Mapping of European Strategies

And their links to youth and youth work

CONDENSED VERSION

Introduction

Despite connections and areas of collaboration, youth work mostly operates outside formal education and training. It is value-based, built on voluntary participation and delivered by a wide range of structures (NGOs, youth associations and organisations, youth clubs, public services, informal groups) whose practices, resources and levels of recognition differ considerably across Europe. Its purpose, however, is consistent: **to support young people in becoming active participants in democratic life and in their communities.**

The European youth frameworks are well developed within the youth field: the **EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027** (Engage, Connect, Empower) and its eleven **European Youth Goals**, implemented through the EU Youth Dialogue; **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps** as the main European funding schemes; the **Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030** and its co-management principle; and the **EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership**, which supports the European Youth Work Conventions and the European Youth Work Agenda.

What is considerably less clear is **how other strategies and policy areas connect to them**, and where those connections are absent or underdeveloped despite an obvious potential. For each strategy, the mapping asks the same questions: does it acknowledge young people explicitly? Does it recognise youth work as a field, a methodology and a set of actors relevant to its objectives? Where neither is true, is there ground for a connection that does not yet exist? It also identifies which **Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) actions** connect most directly to each strategy's objectives.

The strategies were not chosen to become an exhaustive list. They were selected for their **relevance to young people and youth work** (even where a document is 'silent' on youth), their **European scope and steering potential**, and the **complementarity** of EU and Council of Europe frameworks. **Existing links** are references made in a strategy itself; **possible links** emerge from thematic overlap where youth or the youth sector could logically contribute. In the context of this mapping, youth means young people aged 13–30.

This mapping was carried out with Erasmus+ funding through the Europe Goes Local project. Its implementation was supported by the National Agencies responsible for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Belgium-Flanders, France, Germany, Malta and Slovenia. The mapping also benefited from contributions from SALTO Training and Cooperation, SALTO European Solidarity Corps and the Strategic National Agency Cooperation Initiative *Strengthening Youth Volunteering*. **Full mapping:** Snezana Baclija Knoch and Gisele Evrard, *Mapping of European strategies and their links to youth and youth work*, published in October 2026. General coordinator of the project: Judit Balogh.

What does the mapping tell us, strategy by strategy

Condensed from the two mapping tables. Set 1: strategies beyond youth and youth work. Set 2: strategies directly connected to youth and youth work (their links to Set 1 are shown in the matrix). SNACs: Strategic National Agencies Cooperation projects.

Set 1	Existing links with youth and the youth sector	Possible links, programme actions and relevant SNACs
Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 COM(2026) 113	Young women, men and boys named (GBV prevention, cyberviolence, polarisation; study on networks targeting young men and boys). Erasmus+ only for school and sport; youth work not named.	Non-formal methods for attitude change, consent education, work with young men; EU Youth Dialogue for young women's voice; KA2, ESC. **SNACs:** MHYW, YouSports, SPI, NPY.
EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 COM(2026) 12	Youth Check done; JRC study on social media and young people's attitudes; UNESCO project aligned with the EU Youth Strategy; EU Youth Coordinator a partner. Youth work not named.	Non-formal intercultural learning, media literacy, local action plans in community and youth centres; Youth Exchanges, KA2, ESC. **SNACs:** SPI, BB, YouSports, EGL, DYW.
The Union of Skills COM(2025) 90	Youth work, non-formal learning and volunteering named in a single sentence [p.7]; Erasmus+ referenced for VET, higher education and inclusion.	Re-engaging learners in trusted community settings; non-formal providers absent from the Skills High-Level Board; Youthpass and ETS frameworks absent from validation. **SNACs:** Y@W, EaT, DYW, GYW, EAYW, RAY.
Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness 2026	The most explicit: Youth Check, Youth Policy Dialogues; Erasmus+ youth strand and ESC intergenerational volunteer teams named; post-2027 EU Youth Strategy to include this dimension.	Youth work's role on stress, loneliness, NEETs not named; EU Youth Dialogue absent; intergenerational solidarity a post-2027 priority. **SNACs:** MHYW, Y@W, VOL, EP, EGL, GYW, EAYW.
EU Preparedness Union Strategy JOIN(2025) 130	Youth workers/persons of trust named as a professional group [p.9]; Action 16 creates a preparedness priority in Erasmus+ and the ESC.	Youth organisations framed as grant applicants, not partners; absent from the training plan (Action 4); ETS, Youthpass not used. **SNACs:** DR, MHYW, VOL, DYW, BB, GYW, EAYW.
European Democracy Shield JOIN(2025) 791	None: young people are not identified as a group; youth work is not mentioned; Erasmus+ appears once, in the funding section.	Pillar 3 matches youth sector practice (citizenship education, media literacy); youth organisations absent from the Centre's platform. **SNACs:** DR, NPY, DYW, EGL, EP, EAYW.
New Democratic Pact (Roadmap) Council of Europe, 2025	The strongest: 'elevate youth voices'; 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth; conference 'Why Youth Work Matters'; youth organisations in shrinking civic space.	Youth work as structural delivery across all pillars, incl. Pillar 2 (disinformation, first-time voters); programme activities aligned with the Pact (Edu4Europe). **SNACs:** DR, NPY, EGL, EAYW, BB, GYW.
Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 European Council	Only youth employment [p.8]; youth work, Erasmus+, the ESC and the EU Youth Strategy are not mentioned.	Democratic resilience, radicalisation prevention, skills; it guides the next MFF, so the gap matters. **SNACs:** DR, Y@W, NPY, EaT, GYW.
EU Strategy for Civil Society COM(2025) 790	Youth movements counted as CSOs; EU Youth Dialogue, Youth Policy Dialogues and Youth Advisory Board named; Erasmus+ and ESC key funders. Youth sector not distinct.	Youth organisations highly exposed to shrinking civic space; EU Youth Dialogue as input to the Civil Society Platform; FSTP for grassroots funding. **SNACs:** EGL, NPY, EAYW, DR, GYW.

SNACs: BBs: Beyond Borders – Neighbours Together · **DR**: Democracy Reloading · **DYW**: Digital Youth Work · **EaT**: Education and Training of youth workers/persons of trust · **EAYW**: European Academy on Youth Work · **EGL**: Europe Goes Local · **GYW**: Growing Youth Work · **MHYW**: Mental Health in Youth Work · **NPY**: New Power in Youth · **SPI**: Strategic Partnership on Inclusion · **VOL**: Strengthening Youth Volunteering · Europeers: EP · Youth@Work: Y@W · YouSports: YouSports.

Set 2	How young people and youth work are seen	Internal limits
4th European Youth Work Convention Malta, 2025	Young people as agents and co-creators; youth work a distinct, value-based field and pillar of democratic resilience that must stay autonomous.	Non-binding; uneven recognition, unstable funding, precarious working conditions.
EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027	Young people as active citizens and co-creators of policy (Youth Goals, EU Youth Dialogue); youth work an important but non-exclusive instrument.	Not binding; no guaranteed funding; risk of instrumentalising youth work.
CoE Youth Sector Strategy 2030	Young people as rights-holders and co-decision-makers (co-management); youth work a policy field in its own right, one of four priorities.	Political commitments only; uneven national resources.
European Training Strategy 2021–2027	Young people as indirect, ultimate beneficiaries; youth work seen through competence development, quality and professionalisation.	Depends on programme cycles; uneven recognition of youth workers/persons of trust and trainers.
Youth Participation Strategy Erasmus+ and ESC	Young people as rights-holders and democratic actors (no apathy narrative); youth work an enabling environment for participation.	Depends on National Agencies' implementation; limited evidence of system-level impact.
Inclusion and Diversity Strategy Erasmus+ and ESC	Young people with differentiated access conditions (no deficit framing); youth work key for outreach and accompaniment.	Depends on the capacity of implementing bodies; uneven implementation.
SALTO ESC Strategy 2021–2027	Young people as agents of solidarity; youth work implicit, through non-formal learning, mentoring and communities of practice.	Bound by ESC budgets and rules.
Youthpass Strategy	Young people as owners of their learning; youth work a learning space needing recognition, also for youth workers/persons of trust.	Voluntary tool; recognition beyond the youth field cannot be enforced.
Revised European Charter on Youth Participation Local and regional life, CoE, 2025	Participation as a human right; youth work an essential enabling environment and a structural pillar of local democracy.	Normative, not enforceable; depends on local political will and resources.

Cross-reference matrix

The theoretical connection, as perceived from the strategies' contents (topics, principles, ambitions), between each Set 2 strategy (rows) and each Set 1 strategy (columns).

	Prepared-ness	Gender Equality	Anti-Racism	Union of Skills	Democracy Shield	Intergen. Fairness	Strategic Agenda	New Dem. Pact	Civil Society Strategy
4th EYWC	●●●	●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●	●●●	●●●
EU Youth Strategy	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●
CoE Youth Strategy 2030	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●●	●●	–	●●●	●●
European Training Strategy	●●	–	–	●●●	●●	●●	●	●●	–
Youth Participation Strategy	●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●	●●●	●●●
Inclusion & Diversity Strategy	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●	●●●	●	●●	●●
SALTO ESC Strategy	●●●	–	●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●	●●	●●
Youthpass Strategy	●●	●	●●	●●●	●	●●	●	–	–
Revised European Charter	●●	●●	●●●	–	●●●	●●●	●	●●●	●●●

●●● Strong / direct connection ●● Moderate connection ● Weak / indirect connection – No significant link identified

Key observations: the most valuable links to explore

Drawing on the full mapping, this section identifies where the connections between youth work, Erasmus+/ESC and other European strategies are most worth developing, and why.

1. Youth work is named but not structurally integrated

In most Set 1 strategies, youth work is mentioned only in passing, if at all. It is rarely treated as a field with its own expertise, methods and professional infrastructure. The clearest exception is the Preparedness Union Strategy, which names youth workers/persons of trust as a professional group [p.9]. Yet in Action 16 it still treats youth organisations as grant applicants rather than as partners in designing the work. Being named is not the same as being built in: youth work needs to be written into how strategies are delivered, governed and held to account.

★ The most valuable link: the youth sector and the European Democracy Shield

Pillar 3, on societal resilience and citizens' engagement, could almost have been written around what the youth sector already does. Yet the Shield does not mention young people as a group, nor youth work or youth organisations, and it refers to Erasmus+ only once, in its funding section. The Shield is being built now, with a new European Centre for Democratic Resilience and new funding through AgoraEU. If the youth sector is not written in as a partner at this stage, it risks being left out for the whole policy cycle. The tools already exist: the EU Youth Dialogue, Youth Participation Projects, ESC Solidarity Projects and Europeers, the peer network of Erasmus+ and ESC alumni.

★ The most actionable link: Youthpass and the Union of Skills

Youthpass already records the learning of more than 2.2 million Erasmus+ and ESC participants, but neither the Union of Skills nor its Skills Portability Initiative mentions it. As the Initiative is still being developed, there is one specific request to make to DG Employment and DG EAC: **to integrate Youthpass into the Initiative, or into the guidance on validating non-formal and informal learning**. The European Training Strategy's competence models and RAY research provide the evidence for it.

2. The underused bridge between Erasmus+/ESC and the New Democratic Pact

Of all the Set 1 strategies, the New Democratic Pact takes in the youth sector most fully. However, it is a Council of Europe process, while Erasmus+ and the ESC are EU instruments, and the EU–CoE Youth Partnership is not always used for joint delivery. Youth Participation Projects and ESC Solidarity Projects could become a standing delivery route for the Pact's Pillars 1 and 3, as the Democracy Hackathon in Budapest has already shown. The European Academy on Youth Work's work on innovation is directly relevant to Pillar 3 (Innovating for Democracy). A joint CoE–EU position could also name youth organisations as a constituency in both the Pact and the EU Strategy for Civil Society.

3. The prevention gap in gender equality, anti-racism and the missing youth sector

The Gender Equality and Anti-Racism Strategies both identify youth-related problems in their own data, such as online misogyny and the influence of social media on young people's attitudes to ethnic diversity. Their remedies, however, are aimed almost entirely at schools, law enforcement and formal institutions, even though youth work already reaches young men and boys, and diverse communities, in informal settings. Two entry points are already in place: the EU Youth Coordinator, a partner in the Anti-Racism Strategy, and the Erasmus+ youth strand (Youth Exchanges, Mobility of youth workers, Youth Participation Projects, Capacity Building). Sport offers a further shared entry point.

4. Democracy, preparedness and the youth sector as a package as a resilience cluster

The Preparedness Union Strategy, the Democracy Shield, the New Democratic Pact and the Strategy for Civil Society share one concern: Europe's ability to defend democracy under pressure. Erasmus+ and the ESC already fund youth work that serves all four, but each strategy treats the youth sector as relevant to itself alone. The European Academy on Youth Work, for instance, contributes to all four through its work on foresight, innovation and youth work in a fragile democracy. This work could be presented as one package, with KA2 Cooperation Partnerships as its infrastructure, and with DG EAC, the European External Action Service and the Council of Europe Secretariat working together, supported by the EU–CoE Youth Partnership.

5. The intergenerational opportunity: ESC as the most visible existing link

The Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness is the only Set 1 document to name both Erasmus+ and the ESC, which it credits with supporting 'intergenerational teams of volunteers'. It is also the first major EU strategy to refer to the ESC on the theme itself rather than only in the budget. Local and regional ESC Solidarity Projects, SALTO Inclusion and Diversity's work on intergenerational solidarity, and the Strategy's 'Voices of the Future' initiative, in which youth councils and local youth organisations would be natural participants, are obvious ways to build on this.

6. EU Youth Dialogue is missing from most strategies: a governance gap

The EU Youth Dialogue is absent from the Preparedness Union Strategy, the Democracy Shield, the Union of Skills, the Strategic Agenda and the Anti-Racism Strategy, and none of the Set 1 strategies refers to the European Youth Goals. No new mechanism is needed: the Youth Dialogue already exists, is funded through Erasmus+ and has national structures. What is missing is the political will to feed its findings into the drafting and review of strategies beyond the youth sector. The Youth Check is meant to secure this, but it does not yet seem to work across all major Commission initiatives.

7. The civil society funding opportunity: making the youth sector visible in the next MFF

The EU Strategy for Civil Society names Erasmus+ and the ESC as key funding programmes for civil society [p.13–14]. It does not, however, treat the youth sector as a distinct part of civil society, and none of the post-2027 openings (AgoraEU, National and Regional Partnership Plans, the Mediterranean civic service, the Youth Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean) names the youth sector outright. The most useful step would be to make sure that youth sector organisations are named explicitly, from the start, in the scope of the Civil Society Platform and in the Commission's guidance on eligibility for AgoraEU.