

Youth Protection Concept

Name of the organisation

Göteborg stad, socialförvaltning Sydväst/ Fritid and Stadt Koeln

Website of the organisation

<https://www.stadt-koeln.de/> <https://goteborg.se/>

Location of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in decision making
- Human rights
- Peace-building and conflict transformation
- Segregation/integration

Good practice category

Concrete tool

Good practice aim & purpose

The aim of this practice is to develop a practical, rights-based safeguarding framework for international youth work that moves beyond adult-led rules. Our goal was to create a 'Youth Protection Concept' (YPC) where youth participation is the core principle of safety itself, rather than an afterthought. We wanted to achieve meaningful involvement, ensuring young people are involved throughout the entire project cycle so that the framework reflects their real experiences, needs, and language.

By grounding the concept in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Erasmus+ values, we have created a model for rights-based protection applicable to everyday international youth work while remaining accessible for all. This specifically helps youth workers establish safe and inclusive environments without needing complex external infrastructures. A key pillar is shared responsibility, where a Code of Conduct is co-owned by both professionals and young people. While the concept is designed to be helpful for all youth work, this approach serves as a successful example for including marginalized groups or youth from remote areas, as it creates a transparent and predictable safety net tailored to their specific needs.

Good practice description

This Good Practice is a comprehensive pedagogical manual developed through a 1.5-year collaborative process. To achieve our goals, we conducted four days of intensive workshops in Cologne where experts, youth workers, and young people established a shared understanding of safeguarding. These days, led by an external facilitator, focused on aligning different professional perspectives with youth-led insights. A central part of this process was the active participation of young people through a co-creative approach. We integrated German expertise on mandatory safety concepts with Swedish expertise in specialized fields such as gender-based violence, honor-related oppression, and digital vulnerability. Following this, the work was divided between partners to develop 14 specific modules locally. The teams then gathered for a full week in Gothenburg for a review process to agree on the content and tone, ensuring a balanced integration of local and national legal requirements, EU values, and youth perspectives.

The resulting manual consists of 14 thematic modules designed to create a common baseline:

- Legal & Ethics: National jurisdiction, UNCRC rights, GDPR, and professional work ethics including an 'open error culture'.
- Safety & Risk Management: Internal reporting procedures for legal conflicts and the professional duty of supervision.
- Social Dynamics & Inclusion: Meaningful participation, intersectionality, and diversity with a focus on LGBTQIA+ safety.
- Violence & Conflict: Prevention of bullying, toxic masculinity, honor-related violence, sexualized violence, and gang-related risks.
- Health & Crisis: Management of psychosocial crises, NDD (ADHD/Autism), diabetes, or physical disabilities.
- Digital Environment: Risks and ethics regarding social media, AI, cyberbullying, and digital grooming.

A core component of the practice is the Risk and Potential Analysis. This tool allows organizations to systematically identify vulnerabilities (risks) while simultaneously highlighting existing strengths (potentials) within their structures. By using this analysis before the exchange, staff can determine which specific measures and modules to activate. This provides a robust, self-sufficient structure that is especially useful for youth workers in remote or less-privileged territories where external support may be limited. Furthermore, the concept is designed to be used to create a discussion about fundamental values (core principles) before entering a project with a potential partner. This ensures that the safety net is inclusive and predictable for all, especially for marginalized youth who may face higher barriers to participation.

A unique feature is the internal reporting procedure developed to handle legal conflicts between partner countries, ensuring the 'best interests of the child' always take precedence. This is supported by checklists divided into three phases: Before, During, and After the exchange, alongside a youth-oriented self-assessment tool to ensure the framework remains a living, reactive process. The final manifestation is a manual that will be possible to access via a webpage. We have also applied for a KA2 project to digitize the concept, allowing organizations to customize their own YPC by selecting the modules and checklist items applicable to their specific exchange. We aim to present this final product in Cologne in May, at the KEKS conference in Gothenburg and hope to be selected for the EGL conference in Tromsø.

Good practice result & concrete effects

As the project is in its final stages, we see that participation is the most effective element of protection. Youth participants were not just consulted; they co-wrote key sections of the YPC and reviewed documentation to ensure relevance. They also took charge of the visual design and contributed perspectives on power relations and personal boundaries, leading to substantial changes in the final concept.

This 'bottom-up' model has increased ownership and strengthened professional confidence among our key stakeholders: municipal youth workers, NGO experts, and the youth themselves. By involving these different groups, we have bridged the gap between theoretical safety and the practical reality of youth work. We are already applying for a follow-up project with four additional partners, showing the high demand for this model.

Ultimately, we have proven that participation and safeguarding are not opposites; instead, participation is the core of a democratic safeguarding process. This empowers young people to define their own boundaries and recognize power imbalances—a life skill extending far beyond the project itself. By combining these modules with shared responsibility and active co-creation, we ensure that the 'best interests of the child' is a shared, actionable reality.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Core principles of youth work