectiveness of the **wider enabling environment** for youth work service delivery, including in respect of **amplifying young people's voices**, ensuring that decision-makers and service providers have the right **data and evidence** they need, that services meet the needs of young people, and that those **working with young people** have their learning needs met. It is also important that youth work services continue to contribute to the **delivery of outcomes**, in line with wider youth policy priorities. Equally, policy-making and service delivery should pay particular attention to the needs of young people facing the most significant challenges and barriers to opportunity.

Action 17 of *Young Ireland* also includes a number of specific actions on youth services which are set out in **Appendix 2** to this document.

being, and that they are able to participate in enriching activities outside of school, including art, music and sport, regardless of cost. The Programme Plan includes a specific measure to focus on the potential of youth work to engage with young people in deprived neighbourhoods, as a means to encouraging engagement in a range of activities that are of interest to young people.

## Working Across Boundaries

Another key principle of Ireland's policy approach to supporting children and young people is the emphasis on working together across sectors and agencies. To effectively support young people, particularly more vulnerable young people, aligned approaches and structures for collaborative investment are needed. In respect of youth work services, the ETBs are the key State bodies charged with the provision, coordination, administration and assessment of youth work services in their functional areas. It is also important that voluntary youth organisations have strong relationships with other sectors that are working to support young people or that have expertise in key areas of relevance to young people.

To properly identify youth needs, the ETBs, youth organisations and youth services must coordinate with a range of local agencies, in particular CYPSCs. CYPSCs are the main infrastructure to facilitate local interagency working in respect of wider children's and young people's services in Ireland. The CYPSCs' mandate covers the age range 0-24 years. They include representation from both statutory and voluntary services and their role is to identify emerging local needs and bring together the relevant delivery partners to address them. Both *Young Ireland* and *Shared Vision, Next Steps, 2019-2024: The National Policy Document for Children and Young People's Services* Committees include actions to

support the collaboration and co-ordination role of CYPSC in the planning and delivery of services.

Another relevant wider youth policy commitment in this area is the partnership approach set out in *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027*. It is focused on "collaborating across all sectors of government and society in the development and delivery of opportunities for children and young people, to harness support in their families and communities in order to strengthen their capacities to live free from crime and harm."

The *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027* commits to promoting collaboration with the youth work sector in order to enhance access for all young people to services and use resources more effectively. It also commits to enhancing the range of positive leisure time and developmental activities available to young people and ensure that these are accessible to those in vulnerable and 'at risk' situations.

To improve cooperation across Government and relevant sectors, a new Children and Young People's Policy Forum is being put place under the *Young Ireland* Framework. It will be tasked with overseeing and driving the effective implementation of policies affecting children and young people within their respective spheres of responsibility, across Government Departments, agencies and sectors.

# Youth Participatory Approaches

Ireland’s policy commitment to young people’s participation in decision-making is set out under successive strategies and frameworks and is recognised in *Young Ireland* as an integral enabler of young people’s rights. Youth work services in Ireland share a strong ethos of co-partnership with young people. At a policy level, the *National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making* (2021) requires that:

## At club and project level

Every child and young person should have a voice in decision-making about the day-to-day activities and methods of engagement in the club or project.

## At organisational level

Children and young people should have a voice in decision-making in organisational programmes, plans, policies and events as well as in the governance of the organisation. Structures such as youth panels or youth advisory groups are one mechanism for ensuring this voice is heard.

*The Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024-2028* builds on the ambition and achievements of the first *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making* and aims to further promote the inclusion of children and young people in decision making at all levels – in the home, in school, in their communities and at national level.

Likewise, *the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work* (2010) stipulates that one of the core indicators of youth-centred provision, against which the quality of services should be measured, is that ‘young people are involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services’.

# Creative Youth

Ireland’s commitment to fostering creativity in young people is set out in the *Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027*. The plan contains a number of strategic objectives that are aimed at supporting creativity in young people. These include strengthening equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom-heard children and young people;

connecting creative organisations with community spaces so that young people can be equipped with the tools to fully use their creative expression; and using creative engagement to help improve the mental health and well-being of children and young people.

# National Sports Policy 2018-2027

*The National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027* outlines the Government’s commitment to ensuring inclusive, accessible and quality opportunities for participation in sport for all people from all backgrounds and at all stages of life.<sup>10</sup> While young children of primary school age engage regularly in sport, there is a notable decrease in participation levels when children reach adolescence.<sup>11</sup> This decline is particularly evident among girls, young people from lower

socio-economic groups and young people with disabilities.<sup>12</sup> Sport has a proven positive impact on the well-being of young people and it is essential to address inequalities to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate in sport. The youth work sector is well placed to help address these inequalities through providing relevant opportunities to young people and through collaboration with local sports structures.

# Youth employment policy

Ireland’s *Pathways to Work 2021-2025* strategy recognises the risk of detachment from the labour force for some cohorts of young people, including early school leavers, those with low levels of education and those who are not in employment, education or training. It is committed to providing a range of targeted measures to support young people to progress into employment.

Youth work services also have an important role to play in enhancing young people’s employability, enabling young people to develop the personal and social competencies that are associated with improved employment outcomes. Young people who are not in employment, education or training are a target group of the UBU Your Place Your Space youth funding scheme. The Government has also

put in place a Targeted Youth Employability Support Initiative to support focused youth work interventions to assist young people to attain a level of confidence and agency to engage in a wide range of currently available progression routes into employment. For these approaches to be most effective, it is important that there are strong partnerships between youth services and mainstream employment or further education or training services.

For all young people, the personal, social and practical skills developed through non-formal and informal learning in youth work and similar activities such as the Gaisce programme can help to equip them for the workforce and more broadly as engaged participants in society.

10 Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (2019) *National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027*. [www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf#page=null](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf#page=null)

11 ibid

12 Ibid



*Youth Work in Action*

## Digital Creativity for Older Teenagers in Galway

One youth service in Galway has created an Audio-Visual Club for older teenagers as part of its targeted service for young people. The Audio-Visual Club started out with four young people in September 2022 and now has 16 members. The young people come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including young people living in rural isolation, young migrants and neurodivergent young people. They come together because of their interest in film-making and digital creativity as well as story-telling, scriptwriting, visual art, radio drama and podcasting. The club is supported by a youth worker but is youth-led in its approach, as the members choose the activities they wish to engage with and are in full control of the projects they work on. The young people have created a range of films, podcasts, and animations; some for fun, some to engage with STEM, and some dealing with the social issues that young people face. Through these activities, the young people have entered national competitions and set up their own local showcase. Supported by NYCI Artist in Residency funding, the group was able to work intensively with a radio drama producer to create three original dramatic works that were broadcast on local community radio.

“Through the various activities of the club, the young people have developed improved social and communication skills, ability to work in a team, a sense of belonging to their community, the ability to take a project from planning to completion and a huge increase in self-esteem and confidence.

“Some of the young people have been supported to engage with further education and traineeships whilst still engaging with the group. Some others are in the process of becoming young volunteers to support other young people in the community.”



*Youth Work in Action*

## A Teen Fitness Programme in the Midlands

A targeted youth service in the Midlands partnered with Healthy Ireland to fund a teen fitness programme aimed at re-engaging young girls in sport. The programme was focused on fun and included young people from different backgrounds, including young people who had recently arrived in Ireland from Ukraine.

“We had a trainer come in to develop a programme where young people got the opportunity to do a variety of sports. The final hurdle was taking part in the Dublin Mini Marathon. These young people have now developed a great love for outdoor walking and believe it helps their mental health to go for a walk in times of stress. Through their summer programme, they then took part in a surfing activity in Donegal with a surf school in the local area.”

# The Wider National Policy Context

Youth work services also have the potential to contribute significantly towards Ireland's wider policy commitments to deliver inclusion and equality for all and to support thriving and sustainable communities.



## Inclusion, Equality and Integration

Policy commitments to inclusion and equality have been set out in a range of national strategies which recognise that particular measures are needed in order to ensure that all members of Irish society are enabled to achieve their full potential and live safe, fulfilling lives.<sup>13</sup> These strategies, some of which have successor strategies in development, identify a role for youth work services and youth funding schemes in ensuring inclusive spaces and practices for young people of diverse backgrounds, including members of the Traveller and Roma community, young people with disabilities, women and girls, members of the LGBTI+ community and ethnic minority young people.

Having the right data is crucial to delivering on inclusive and equality-based approaches. Delivery partners working with young people should have access to the data they need to identify where and what the diverse needs are. Funders and decision-makers should also have access to disaggregated data on participation in services to inform effective policy-making and impactful investment. The forthcoming *National Equality Data Strategy* will put in place a strategic approach to improving the collection, use and dissemination of equality data.

The Government is also committed to supporting migrant integration and social cohesion, as set out under the *Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020*, a successor to which is under development. Youth work services have an important role to play in supporting the belonging of young migrants in their communities and supporting intercultural awareness among young people.

<sup>13</sup> The National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021; the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020; the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020; the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020; the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021; the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021; and the National Action Plan Against Racism (2023).



## Active Participation and Civic Engagement

The 2020 Programme for Government: Our Shared Future sets out a vision for Ireland that includes the “full and equal participation [of people] in Irish social, political and cultural life.” The theme of active participation in society is also reflected in *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2023* which includes as a key measure of well-being an indicator on ‘Connections, Community and Participation’. The Well-being Framework 2023 describes this as:

the ability and opportunities that an individual has to meet the basic needs of personal connection and engagement with family, friends and the wider community. In the modern era, this includes online social connections and interactions. This dimension also covers connection to the community, for example, through volunteering or other community activities.<sup>14</sup>

Also included as a measure under *The Well-being Framework 2023* is ‘Civic Engagement, Trust and Cultural Expression’, described as:

the rights and opportunities an individual has to impact the political functioning of their society, the existence of institutional arrangements that foster cooperation and freedom of expression of identity and non-discrimination, and trust in those institutions and across broader society.

For young people in particular, it is an aim of *Young Ireland* that more young people become “active participants in democracy, including electoral politics and other forums of democratic decision-making”.

Another important facet of young people’s full participation in society is the provision of reliable, accessible information that makes them aware of their rights, helps them to navigate wider services, and supports them to develop information and media literacy. *The Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework (2022)* notes the importance of media literacy in the digital environment, especially given the increasing threat of misinformation and rise of extremism.

Youth work services are an important part of the supportive ecosystem for young people’s civic engagement. Enabling young people’s civic engagement and active participation in society means ensuring that they have access to safe youth-friendly spaces and opportunities to thrive, connect with others and contribute to their communities. In addition, it is important that particular provision is made to support young people to skilfully navigate the contemporary information landscape.

<sup>14</sup> *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2023*, p. 28.

## Rural and Community Development

Youth work services in Ireland are mainly provided within the local community by organisations operating in the community and voluntary (C&V) sector. This means that effective youth work provision is dependent on wider policies and structures to develop communities and support the C&V sector.

*Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024* sets out a number of commitments that are relevant to the role and challenges experienced by voluntary youth organisations, including the need to scope out an approach to multi-annual funding models, thus allowing for a more strategic approach to planning and service provision.

*The National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* sets out a vision of a society where volunteering is promoted, valued, facilitated and supported so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities. It recognises the changing nature of volunteering in Ireland and the need to have structures in place to respond to this changing environment and the diverse training and support needs of

volunteers and organisations. The *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* also recognises the value of engaging young people in volunteering, which delivers a wide range of benefits for young people and wider society.

A related strategic context is the commitments set out in *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*. Some of the challenges facing rural communities have a pronounced impact on young people in particular. These include challenges in accessing public transport, age-appropriate facilities and a sufficiently diverse range of activities outside of sport.

The Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are responsible for coordinating, planning and overseeing local and community development funding and ensuring that local resources are aligned with priorities. They input into each local authority's Local Economic and Community Plan, which is the primary mechanism to promote community and local development, including in respect of infrastructure and community facilities. Statutory and voluntary youth sector representatives are included on the LCDCs.

### Youth Work in Action

## A Youth Service in Tallaght

One participant based in Tallaght reflects on the difference being involved in her local youth service has made to her.

"I am a 22-year-old Traveller woman. I was attending Youthreach and they gave me a leaflet with the different [youth] services available to me.

"I first contacted the youth worker to get help to do the Driver Theory Test Training that they provided. We set up an appointment and I did an introduction to the training. I trained twice a week for an hour at a time with the youth worker. After a few months the youth worker encouraged me to apply for my test as she felt I was ready. The youth worker accompanied me to the test centre and I passed the test. I was delighted and so was my family.

"I also joined the Ladies weekly afternoon group and got to meet other Traveller women of the same age, some from different Traveller clans. The new experiences we had were great, including: hiking up the mountains; doing yoga; visiting the museums in Dublin City; hiring out bikes and cycling around the Phoenix Park. A highlight was being guests in Dáil Éireann and witnessing a Sitting. These are things I never would have thought to do and would not have been allowed to attend on my own.

"While attending the Ladies afternoon group I was informed of a Community Employment vacancy with a local youth service for a Youth Work Assistant. The youth worker helped me to do up a CV and apply for the position and then make my Garda vetting application. I have been on the CE scheme for over two years now and I was encouraged by and supported to take up training to help me gain employment when I am finished on CE.

"The youth service has given me opportunities that I would not have taken on my own and also encouraged me to believe that there are options for me after I finish on the CE scheme."

### Youth Work in Action

## Exploring Potential with Roma Young People in Roscommon

One targeted youth service in Roscommon works with Roma young people in the area to support them to discover and reach their potential. Inspired by a shared for music, a group of 21 of the young people (13-22 years old) completed a five-week music production programme in collaboration with Roscommon Community College and TUS Athlone Access Centre.

“The purpose of the initiative was to enable the young people to gain a deeper insight into the possibilities available to them at third level. The young people got to learn about the industry and had the opportunity to put their newly developed skills to the test by recording three of their own songs and making their own music video.

“This collaborative initiative was highly successful and some of the young people are considering going on to third level now, while others are hoping to pursue a future in music production, engineering or performance.”

In another music-based initiative, the Senior Roma Boys Group (13-17 years old) worked with Music Generation to create their own original Rap titled ‘Yeshua’. The senior boys first wrote and recorded their own lyrics in English and then the chorus in Slovakian, to ensure that everyone in the group could participate whether they spoke English or not. The lyrics to Yeshua are about the importance of their family, friends and their beliefs.

“Once the song was recorded, the boys dressed to impress and starred in their own music video for ‘Yeshua’ which was set in the Phoenix Youth Centre in Roscommon. This initiative has motivated the young people and their peers to continue to use creativity as an outlet and to express themselves through song writing and performing.”

### Youth Work in Action

## A volunteer-led club in rural Cork makes changes to be inclusive for all

A volunteer-led club in rural north Cork meets every Friday night in the local Community centre. There are two groups, one for young people in 1st and 2nd year of secondary school and one for young people in 3rd year and over.

“The club takes part in an array of different activities - soccer, badminton, basketball, music, pool tournaments, baking, TAB time (tea and biscuits), arts and crafts, playing cards and board games and so on. These activities are decided upon by the youth club members. The club is extremely active within the local community through various projects they have taken on, e.g. designing Christmas and Easter Cards for residents in the local nursing home, helping out at the Senior Citizen’s Christmas dinner, litter picks, painting murals on blank walls in line with the Tidy Towns Committee, creating the bee and butterfly garden in their community and ensuring it is maintained throughout the year.

“The club has made positive changes to their club over the past year to ensure that it is inclusive. The club has a number of members with autism and the club identified areas they could improve on to make the club inclusive so that all young people feel welcomed and comfortable.

“The club has implemented a quiet space they can go to which has board games that they enjoy to play when they want space. The club has ear defenders available if required by the members. The Volunteer Leaders have attended autism awareness training to ensure they can best support the members. When the club is going on trips they ensure the activities are inclusive and arrangements are made to ensure all young people can attend and partake.

“These changes within the club have made a significant impact so that everyone knows it is a welcoming space for all.”



# International Policy Context

At an EU policy level, youth work, broadly defined, is recognised as a critical lever to achieving broader EU and Council of Europe youth policy objectives. In 2026, Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU and will have the opportunity to advance specific priorities in the youth field, in line with national and wider EU youth policy frameworks.



## EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027

The three general objectives of the *EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027* are to engage, empower and connect young people. The *EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027* provides for the European Youth Goals, which were designed and agreed by young people across Europe during the 6th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue (2017–2018) and represent young people’s vision for youth policy in Europe for the current period to 2027. These are:

Connecting EU with Youth	Quality Employment for All
Equality of All Genders	Quality Learning
Inclusive Societies	Space and Participation for All
Information & Constructive Dialogue	Sustainable Green Europe
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Youth Organisations & European Programmes
Moving Rural Youth Forward	

## European Youth Work Agenda

The European Youth Work Agenda was adopted by all EU Member States in 2020. It provides a strategic framework or roadmap for further developing and strengthening youth work across Europe. Its priorities include expanding the youth work offer to engage more young people and further develop quality and innovation in youth work.

## Relevant EU Policy Documents

A large number of EU Council Conclusions and Resolutions have been adopted at EU level to provide direction to youth work policy. A summary of the most relevant ones is included at [Appendix 4](#).

## Sustainable Development Goals

A key element of both the international and national policy context is Ireland's commitment to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, which include an emphasis on the importance of supporting and empowering young people, including through youth work programmes.<sup>15</sup> Ireland's

*ESD to 2030: Second National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2022)* includes a priority action area to empower and mobilise young people and notes the important role of the youth work sector in delivering this.

## The Rights of the Child

As the majority of the beneficiaries of youth work policy and services are children, the rights of children as set out in international frameworks and recognised in the Irish Constitution are a key part of the relevant wider context. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Ireland in 1992, identifies the rights of children up to the

age of 18 years.<sup>16</sup> The UNCRC recognises the right of all children to realise their full potential and have their well-being and development supported and their voices heard. Building on this, the *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child* sets out actions that highlight the shared responsibility to promote, protect and realise the rights of the child.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Youth work services and supporting schemes have a key role to play in addressing the national and international policy commitments outlined above. To deliver on these commitments for young people from all backgrounds and create space for young people themselves to be active contributors in their communities and wider society, it is important that we fully leverage the particular capacity of youth

work to engage and empower young people. Youth organisations and services may, at a local level, be involved in delivering a variety of State-funded schemes, for instance both UBU Your Place Your Space and Youth Diversion Projects. It is important that there is a coherent and co-ordinated approach, at all levels, to the delivery of these services in order to ensure the best outcomes for young people.

<sup>15</sup> Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission (2021) EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

### International Youth Work in Action

## Erasmus: Funded Projects

A number of youth groups describe their experiences participating in opportunities funded under the EU Erasmus programme:

### An LGBTQ+ themed youth exchange in North Macedonia

"Our Youth Service works with young people aged 10–24 years within the area of Inchicore, Dublin. We support young people to achieve their full potential through non-formal education, group work and one-on-one support. The 'Friends' group started back in 2016; they became a solid support system for one another and for young people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. As young people, they have all dealt with their own personal traumas and as a result are a really supportive group for one another.

For their next steps as a group, they wanted to get involved in European projects, focusing on LGBTQ+ issues. They started researching safe countries for LGBTQ+ young people and from there they found a partner with North Macedonia. The group took part in a youth exchange in October 2023.

On the exchange, young people compared the LGBTQ+ rights in Ireland and North Macedonia, spoke about their experiences, and took part in a film-making project to raise awareness for LGBTQ+ young people about the issues they face. These all proved to be powerful activities for young people

to share in a safe space their experiences in both Ireland and North Macedonia. They created films about trans rights and LGBTQ+ education in schools.

This exchange proved to be a pivotal moment for this group to step out of their comfort zone and take part in an exchange away from home. The space they created as young people to share and be their true authentic selves was fantastic to see and a credit to them.

Since coming back from the exchange, their confidence and self-esteem has grown in themselves as young people, which in turn helped when they hosted the youth exchange for North Macedonians in February. This trip really broadened their horizons and understanding, as it made them realise how easily accessible things are in Dublin and the differences in North Macedonia.

Going forward, this piece of work will be used to support the community in facilitating programmes for other young people about LGBTQ+ rights and issues affecting young people."



## Pathways to Nature

“Our youth service has worked with young people in Waterford and South Tipperary for over 50 years. We have built strong and trusting relationships with the community.

A core part of the youth work planning process involves working with young people to identify their needs. Five years ago the young people told us ‘We feel better when we go into nature’.

In response, we started to co-design programmes with young people, with a focus on nature.

Building on the long-term relationships and skills our projects have developed over generations working in the communities, our service began to use the Erasmus+ Programme, with support from Léargas, to test out training courses for youth workers around connecting with nature, to develop nature-based solidarity projects, and to run nature-themed youth exchanges with young people.

Between 2019 and 2024, more than 200 young people have participated in nature-based youth exchanges, and more than 100 youth workers from 12 different European countries have participated in nature-based trainings with Irish youth workers in Waterford. Those youth workers have returned to their own countries to work with thousands of young people aged between 10 and 30 years.

Since 2023, the service, alongside four partner organisations from Ireland, Finland, Spain and Armenia, has worked on a large-scale cooperation partnership project through the Erasmus+ Programme, called Pathways to Nature, which is designed to improve youth mental health and well-being by connecting young people with nature using youth work methodologies. The impact of the programme on the mental health and well-being of more than 300 young people is being evaluated by the Department of Applied Psychology in University College Cork. The power of youth work is rippling through organisations, countries, youth workers, and most especially in the lives of young people and their communities.

As one participant said on the Community Youth Leader Team Training Course in March 2024 – ‘The roots are down now, so all we have to do is let it grow and reach the sun.’”



## Building European identity through street art skills in Ballyfermot

“Our journey with Erasmus+ has been and will continue to be an amazing experience for our youth service. We have seen the benefit these projects have for young people from our community, granting them new experiences and making Europe real for them. We have also seen the benefit for our staff. They learn new skills and share practices which benefit the organisation.

On a recent project with our European partners, we embarked on a journey to upskill our youth work team and volunteers in the area of street arts. This was identified as a skill shortage when holding our annual Halloween festival.

Through Erasmus, we were able to bring over an expert from Italy to teach clowning. We also had two jugglers from our service who organised the workshops for the participants and we had an artist from a Traveller-specialist youth organisation involved who taught everyone how to make giant puppets.

This training provided the youth workers with the tools to implement street art workshops in the local area, introducing young people to the positive impact of street art and helping them to develop their self-esteem, confidence, ability to interact in intercultural contexts, respect, tolerance, solidarity, understanding and team spirit.

The training involved 42 participants from 12 European countries. The group carried out training exercises for 4 days, followed by 2 days’ performance on the street. The highlight for the participants was taking part in the public performances in Ballyfermot for Halloween. The performances included flash mobs, juggling, clowning, busking and a parade of giant puppets. Over the 2 days, 1,000 people attended the performances, with the streets coming alive with the sound of laughter and music. The added bonus of the excellent weather led to a carnival atmosphere and inspired us to continue the experience. As we had 12 countries involved in the project, the cultural nights were busy with the sound of dance, music and food.

All the participants on this project challenged themselves with street arts. The project left a positive footprint in our community and showed the power of using the arts to engage, motivate and empower young people. The project also created a support network around the young people.”



# Consultation Themes

*Opportunities for Youth* has been informed by extensive consultations with young people, key stakeholders and the public.



## Consultation Themes

Further detail on these consultations and the range of themes arising is included at [Appendix 3](#). However, the following key messages emerged prominently across all consultations:

**Key Messages :**

Participation in youth work services has a range of benefits. These include allowing young people to meet peers and develop social skills; connecting young people with positive role models, mentors and ‘one good adult’; providing particular supports for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable; developing young people’s self-esteem, autonomy and confidence; and enabling young people to develop new skills and interests.

There is a need for a greater diversity of enriching offerings that meet the range of interests of young people, including young people of different ages.

There is a demand for more youth spaces/ programmes in the following areas: universal services open to all young people, including youth cafés; outdoor or adventure activities; programmes for young people who are not in education, training or employment; youth-led opportunities for young people to develop their own activities; opportunities for young people to volunteer; opportunities for young people aged 16–18 years; services for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

There are insufficient local spaces and premises for young people and youth work services.

There is a need for a more integrated approach between universal and targeted youth work services and between youth work services and other services for young people, e.g. mental health services, as well as a need for improved coherence in funding schemes for the youth sector.

Youth work spaces and opportunities are unevenly distributed throughout Ireland.

Youth work spaces and opportunities are not sufficiently visible to young people, their families and communities, and there is not enough public awareness of what youth services are.

There are widespread challenges in the recruitment, retention and training/ professional development of staff and volunteers, which is impacting on the quality and sustainability of service delivery.

There are excellent collaborative practices involving youth work services working together with other sectors for the benefit of young people, for instance through the Local Creative Youth Partnerships, Meitheal or the CYPSCs. However, there continue to be barriers to coordination and collaboration as well as challenges associated with unclear mandates.

There is a critical need for better data, evidence and outcomes measurement tools to inform investment and service delivery. Areas identified as in need of further investigation and a stronger evidence base were wide-ranging and included research on the workforce; measurement of the impact of youth work and of particular interventions; research to identify areas of unmet need; research on young people's needs and how to engage them; and a full review of funding for the youth sector across Government Departments and agencies.

Particular cohorts of young people, including Traveller and Roma young people, rural young people, LGBTQ+ young people and young people with disabilities, experience particular barriers to participation in youth work services.

Increased and multi-annual investment is needed in order to enable more young people to access high-quality youth work services with an expanded range of programmes and activities.

For a variety of reasons, resources are being diverted to supporting young people with increasingly complex needs, with implications for the space available for universal provision and for the support and training needs of youth workers and volunteers.

### Youth Work in Action

## Youth Theatre in Rural Ireland

One former participant in a youth organisation that focuses on theatre shares her experience:

"Growing up in a small rural village, there was not much going on; cars coming and going from the factory gates, cattle in the green fields surrounded by two main roads, people coming and going to the shop.

Growing up was always hard. I couldn't talk to older people and felt uncomfortable in large crowds, but that all changed. As soon as I stepped on stage [in the youth theatre group], I knew it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Today, as I prepare to perform in an off-site dance production and direct end-of-year shows with junior drama groups I think back to those first cautious steps and to the people who facilitated and encouraged this love of theatre.

Those who gave me that safe space where I could be brave.

This is a place where you can go to let go, express how you feel, a place for friends, but most of all it's a place where you get to take part in the most amazing opportunities.

Joining this group helped me to build my confidence to become more resilient to develop soft skills and organisational skills.

It has helped me to be proud of my community and to see possibilities in improving it."





# Delivering Opportunities for Youth

In order to deliver on the objectives of Opportunities for Youth, we must have an enabling environment for the delivery of high-quality, inclusive youth work services that work well within the wider context of policies and services for young people.



## Delivering Opportunities for Youth: Actions and implementation 2024–2026

In order to deliver on the objectives of *Opportunities for Youth*, we must have an enabling environment for the delivery of high-quality, inclusive youth work services that work well within the wider context of policies and services for young people. Enhanced service delivery relies on strong public investment. However, in order to ensure that investment is impactful and delivers for young people, *Opportunities for Youth* addresses other key elements of this enabling environment, including the design of funding schemes; the paid and volunteer workforce; the role of the ETBs and of voluntary youth organisations; infrastructure; access to data and research; and structures for collaboration, coordination and youth participation. Another important enabler will be the further development of a shared understanding of the State's vision for youth work services in the context of the evolving needs of young people. This includes the role of cross-government funders within a delivery and policy landscape that has altered significantly since the enactment of the Youth Work Act, 2001. A focussed Implementation Plan setting out specific delivery dates and associated key performance indicators for these actions will be finalised by the end of 2024.

It is important that DCEDIY and all delivery partners within the statutory and voluntary sectors work effectively together and that there are strong and effective communication and engagement structures that enable clarity of purpose and support alignment between a dynamic policy agenda and local delivery. Implementation of the actions set out in *Opportunities for Youth* will require ongoing collaboration, cooperation and sectoral involvement in order to design the best approach to each action and achieve the intended outcomes.

The implementation of this Strategy and the cooperation of all relevant actors will be supported via the new National Youth Sector Reference Group as well as a group with representatives from Departments and agencies that provide funding to or interact with the youth sector. Implementation will be reported on via the *Young Ireland* governance structures. The strategic objectives and agreed actions will guide decision-making at a national and local level and will be incorporated into funding scheme development and monitoring.

It is intended that, informed by progress to date, further actions for delivery in 2027 and 2028 will be identified after the first phase of delivery. It is anticipated that actions during the second phase will include a review of the Youth Work Act, 2001.



Priority Actions for Delivery 2024 – 2026

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
1	Develop a model for multi-annual national youth policy priorities to be addressed through schemes and service delivery, with an annual strand to support emerging needs.	DCEDIY; the Department of Justice (DoJ); the Department of Rural and Community Development(DRCD); the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC); the Department of Social Protection (DSP); the Department of Education (DoE); the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (D/ FHERIS); the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM); Tusla – Child and Family Agency; the Health Service Executive (HSE); Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs); National Youth Sector Reference Group; ETBs; NYCI; Gaisce; Léargas; funded youth organisations.	This will better align youth work provision with wider policies for children and young people. Priorities will be identified in consultation with young people, the wider public, the youth sector and relevant Departments and agencies. It is intended that this approach will better support strategic planning and collaboration within the funded youth sector. The annual strand will allow emerging issues to be identified and addressed.
2	Establish a National Youth Sector Reference Group (NYSRG), incorporating strong mechanisms for young people to influence decision-making and including expert and sectoral perspectives and those representing cohorts of young people who experience particular barriers to participation.	DCEDIY; funded youth organisations; ETBs; National Participation Office; other youth work stakeholders, including young people	This will support a balanced and transparent input from across the wider youth sector into national decision-making and will be a platform for coordinating the implementation of other actions under Opportunities for Youth. A key pillar of this will be the representation of the views of young people, including young people of diverse backgrounds, so that they can influence decision-making in respect of youth work services.

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
3	Establish a group with representatives from Departments and agencies that provide funding to or interact with the youth sector, to be integrated insofar as possible with the Young Ireland governance structures and the Young Ireland Policy Forum. The aim of this group, which may be a subgroup of the Young Ireland policy forum, will be to develop a renewed and whole-of-Government vision for the role of State-funded youth work services in the Ireland of today as well as the role of youth work within the wider landscape of provision for children and young people, to improve coherence and complementarity across schemes, ensure a joined up approach to supporting young people and input into the development of the National Youth Policy Priorities.	DCEDIY; DoJ; DCRD; DECC; DSP; DoE; DFHERIS; DTCAGSM; Tusla Child and Family Agency; HSE; CYPSCs	<p>This action seeks to respond to the changing role of the State in relation to youth work services since the enactment of the Youth Work Act, 2001 and ensure that we have a collaborative and coherent approach.</p> <p>It will support greater cooperation between the range of State funders who influence the direction and shape of youth service delivery. It will also be the vehicle to support interdepartmental cooperation across other actions and strategic objectives.</p>
4	<p>Ensure that there is a sufficient range of opportunities available to young people and that the overall service offering across schemes and services includes a focus on the following key policy themes for 2024–2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting mental and social well-being</li><li>• Support for young people who are not in education, employment or training</li><li>• Inclusion, outreach and intercultural approaches, including addressing the needs of cohorts who have traditionally been under-represented in youth organisations</li><li>• Participation in arts, culture and outdoor recreation</li><li>• Youth civic engagement and volunteering</li><li>• The digital environment</li><li>• Information and misinformation</li><li>• Collaborating to enhance opportunities</li></ul>	Funded youth organisations; DCEDIY; ETBs	These policy areas reflect the most significant themes that emerged from the consultation and review process to inform Opportunities for Youth. Service planning and funding schemes should address these.

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
5	Funded youth organisations and other delivery bodies will enhance their approach to proactively communicating and promoting the opportunities available to young people and the wider community, including making use of digital engagement tools.	Funded youth organisations; DCEDIY; ETBs; CYPSCs	This action seeks to address the issue, flagged across a number of consultations with young people, of limited awareness of services and opportunities in their area.
6	Work with the ETBs to identify recommendations on how best to leverage and resource their role across the three Strategic Objectives.	DCEDIY; ETBI; ETBs; DFHERIS; DoE	The ETBs' youth work function has a critical role to play in fully delivering on the aims of this strategy, given their statutory role, local expertise and broad range of youth-relevant functions. DCEDIY will work with the 16 ETBs, and where relevant, with DFHERIS and DoE, to better leverage and equip the ETB role to meet the needs of young people in their area, taking account of their wider functions.
7	Produce a Workforce Development Strategy in respect of the youth work sector, to include consideration of training needs and the requirement for high-quality, accessible and inclusive youth work services and opportunities.	DCEDIY; DFHERIS; Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); ETBs; funded youth organisations	Youth work workforce issues emerged strongly as a key theme across the consultations. It is important that youth workers are adequately trained and supported to provide quality services and that we avoid impacts on young people of recruitment, retention and training deficits.
8	Review the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme as a whole to ensure that it is delivering on its policy aims, and identify if changes are needed to its operating system in order to meet the needs of its target groups.	DCEDIY; ETBI; ETBs; funded youth organisations	<p>This is the Government's largest youth funding scheme and it is important that we have a clear view of the impacts on young people of the scheme and its operationalisation at local level, following its launch in 2020.</p> <p>Difficulties as well as benefits associated with this scheme were cited by a number of responses to the consultations.</p>
9	Map the availability and distribution of youth work and wider youth services and facilities throughout Ireland, charted against key demographic data.	DCEDIY; ETBI; ETBs; funded youth organisations; relevant Government Departments and agencies.	This action is intended to address a number of issues raised during consultations, including making services more visible to young people, their families and the wider community; helping to identify gaps so we can have a more data-led distribution of funding; mapping facilities available at a local level so that we can best target any capital funding that is secured; and supporting cooperation across services.

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
10	Develop and implement a policy for youth spaces and facilities at a local level.	ETBI; ETBs; funded youth organisations; local authorities; DCEDIY; DoE	<p>This action seeks to address the issue raised throughout the consultations of insufficient premises for youth work delivery at a local level. It encompasses both enhanced access and collaboration in respect of existing premises within each ETB area and the identification and development of new spaces where there is an evidenced need. It is important that the approach to premises be balanced against the importance of meeting young people 'where they are' and that a strong emphasis on outreach, detached youth work and digital formats is also included.</p> <p>The local authorities' Local Economic and Community Plans are the primary mechanism to promote community and local development, including in respect of infrastructure and community facilities.</p>
11	Ensure effective compliance with necessary reporting systems so that DCEDIY has the data it needs on outputs, in order to enhance service delivery for young people. Reporting will be developed on a phased basis, with the ultimate aim of funded services providing disaggregated data about the young people participating in services, in line with guidance developed under the National Equality Data Strategy.	DCEDIY; ETBs; funded youth organisations	<p>The Young Ireland framework includes a commitment to "implement a robust data collection and evaluation system so that young people's participation in youth services, and in particular the inclusion of young people who are marginalised, vulnerable or disadvantaged, can be measured and enhanced."</p> <p>This action is intended to deliver on this and requires all partners to work together, with the ultimate aim of being able to identify the numbers of young people participating in services and the cohorts of young people who may be facing continued barriers to participation. The approach to the reporting of disaggregated data will be guided by the National Equality Data Strategy.</p>
12	Develop initiatives to promote, support and sustain volunteering within the youth sector.	Funded youth organisations; DCEDIY; DRCD; ETBs	Volunteers have an essential role to play in delivering services at community level, particularly in local clubs. DCEDIY currently funds more than 30 national youth organisations to sustain their volunteering infrastructure while also funding individual local youth clubs via the ETBs. The national youth organisations are the key leads in respect of this action, and additional funding will be sought to support new and effective initiatives in this space.

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
13	Ensure provision for suitable indoor and outdoor spaces for young people, and provide support for such spaces through relevant infrastructure and community development schemes.	DRCD; DCEDIY; DHLGH; local authorities; ETBs; funded youth organisations	Given the degree of infrastructural demands at a local level, addressing the needs of young people and youth services for suitable premises requires a co-operative approach.
14	Implement an updated sector-wide National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work.	DCEDIY; ETBs; funded youth organisations	<p>While the National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) for Youth Work were adopted in 2011, they have yet to be fully implemented throughout the youth work sector. The importance of supporting and enhancing quality in youth work service provision was a strong theme emerging from the public consultation process.</p> <p>Impact measurement is a key part of supporting quality and is expected to be included in the overall approach to quality.</p>
15	Deliver a reformed Youth Services Grant Scheme that is more responsive to the current needs of young people, facilitates youth organisations to more effectively deliver services to young people, and enhances the governance and oversight structures for the scheme.	DCEDIY	The Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) is the State's largest funding scheme supporting youth work opportunities open to all young people. Following a significant reform process, a revised version of the scheme will be launched in 2025.
16	Establish a funding line and national-level mechanism to support an enhanced evidence base in respect of key policy and practice issues affecting youth work.	DCEDIY	<p>The need for enhanced research and an improved evidence base to inform policy and practice was raised throughout the consultations.</p> <p>These should align with national-level priorities for youth work.</p>
17	Increase the engagement of young people and youth organisations in the EU youth programmes, in particular with respect to young people with fewer opportunities.	Léargas; NYCI; ETBI; DCEDIY	The funding and opportunities available for the youth sector under the Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps programmes have increased considerably in recent years. The benefits of engagement with the programmes for young people, youth workers and youth organisations are well evidenced. It is important that these benefits are fully realised for Irish young people and youth organisations.

#	Action	Lead; Partners	Purpose
18	Strengthen the profile and accessibility of Gaisce – the President's Award across sectors and for young people from all backgrounds.	Gaisce – the President's Award; DCEDIY; DFHERIS; DoJ; Tusla – Child and Family Agency; funded youth organisations	Participation in the personal development and active citizenship opportunities of Gaisce – the President's Award can have a transformative impact on young people. It is important that all young people are aware of and are able to benefit from the programme. Likewise, improved recognition of the programme and its certification of young people's non-formal learning would enhance young people's pathways into further education and employment.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Key Milestones in the Development of Youth Work Services

1930	Vocational Education Act, 1930
1942	Comhairle le Leas Óige, now City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) established
1967	Establishment of the National Youth Council of Ireland
1977	A Policy for Youth and Sport (Bruton Report) published
1978	Neighbourhood youth projects established on a pilot basis
1980	Report of the O’Sullivan Committee: The Development of Youth Work Services published
1980s	Youth Affairs Section established in the Department of Education
1980s	Special Projects for Youth (SPY) established
1980s	Youth Information Centres began to be established
1982	Youth Affairs relocated to Department of Labour (returned to Department of Education in 1987)
1984	Final Report of the National Youth Policy Committee (Costello Report) published
1985	In Partnership with Youth: the National Youth Policy published
1985	Gaisce established
1986	Léargas established
1986	Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS) Policy Guidelines published
1991	First two Garda Youth Diversion Projects established
1997	Appointment of National Youth Work Advisory Committee under the Youth Work Act, 1997
1998	Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund (YPSF) established

1992	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ratified by Ireland
1995	Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education published
2000	National Children's Strategy – Our Children – Their Lives: Ireland's first national strategy for children and young people published
2001	Youth Work Act, 2001
2003	National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007 published
2006	Launch of the North South Education and Training Standards for Youth Work (NSETS)
2008	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) established
2011	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) established
2011	National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work published
2013	Education and Training Boards Act 2013
2014	Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes published
2014	Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020 published
2015	National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 published
2019	UBU Your Place Your Space scheme launched
2020	DCYA expanded to become the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)
2022	YSGS reform process initiated

## Appendix 2: Young Ireland Action 17

No.	Owner	Action	Timeline
17.1	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Develop and implement a <i>Youth Services Action Plan</i> to provide a strategic direction for the delivery of youth services over the lifetime of this Framework	2023-2028
17.2	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Support the provision of high-quality and inclusive youth opportunities, spaces and services, by providing funding, guidance and other supports to organisations who deliver youth services.	2023-2028
17.3	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Implement a robust data collection and evaluation system so that young people's participation in youth services, and in particular, the inclusion of young people who are marginalised, vulnerable or disadvantaged can be measured and enhanced.	2023-2028
17.4	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Ensure that young people have a role in the development and delivery of youth services.	2023-2028
17.5	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Continue to develop the UBU Your Place Your Space targeted services funding scheme, including by means of external review ahead of the 2027 application cycle.	2023-2028
17.6	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Provide increased investment in Irish-medium youth services for young Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht.	2023-2028

# Appendix 3: Consultations to Inform Opportunities for Youth

Over the course of Q2 2023, a number of consultations took place to help inform the development of *Opportunities for Youth*. Between 1 June and 15 July 2023, a Call for Submissions and a public survey were carried out to gain the opinions of the public. DCEDIY commissioned Research Matters to carry out an analysis of the findings of the Call for Submissions and public survey. Consultations with different cohorts of young people were also conducted during this period, in partnership with the NYCI and ETBI. Additionally, between September and October 2023, a series of regional and online consultations with youth workers and volunteers were held, in partnership with the NYCI.

## Public Consultation

The public consultation ran from 1 June to 15 July 2023 and was conducted in two parts, a Call for Submissions and a public survey.

The submission template focused on access to youth services, quality of youth services, collaboration and coordination, strengthening young people’s access to rights, and measures to support effective and sustainable youth services. It also included space for additional comments. A total of 54 submissions were made, with the majority comprising submissions from youth or youth work organisations.

The survey focused on access, awareness, benefits, barriers, under-represented groups, types of services respondents would like to see more of, and priority changes/measures. There were 334 valid responses to the survey (29% from youth workers, 25% from volunteers, 21% from participants, and 4.5% from parents).

Key themes identified:

**Barriers to Access:** There are limited or no services in some areas and low levels of awareness about services that are there. More than 60% of respondents to the public survey cited a lack of awareness or a lack of confidence as barriers in accessing youth services. There is insufficient diversity in service provision, and there are geographic challenges and cost barriers (see figure 2).

**Quality of Services:** Need for monitoring and evaluation and a tool to measure quality, impacts and outcomes; indicators of good services identified – youth participation, attendance, accessibility, engagement and retention, evidence informed, enable choice, family and community engagement.

**Collaboration and Co-ordination:** This is seen as core to good youth work; barriers include unsuitable funding models and competition for funding.

**Young people’s rights:** youth services have been to the forefront of championing the youth participation model; four broad measures were identified to enhance young people’s rights – awareness and promotion of young people’s rights, education and empowerment, advocacy, ensure that national, regional and local structures are in place..

**Overall measures:** Need to develop a clear strategic document that ensures youth services can operate in an informed and integrated manner; improved cross-government working; raising recognition of youth work and its role for young people; ensure a wide range of services and approaches; support inclusivity; support collaboration and coordination.



Key challenges identified:

**Inclusivity:** Need to ensure that youth services are inclusive of all groups of young people. Young people belonging to migrant, Traveller, LGBTI+ and ethnic minority groups reported as being under-represented groups in youth services, while rural young people experience geographic barriers.

**Research/Evidence:** Need for better access to research/data, including in respect of quality/outcome measurement; need disaggregated data; invest in organisational capacity regarding research.

**Funding:** Inadequate and inequitable; short-term model does not allow for long-term planning; criteria can be hard to meet; unable to meet new needs emerging through existing funding; competitive funding creates a barrier to collaboration; more funding needed in order to allow more staff to be hired and deliver a better variety of programmes.

**Workforce:** Challenges regarding both paid workers and volunteers should be addressed; recruitment and retention difficulties; need for more diverse workforce; limited educational pathways into youth work; challenges accessing continuing professional development and upskilling; lack of youth work regulation.

**Infrastructure:** A large number of submissions referenced access issues; insufficient dedicated youth/youth-friendly spaces; rental costs too high; facilities not fit for purpose; need dedicated capital investment fund and better liaison between DCEDIY and other Government Departments/agencies in order to ensure access to space; need investment in youth cafés.

**Governance:** Administration burden of different and increasingly complex requirements across funders; ‘number crunching’ especially for the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme; displacement of time away from direct delivery.

## Survey Responses

The following chart and all successive charts are based on a multi-choice survey, and therefore all percentages will not add up to 100% combined.

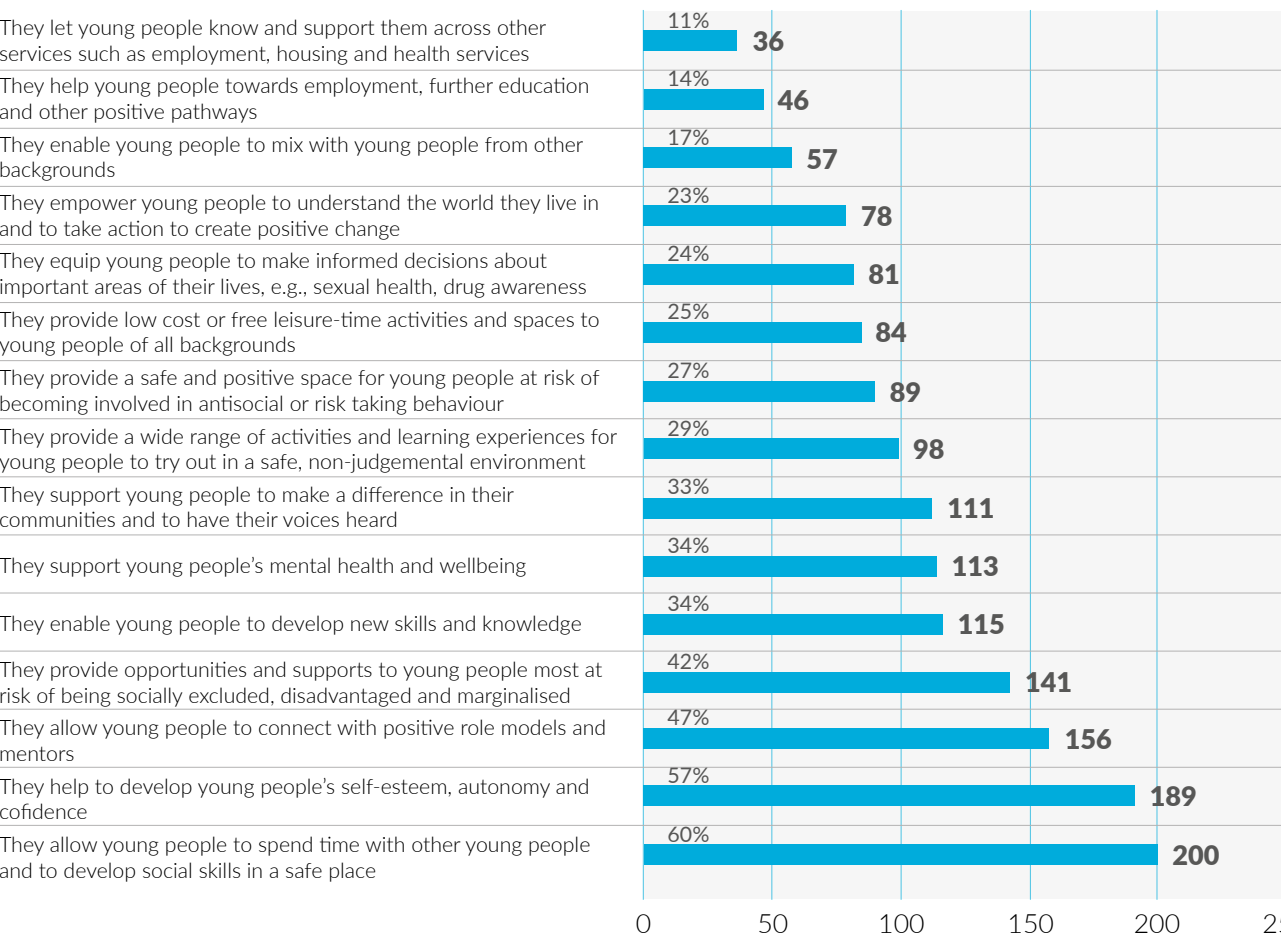


Figure 1: Benefits of youth services ranked

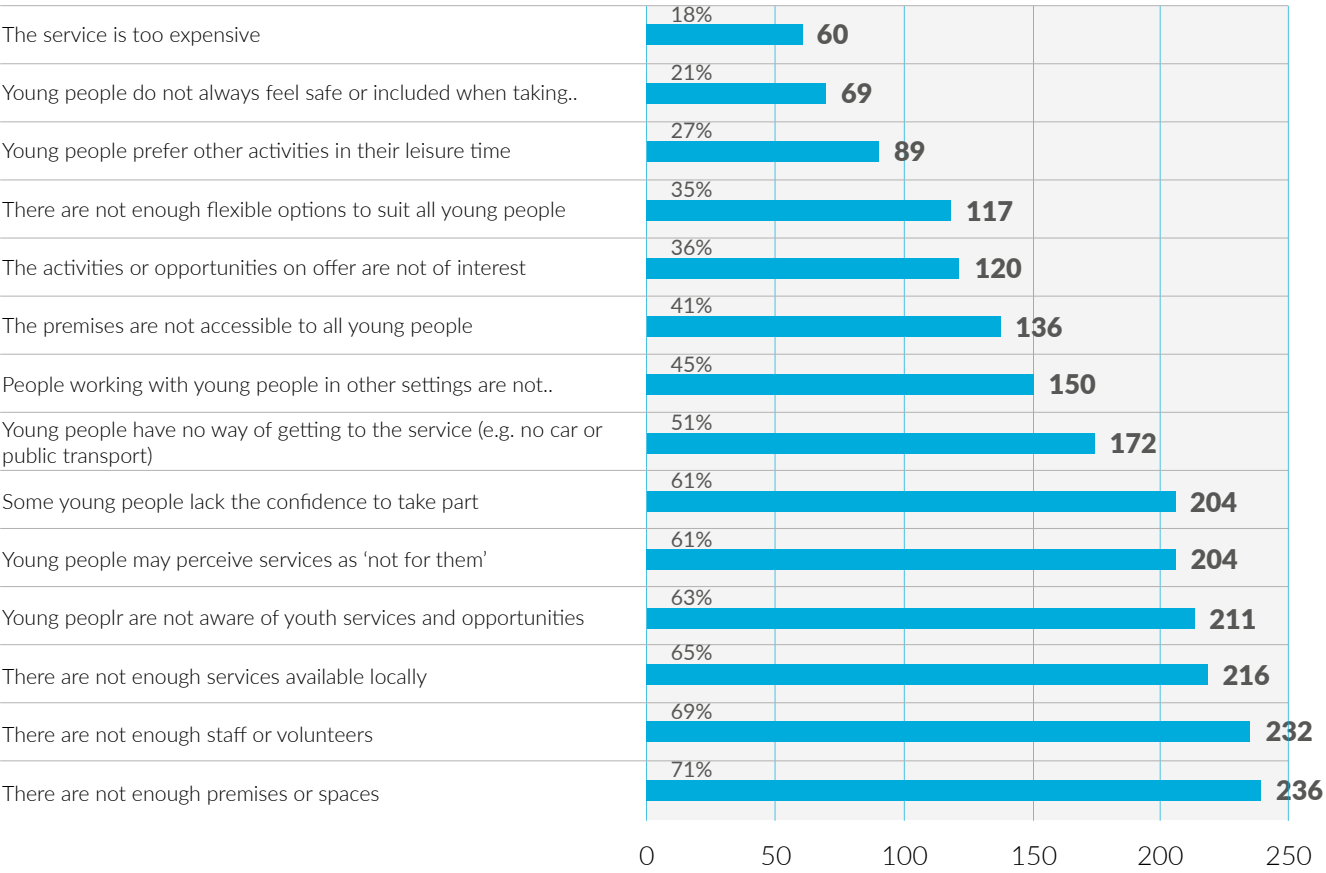


Figure 2: Barriers to participation

Under-represented groups	Number of respondents (n)	Percentage of overall respondents (%) (n=334)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Migrants/ new communities</li><li>People from travelling communities</li><li>LGBTQI+</li><li>Minority groups**</li><li>Socioeconomically disadvantaged</li><li>Other</li></ul>	<div>36</div> <div>36</div> <div>26</div> <div>17</div> <div>14</div> <div>14</div>	<div>30.8</div> <div>30.8</div> <div>22.2</div> <div>14.5</div> <div>12</div> <div>12</div>
Additional needs (e.g. disabilities/carers)	73	22
Age	71	21
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Under 13 years</li><li>13-15 years</li><li>16-18 years</li><li>16-18 years</li><li>18-24 years</li></ul>	<div>15</div> <div>23</div> <div>43</div> <div>14</div> <div></div>	<div>21.1</div> <div>32.4</div> <div>60.6</div> <div>19.7</div> <div></div>
Mainstream/not at risk	36	10.8
Rural	33	10
Other***	19	5.7
At risk of antisocial behaviours/drug misuse	10	3.0
None	6	1.8

\*These totals do not equate to the total number of respondents for this group, as some respondents identified more than one group with each category.

\*\*Minority group identified as such by respondents.

\*\*\*Other refers to a wide range of issues, including, for example, young people who prefer arts to sports; gender imbalance; people who have lived in the area for a long time

Figure 3: Under-represented young people (Open Question)

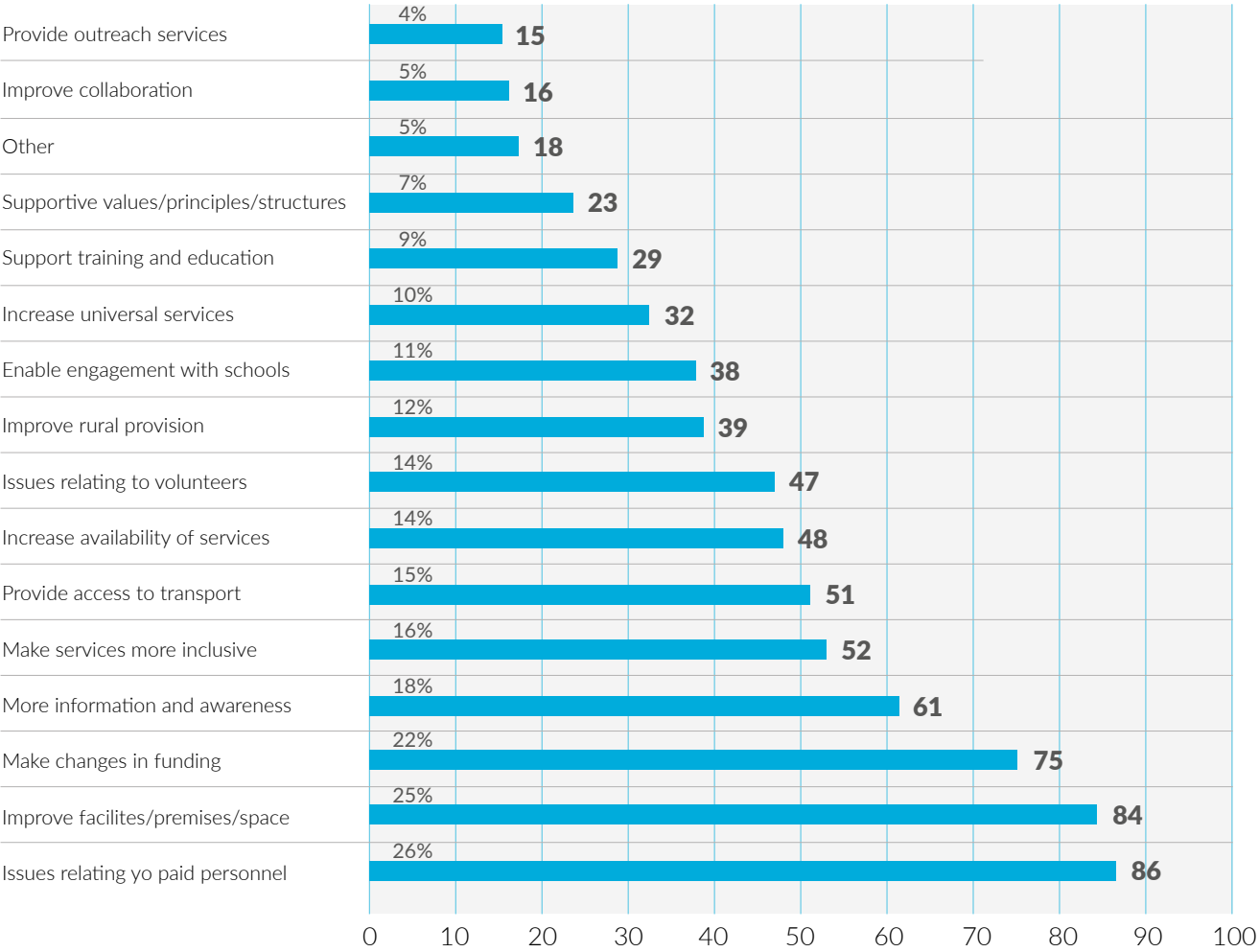


Figure 4: Actions to make youth services more accessible

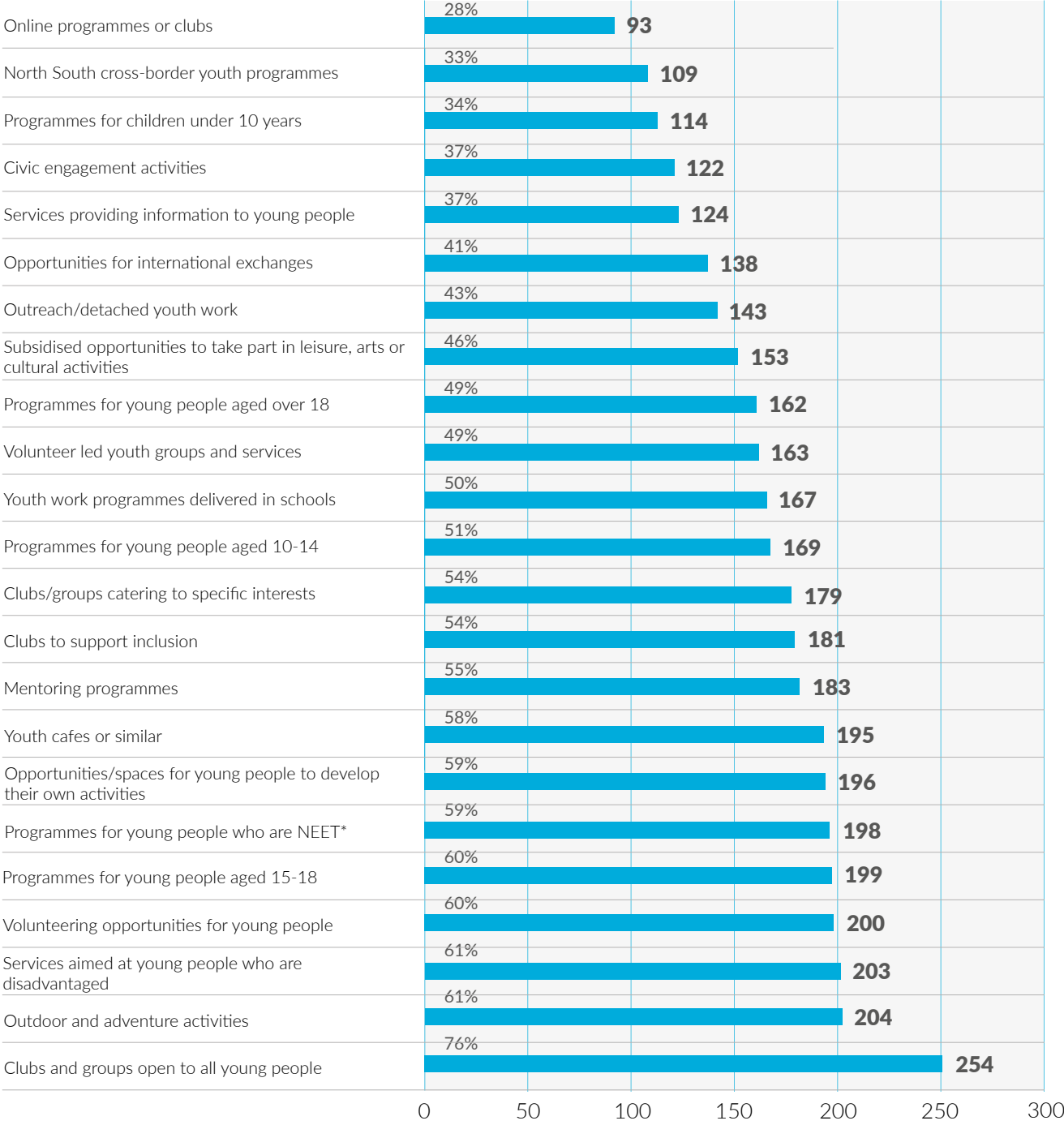


Figure 5: Types of youth services/activities that respondents would like to see more of



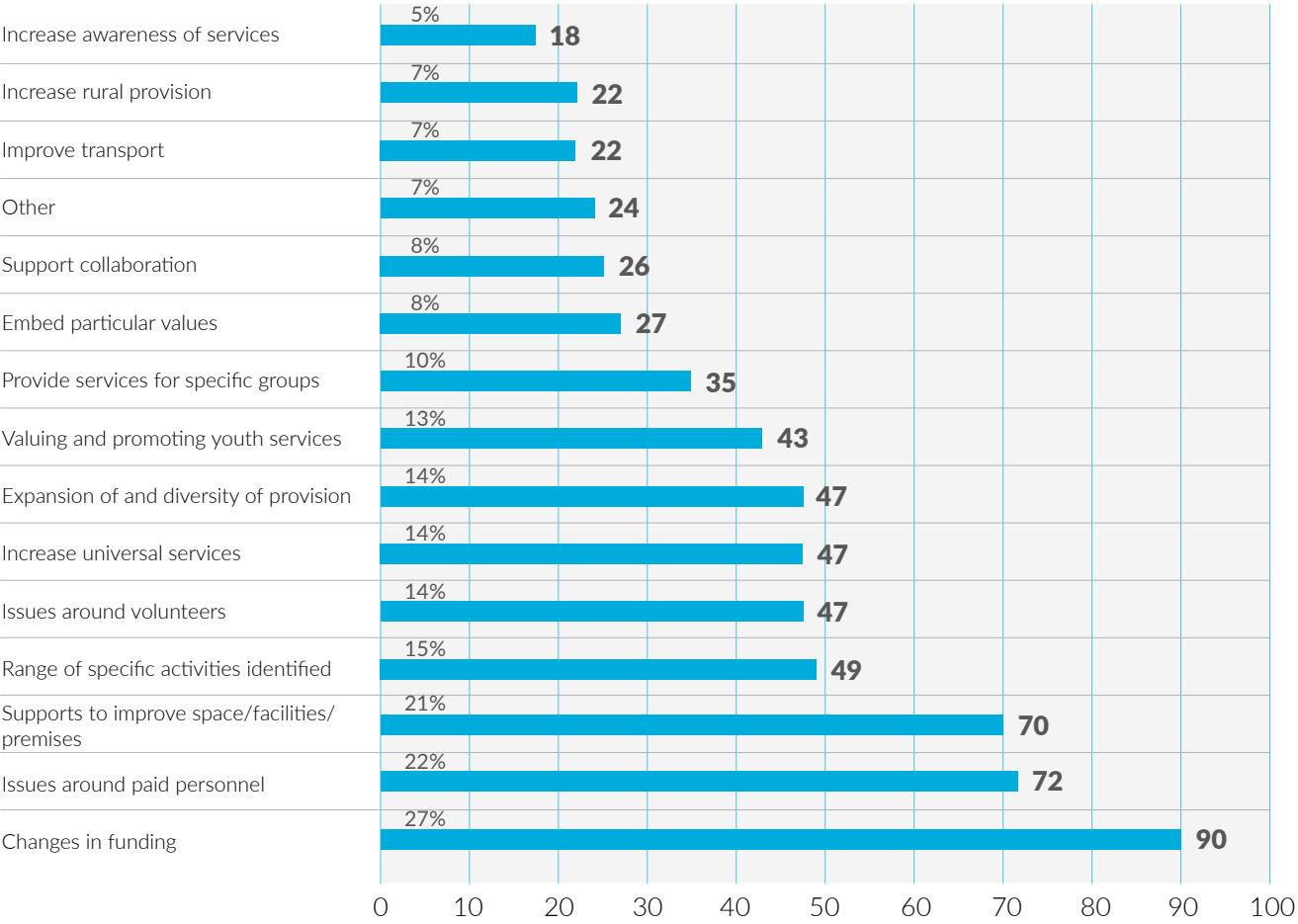


Figure 6: Changes/actions for priority in the action plan for youth services

## Consultations with Young People

The consultations with young people took place between June and July 2023, with a total of 280 participants across online and in-person sessions. The sessions were carried out by the NYCI and ETBI on behalf of DCEDIY. The participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- What are the key benefits for young people and/or society of young people being able to participate in youth services?
- How can we enhance access to youth service opportunities for all young people as well as for particular cohorts of young people?
- How can we ensure that young people are at the centre of the design of programmes and activities for youth services?
- What key themes/challenges for young people/innovative approaches should youth services focus on over the next 5 years?
- What could youth services do to encourage young people to participate, engage and remain with youth services?
- What key actions could the Government or youth services put in place to ensure young people are aware of the opportunities youth service offer to them?

# Individual and social benefits of accessing youth services

Benefits across the five National Outcomes for children and young people highlighted
The opportunity to meet and make friends, to build social capital and widen their networks
The opportunity to participate in recreational and developmental activities
Increased self-confidence, higher self-esteem and improved personal and social competencies
Greater opportunities for learning and the development of life skills
Enables young people to have their voices heard and to engage in active citizenship and social activism
Benefits by particular cohort: ‘feeling safe’ mainly highlighted by minority ethnic young people such as migrant and asylum seekers and young people who identify as LGBTQ+
A space for young people from different backgrounds to come together
Support young people to remain in school
Enhanced opportunities for more positive associations and ‘to keep out of trouble’
Advice and assistance regarding employment
Improved capacity to make better health choices
Opportunities to engage positively with the wider community, even where they may have disengaged from formal education – the non-formal education approach was highlighted as an enabler of this
Support periods of transition

# Barriers to Accessing Youth Services

Distance to youth services
Lack of public transport (especially in rural areas)
Cost
Limited range of programmes of interest; also, older young people prefer unstructured time and space to ‘just come in and chill’
Language barriers
Lack of knowledge about youth services among migrant and asylum seekers
Negative perceptions among parents that youth services are for young people in trouble, especially where a multi-funded youth service also had a Irish Youth Justice Service project
Conversely, some thought that the ‘cool kids’ who were involved in anti-social behaviour felt youth services were not for them; in addition, some Traveller young people felt they would be judged by their community for attending.
Some cohorts – migrants and asylum seekers – reported that they had internalised a sense of stigma which held them back from participating.

## Suggested Improvements

- Youth services should be better promoted and advertised.
- Youth services should be available to all young people, with more resourcing needed to enable this.
- More resources for youth services, including for certain cohorts and communities, e.g. Traveller and rural young people
- Designated youth facilities and an improved commitment to youth spaces across Government.
- More youth work positions and training needed for trauma-informed practice.
- Better integration of youth services with schools and other services, including mental health services
- A broader range of offerings to suit the interests of more young people
- Youth services should follow up with young people who disengage – for feedback.
- Engage with people when they are younger to keep them connected as they enter teenage years.
- Above all, young people to have their voices heard and to be active equal partners in co-design of youth service provision and in any future policy developments for the sector.

## Consultations with Youth Workers and Volunteers

Between September and October of 2023, six consultations were held with youth workers and volunteers. Three were in person, in Sligo, Tipperary, and Dublin, and three were online. DCEDIY partnered with the NYCI to organise these events. In total, there were with 165 participants.

### What is working well:

- The ability of youth workers (paid and voluntary) to connect with young people, the high rates of engagement of young people in youth work and the positive and very broad role it plays in their lives (see figure 7)
- Inclusion of LGBTQ+ young people
- The support from national organisations to voluntary youth groups and clubs
- Good-quality training programmes available to staff and volunteers
- The UBU Your Place Your Space scheme “provides a structure which was previously absent and also streamlined training and networking; and provided more opportunities”.
- The integration and collaboration of youth services within their communities
- The unique offering of voluntary youth work and the transformative impact it has on young people



### What is not working well:

Youth workers (paid and voluntary) are being “overstretched” and “drained”

Youth services operating as “holding spaces” for young people in the absence of more appropriate or statutory supports, e.g. mental health

The recruitment and retention “crisis” is at a very critical juncture, with the reported exit of experienced, quality youth workers leaving services understaffed and overreliant on either students, CE staff or volunteers, with a number of negative impacts for quality, relationships with young people. Causes identified: short-term contracts and other poor terms and conditions; under-resourced services for the demand; and “competition” from the social care agencies, the HSE, Tusla and others.

One-worker projects – not sustainable and creates risks for young people, e.g. one worker managing difficult behaviour in a group

Inadequate supports and learning opportunities for youth work students in services and potential mismatch between third-level courses and skills now needed

The lack of a dedicated support person for volunteers (in some services)

Youth work not recognised, valued or promoted by DCEDIY or society and a lack of “visibility” of youth work in the community and in the media

Duplication and volume of administration and reporting (for example, DCEDIY and ETBI)

UBU Your Place Your Space: the UBU 70/30 ratio is not a realistic expectation; the level of administration required, which is a particular problem for youth workers who do not have administrative support or management structure; measuring tools for contacts are inadequate; catchment area restrictions and target groups do not always match with young people’s wishes to either move around their area and socialise in other peer groups

Funding: competition and inequity, especially in context of different funders; inadequate to cover core costs; reactionary funding

“Rural isolation”: the lack of rural transport, facilities and services

Recruiting volunteers for clubs – risk factor on a night to night basis; Garda vetting can be a barrier

Training: issues for young people changing on a very fast basis; challenging to find time for training in stretched services; volunteers working with young people with complex issues

### What needs attention and should be prioritised in the new Action Plan:

Youth services should be available to all young people in the State.

An investment in rural youth services and related community infrastructure

An integrated model of youth service delivery incorporating universal/early intervention youth work alongside a more targeted approach for certain cohorts of young people

More coordination between Government Departments in relation to young people and their broader needs (transport, health, education, etc.)

Fund for services to provide cover while youth workers attend training

More training and support for volunteers running voluntary organisations

Increased supports for youth workers, including external supervision, Employee Assistance Programmes and community supports

More pathways to third-level education and explore the option of an “onsite youth work apprenticeship scheme for young people”

UBU: “Change to how data are being measured” and “more qualitative data” should be incorporated into reports. More support in the “Performance and Oversight Engagement Frameworks (POEF)s, to help capture the work of the services” and “a new framework for measuring impact and outcomes and addressing additional needs, based on the seven personal and social outcomes”

Incorporate “the voice of the young people in the design and evaluation of all youth work frameworks”.

- Explore the option of regulation for the profession, similar to CORU.
- Recognition of youth arts as a valid and valuable form of youth work
- Capital funding: investment in youth facilities and transportation required
- Two-worker projects should be the minimum standard.
- More equity in resource allocations, and make capital funding grants available to uniform groups and voluntary youth groups.
- Improve terms and conditions to attract and retain high-quality youth workers and explore the option of standardised pay scales.
- A specific focus on minority ethnic young people; members of the Traveller Community; LGBTI+ young people, and intersectional needs



Figure 7: The role youth workers play in young people's lives

# Appendix 4: Relevant EU Policy Documents

There are a number of other significant policy documents that EU Member States have adopted, including:

*Council conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people (2013)* emphasises the importance of promoting high-quality youth work, including through developing quality frameworks and supporting collaboration and best practice sharing.

*Council conclusions on reinforcing youth work to ensure cohesive societies (2015)* recognises the important role youth work plays in reaching out to all young people and invites Member States to strengthen quality, recognition and promotion of youth work.<sup>i</sup>

*Council conclusions on the role of youth work in supporting young people’s development of essential life skills that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life (2017)* calls for the promotion and validation of education and training for youth workers to enhance their role in supporting young people’s life skills, best practice sharing and support for young people’s volunteering.<sup>ii</sup>

*Council conclusions on smart youth work (2017)* and *on digital youth work (2019)* focuses on the potential of new technologies for youth work and call for support to enable youth work to utilise these technologies to their full potential.<sup>iii</sup>

*Council conclusions on the role of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters (2018)* invites Member States to improve training and knowledge for youth workers, provide a framework and policies for youth work and promote networking and research in an effort to support its role in respect of migration.<sup>iv</sup>

*Council conclusions on education and training of youth workers (2019)* notes that the education and training of youth workers should be high quality and should be enhanced including through development of a competence-based framework for formal and non-formal youth work education and training.<sup>v</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Council conclusions on reinforcing youth work to ensure cohesive societies (2015)  
Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52015XG0523%2801%29>

<sup>ii</sup> Council conclusions on the role of youth work in supporting young people’s development of essential life skills that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life (2017)  
Available from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0615\(01\)&from=DE](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0615(01)&from=DE)

<sup>iii</sup> Council conclusions on smart youth work (2017) Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG1207\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG1207(01)) and Council conclusions on digital youth work (2019). Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019XG1210\(01\)\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019XG1210(01)))

<sup>iv</sup> Council conclusions on the role of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters (2018)  
Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG1207\(02\)&rid=4](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XG1207(02)&rid=4)

<sup>v</sup> Council conclusions on education and training of youth workers (2019)  
Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13595-2019-REV-1/en/pdf>





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