

Finnish Chairmanship of the Council of Europe  
Seminar on Education and Training Pathways of Youth Workers  
Marina Congress Center, Helsinki  
20 February 2019 at 13.15  
Sampo Terho, Minister for European Affairs, Culture and Sports

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
(Director-General Samardzic-Markovic,  
Distinguished Representatives of the Council of Europe),

Welcome to this main event in the field of youth, held during Finland's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

Finland is chairing the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from November 2018 to May 2019, for the first time in more than twenty years [1997-1998]. During our term of Chairmanship, the Council of Europe will also celebrate its 70th anniversary, which gives us a great opportunity to increase the Council of Europe's visibility and make its activities known to a wider audience.

For Finland, the Council of Europe offers a major forum of international cooperation in youth field, culture and sports. During our Chairmanship, our key priority is to keep strengthening the crucial work of the Council of Europe in advancing human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Other key priorities include equality and women's rights, openness, inclusion, young people and the prevention of radicalisation.

The Council of Europe has played, and continues to play, a key role in the development of Finnish youth work and youth policies.

In 1997, Finland was honoured to become the first country where the Council of Europe conducted an international review of national youth policies. Twenty other countries have since followed Finland's example. That external critical evaluation, which nevertheless respected our national characteristics, laid the foundation for Finland's reforms over the next decades. Encouraged by our good experience, we again asked the Council of Europe for an opinion when we prepared our

current Youth Act. The Council of Europe has developed standards and instruments that support both local and national work. A concrete example of this is the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres, which has been awarded to two of our national youth centres.

It was not by chance that the youth workers' training and skills were chosen as the topic of this Chairmanship seminar. The first Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on youth work, which the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted in May 2017, was an important step forward in how European youth work is being developed and how it is respected. Finland's youth sector played an important role in supporting and backing up its preparation. I am pleased that during our Chairmanship we can contribute to the implementation of the Recommendation.

In comparison with many other European countries, youth work enjoys a relatively strong position in Finland. It is governed by national law and has very high standards of training and development. The Finnish youth work has many strengths, such as a wide scope, high quality, professional approach and innovativeness. For these reasons, the youth sector is also recognised as an active partner in cross-sectoral collaboration.

An open society and an active civil society are essential in building democracy. Youth participation has long been a priority area, both for the Council of Europe and Finland. Nationally, we have used legislation to safeguard young people's right to participate in the decision making concerning them.

When high-quality youth work is made available to support young people, the civil society grows stronger and active citizenship is promoted. The value base of youth work is identical to the moral principles of human rights education. For example, youth work can prevent young people from becoming radicalised by violent extremist groups. Youth work education and training are crucial for these prevention efforts.

The training and education background and requirements of youth workers – both volunteers and employees – vary considerably across Europe. If we seek to improve the standards of youth work, we must invest in developing the youth workers' education and training in Europe. Peer learning and practical training and coaching can accelerate the exchange of good practices and innovations while raising the youth workers' profile.

This year, Finland has an exceptionally good opportunity to influence the development of European youth work and youth policies. Soon after the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe ends, we will

take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union until the end of 2019. Youth workers' education and training are high on the agenda of both our Chairmanship and Presidency.

I wish to extend my sincerest thanks to the Council of Europe for their excellent cooperation and the opportunity to hold this seminar as part of our Chairmanship programme.

I wish you all an inspiring and productive seminar.

Thank you.