



Empowering
young people



Impact Report 2025

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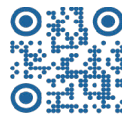
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As 2025 comes to an end, I want to share a few reflections on what we have achieved together. The two major events this year showed clearly why our network is needed, and how we can contribute in different parts of Europe.

At the Annual Event, we focused on intergenerational poverty and how research and practice can support each other. The discussions reminded us that poverty affects more than living standards. It shapes opportunities, trust, and young people's ability to participate in society. Many of you shared concrete methods from your daily work, and it was valuable to see [how different perspectives can strengthen each other](#).

The Policy Event continued this path, with a focus on NEET's and the gap between young people's real situations and the systems that are meant to support them. The examples you brought showed how important long term, relationship-based work is, and [how frontline experience can guide better policies](#) at the European level.

These events reminded me of what I value most in the YES Forum. [Our members bring openness, experience, and commitment to every discussion](#). You make sure that voices that are often not heard become part of the conversation, and this is what gives our network meaning and credibility.

Thank you for everything you have contributed during the year. Your engagement in events, workshops, and policy processes has strengthened our shared work and given it clear direction. As we move into next year, I am confident that we will continue building on this foundation together. The work we do matters, and it makes a difference for young people across Europe.

Warm regards,

Hannah Degerman

Chair of the YES Forum Board

Welcome!

The year 2025 marked a period of consolidation and strategic focus for our network. Against a complex global backdrop, we strengthened cooperation among our members through on-site gatherings, knowledge exchange, and a balanced mix of online and face to face activities. These efforts reinforced our shared capacity to respond to social challenges and policy developments at European level.

Our work focused on two key priorities. We addressed intergenerational poverty and explored the role of youth work in breaking its cycle. At the same time, we contributed to discussions on the [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\)](#), highlighting the need for sustained investment in social infrastructure to support social cohesion and young people's future prospects.

Our policy engagement gained further momentum through strengthened connections with European stakeholders. This led to concrete results, including meetings with Members of the European Parliament, contributions to the [EU Youth Test](#), and a more active role within the [EESC Liaison Group](#).

Young people remained at the heart of our work. Whether through policy dialogue, learning mobilities, or capacity building for professionals, we aim to ensure that young people have the opportunities to explore their talents and fulfil their potential. As we look ahead to the next four-year cycle starting in 2026, we remain committed to building on these achievements and responding to future challenges. We thank our members, partners, and friends for being part of this community and wish you an inspiring read.

Annett Wiedermann

Managing Director of the YES Forum



OUR IMPACT

32

policy dialogue activities

34

online and on-site meetings

270

professionals working in the youth
and social work field from 23 EU
countries

672

professionals working in the youth
and social work field from 23 EU
countries

10%

growth in social media, through
'It's Not Luck, It's Social Work'

25

expert contributions at EU-level
policy events amplified the sector's
voice

22

countries represented through YES
Forum membership

60

co-organised activities, including
skills labs, working groups,
workshops, and training sessions

10.000

people reached through communication
activities

January

We started the year with an [online gathering with our members](#) to share plans, exchange updates, and explore opportunities for cooperation across the network.

March

YES Forum brought the experience of social and youth work professionals, as well as young people, into two major European spaces for dialogue and exchange: [Civil Society Week \(Brussels\)](#) and the [EU Social Forum \(Brussels\)](#).

May

The [A.M.O.R.](#) project concluded in Slovenia with a final partners meeting and a Respectful focused on integration, learning, and shared reflection on the project's outcomes (Celje, Slovenia).

July

In Freiburg, the [Zug um Zug training](#) brought professionals and young people together to co create inclusive methods and explore innovative hybrid approaches to youth work.

September

The YES Forum continued collaborating closer with its members in the second session of the [Project Planning Process](#) and the [Board and Secretariat retreat \(Agina GR\)](#).

November

YES Forum member organisations engaged in dialogue with Members of the European Parliament, including [Sabrina Repp](#), [Estelle Ceulemans](#), [Marit Majj](#), and a representative from the office of [Maria Ohisalo](#). We also joined the conference of our member [CNLAPS](#) to learn more about the French approach to *prévention spécialisée*.

February

We launched [EU Player \(Stuttgart\)](#), our new project, and marked one year since [Back on Track](#) began, reflecting on progress and next steps together with partners.

April

With the kick off of the [Youth Empowerment for a Stronger Europe project \(Ljubljana, SLO\)](#) and the [CitiGenZ Shadow Cabinet](#), we strengthened young people's civic engagement and created new spaces for participation.

June

Members and partners met in [Groningen \(NL\)](#) for the [Annual Event and General Assembly](#), and exchanged expertise on intergenerational poverty and its impact on young people's lives ([Koper, Slovenia](#)).

August

In Prague, young people and professionals took part in training on social innovation strategies within the framework of the [YES Project \(Prague\)](#).

October

[Back on Track](#) partners met ([Szombathely, HU](#)), to review project developments. In parallel, the YES Forum contributed to the [EESC Task Force shaping Civil Society Week 2026](#).

December

We joined the conference "[Democracy in Action – Youth Work Matters](#)", organised by [IJAB](#) and the [Council of Europe](#), and shared the YES Forum Policy Event as a participatory practice that strengthens youth voices in democratic processes.

Setting our future strategic direction

With our renewed Strategy 2025–2029, YES Forum supports social inclusion not as a by-product of economic growth; but as a condition for it. Our strategy reaffirms the direction of our work programme for the next four years and integrates into it the experience of our members, youth and social work organisations across Europe. Our new strategy reaffirms our shared commitment to the social inclusion of all disadvantaged young people.

It is a living document, one that will evolve as Europe continues to evolve, and it is built around four overarching objectives that together form our GROW framework.



Find out more: [YES Forum - Objectives & Principles](#)

Our five thematic priorities

Find out more: [YES Forum Strategy 2025-2029](#)

Implementing the EPSR and the new Action Plan to strengthen social rights in Europe

Promoting inter-generational dialogue and workforce cohesion, in the context of an aging society

Investing in the skills development, upskilling, and reskilling of the social care workforce

Evidence-based social work to combat intergenerational poverty

Strengthening the recognition of youth, social care and education professionals

Policy dialogue in Brussels: Connecting regional realities with European strategies

From 17–19 November 2025, YES Forum’s annual Policy Event brought together 79 experts from the youth and social work field from more than 15 European countries.

The event focused on the reintegration of **NEETs** in rural areas, with a particular lens on the **Danube region**, and created space for genuine dialogue between EU institutions, practitioners, policymakers, and young people.

Contributions from **Eurofound**, DG Employment, the European Committee of the Regions, and the **Danube Youth Council** grounded discussions in evidence and regional reality.

A practical case study from the Back on Track project explored NEET support interventions between Western and Eastern European partners, offering a model for cross-border cooperation that works.

21 young people travelled to Brussels, many for the first time, and met directly with MEPs, and brought their lived experiences into roundtable discussions on outreach, mentorship, and effective interventions.

Discussions focused on key EU priorities, including the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Anti-Poverty Strategy, and the Youth Guarantee.

Key contributions highlighted:

- Challenges leading to NEET status and digital inequalities
- EU measures to address social and labour market disparities
- rural perspectives and regional realities
- the importance of structured youth participation
Find out more: [YES Forum - Advocacy](#)



It's not luck, it's social work

In 2025, our campaign 'It's not luck, it's social work' showcased that when a young person finds their path, gains confidence, or feels supported, it is not luck. It is social work.

Behind every story of change are professionals and organisations creating opportunities for young people to grow and participate in society. Their impact is built on care, commitment, and expertise, supported by stable structures and long-term investment.

Through our campaign, we achieved:

- 5000 people reached
- 21 organisations across 5 countries involved
- 10% growth of YES Forum social media Find out more: [YES Forum - It's not luck, it's social work campaign](#)

To bring this message to life, we gathered and shared voices from practice and lived experience, including the following statements:



"We work hard to create and maintain a space where opportunities exist, where every young person has the chance to learn, try, and discover something extraordinary about themselves. Opportunities do not simply appear by chance; they are built, protected, and shared."

Leon Gijzen, social worker, Stichting SCN (The Netherlands)

[Read more](#)

"Things started to change when someone really listened to me. That support truly gave me light. Social workers remind you that you are not alone in the hard times."

Ilenia, Italy

[Read more](#)



Contributions to European policy

Alongside its core policy initiatives, the YES Forum contributed to several key European discussions, ensuring that the perspectives of young people and youth and social work professionals remain visible in EU debates.

Civil Society Week

At Civil Society Week 2025, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, the YES Forum presented its work and the Back on Track project, highlighting the need to improve opportunities for young people who are NEET. We were joined by our members [Internationaler Bund \(DE\)](#) who engaged in Civil Society Week (17–20/03/2025, Brussels) with a stand and workshop input.

Discussions focused on major European priorities, including:

- the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)
- the European Pillar of Social Rights
- the future EU Strategy for Civil Society

The event reinforced the importance of bringing grassroots perspectives into European policymaking. Going forward, we have secured YES Forum's active role in Civil Society Week 2026.

Find out more: [YES Forum - Civil Society Week 2025](#)





EU Social Forum

At the EU Social Forum, the YES Forum emphasised that skills policies must work for all young people, including those facing barriers to education, training, or employment.

As discussions around the Union of Skills advance, targeted support remains essential to ensure that disadvantaged young people are not left behind in the green and digital transitions.

Find out more: [YES Forum - EU Social Forum 2025](#)

Enhancing dialogue with Members of the European Parliament

Together with our members, we identified policymakers whose priorities align with youth inclusion and social rights. Following this, we organised meetings with several MEPs throughout the year, creating opportunities for our members to bring grassroots perspectives into EU policy work. Member organisation representatives were matched by nationality and area of expertise

With [Sabrina Repp](#), discussions explored the EU Youth Strategy and the challenges facing young people in rural areas.

With [Maria Ohisalo](#), the focus was affordable housing and the preventive role of social and youth work in addressing youth homelessness, including the importance of protecting the 12.5% ESF+ ringfenced funding.

With [Estelle Ceulemans](#), the agenda covered the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Youth Guarantee, the Quality Jobs Roadmap, and access to housing and education.

With [Marit Majj](#), Dutch member organisations shared good practices in youth care alongside the persistent challenges they face, making the case for explicit recognition of social and youth work in the post-2027 ESF+ framework.

Across all four meetings, MEPs expressed strong interest in hearing directly from young people and the professionals who support them, a clear signal that dialogue is valued at the European level.

Networking & capacity building

Strengthening the capacities of youth and social work professionals remained a central focus of the YES Forum in 2025. Through trainings, exchanges, and collaborative activities, we created spaces where practitioners could share experiences, learn from each other, and develop new approaches to support young people across Europe.

By connecting organisations and professionals from different regions and sectors, these activities strengthened both individual skills and the wider European youth and social work ecosystem.

STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK

Project planning

Our online Project Planning Process brought together organisations from across Europe to develop new collaboration and project ideas. Discussions focused on shared challenges, including funding pressures and digital risks, and laid the groundwork for future joint initiatives. Find out more: [Projects](#)



Pathways to a Fair Europe – Annual Event

From 3–5 June 2025, the YES Forum held its [General Assembly and Annual Event](#) in Groningen, in partnership with [CMO STAMM](#). Under the theme “[Pathways to a Fair Europe](#)”, the event brought together [61 participants from 11 countries](#) to explore how research and international cooperation can help address [intergenerational poverty](#).

Participants were welcomed by local partners and introduced to the specific challenges faced in the Groningen region, including high poverty rates and the long-term social impact of gas extraction-related earthquakes.

Participants also shared approaches used across Europe to support disadvantaged youth, including initiatives focused on:

- housing support
- vocational education and training pathways
- financial education
- family support programmes
- targeted support for [NEETs](#)

The event concluded with visits to local initiatives, including [Stichting SCN's youth centre](#) and the [Simon van Hasselt School](#), where participants learned about restorative practices used to address conflicts and strengthen supportive learning environments.

Find out more: [Annual Event 2025](#)



Youth participation and mobility

At the Policy Event in Brussels, a dedicated youth programme gave over 20 young people from across Europe the tools to engage directly with EU decision-making. Through interactive sessions on political processes, roleplay, and visits to the Parliamentarium, participants prepared to meet Members of the European Parliament and contribute their lived experiences to roundtable discussions. The programme concluded with the EU Up Close experience at the European Parliament, for many, their first direct encounter with the institutions that shape their lives.

Across the year, young people also participated in trainings, shadow cabinets, ideathons, and cross-border mobility exchanges, building skills, making connections, and developing as active European citizens. And at the YES Forum Secretariat in Stuttgart, internships continued to offer young social and youth workers hands-on experience in international cooperation.

One intern captured what that means in practice.



Clara Stacheder reflected: *“My internship taught me a lot about the organisation and framework of youth social work in the international context — and about the importance of my future field of work.”*
[read more](#)

Our flagship report: Report on the infrastructure of youth (care) and social work in Europe

In 2025, YES Forum published a report examining a fundamental question: when we talk about youth and social work across EU Member States, are we even talking about the same thing?

The answer is often no. Legal frameworks, funding models, and service delivery vary enormously, from Germany’s statutory guarantee of youth services up to age 27, to Italy where the youth worker role remains entirely undefined and unregulated at national level. In some countries the state leads; in others, NGOs and volunteers carry the weight. Drawing on testimonies from members, European Semester data, Youth Wiki, and Eurostat, the report maps these differences and makes the case that without shared understanding, EU-level policy risks talking past the very systems it aims to strengthen.



[Read the report](#)



Innovation in practice

Throughout the year, YES Forum engages with a range of initiatives beyond its core programme — collaborating with members, joining sector events, and providing workshops and training opportunities that strengthen the field and connect practitioners across Europe.

Game-based learning - EU Player

Together with IEKEP (EL), Finglas Youth Resource Centre (IE), Nevo Parudimos (RO), ÖJAB (AT), and Zefiro (IT), we are developing an educational board game to help youth workers introduce young people to the European Union. Launched in February 2025, the project focuses on developing the game and a supporting handbook. Next steps include training professionals, piloting the tool with young people, and expanding its reach.



Seeds for Democracy

In December, YES Forum joined IJAB and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg for a conference on youth work and democratic participation. We contributed to the „Seeds for Democracy“ session, sharing our Policy Event as a model of participatory practice and how youth voices can meaningfully shape policymaking. Find out more: [Democracy in Action event YES Forum](#)

Green Skills and Innovative Youth Work Methods

The Zug um Zug training in Freiburg brought professionals and young people together to co-create inclusive youth work methods, develop a simulation game, and explore how to blend digital and in-person learning, including through Green Skills approaches.

Find out more: [Zug um Zug - Train to Europe](#)

Citizens Ideathon - Slovenia

Young people from across Europe came together for an Ideathon on exploring youth participation, political engagement, and social inclusion through creative and collaborative workshops. Working in teams, participants developed and pitched their own project ideas, gaining hands-on experience in needs assessment, project design, and proposal development.

Engaging Gen Z In Democracy

In January, YES Forum hosted a youth workers training in Stuttgart exploring how to engage Generation Z with EU citizenship and democratic participation. Participants tested approaches from the CitiGenZ handbook and reflected on making European topics more accessible and relevant in their daily work.

Reimagining EU Decision making

In April, YES Forum hosted the CitiGenZ Shadow Cabinet, where young people explored EU decision-making through roleplay and discussion.

Social innovation training

Launched in April 2025 in Ljubljana with partners from the Caritas network, the YES project supports young people in understanding political processes and democratic participation. At the first training in Prague (August–September), 40 participants from 12+ countries tackled the challenges of mental health and housing through theatre, video, and web design, developing ideas and a shared roadmap for action.

Find out more: YES - [Youth Empowerment for a Stronger Europe](#)



New members

The YES Forum network continues to grow. At the latest General Assembly, two new members joined:



Stichting SCN (NL)

A community-driven youth centre in Groningen supporting young people through creative, technical, and social activities in an inclusive environment.



ipcenter (AT)

A provider of vocational education and training, combining practical learning with digital methods such as e-learning, gamification, and virtual reality.

Find out more: [YES Forum - Members](#)

Re-elected Board

The General Assembly renewed the Board's mandate for two more years.

Hannah Degerman, Gwen Birza, Sebastian Frank, Andreas Koth, and Lilika Trikalinou will continue guiding the network in close collaboration with the Secretariat.

Learning from our members – CNLAPS conference

In November, the YES Forum joined the National Days of Specialised Prevention in Metz, organised by CNLAPS, bringing together around 700 professionals.

The event explored France's approach to prévention spécialisée, highlighting the role of outreach work and cooperation in supporting young people in vulnerable situations. It also provided an opportunity to present the YES Forum and exchange with practitioners.



Vision, mission, and values

We envision a Europe where all young people have access to opportunities, education, and support, and can participate in shaping their future.

We advocate for strong investment in youth and social work as a key part of Europe's social infrastructure. Our work promotes inclusive policies, supports professionals, and strengthens responses to youth poverty and inequality.

Youth participation is at the core of our approach. We move from "what we do for young people" to what we do with them, ensuring they are active partners in shaping solutions and contributing to a more inclusive Europe.

Find out more: [YES Forum - Vision & Values](#)

How we work

We act as a hub for the exchange of good practices, connecting youth and social work organisations, professionals, and decision-makers across Europe.

Through events, trainings, and outreach activities, we create opportunities to collaborate on key themes such as education, employment and skills, the digital and green transition, and poverty prevention.

These exchanges strengthen capacity, support learning, and contribute to more effective policy engagement.

Find out more: [YES Forum - About us](#)

Board

Gwen Birza, *Jongerenwerk Barkema de Haan (NL)*

Hannah Degerman, *Piteå Kommun (SE)*

Sebastian Frank, *ÖJAB (AT)*

Andreas Koth, *Internationaler Bund (DE)*

Lilika Trikalinou, *IEKEP (EL)*

Secretariat team

Annett Wiederman, *Director & Project Manager*

Diana Neugebauer, *Financial Administration*

Olatz Alonso Guevara, *Communications Officer*

Lucy Pettinella, *Advocacy and Co-operation Officer*

Violeta Bakia, *Project and Advocacy Officer*

Jone Villarroel, *Project Officer*

Cassandra Helmlí, *Student assistant*

Clara Stacheder, *Intern*

Nicole Wooley, *Intern*



Piteå Kommun

