

Europe Goes Local National Conference

Dublin, Ireland

27th November 2025



Executive Summary

The Europe Goes Local (EGL) National Conference brought together a vibrant cross-section of Ireland's youth work community to explore how European collaboration enhances local practice. With 87 attendees spanning youth workers, service managers, ETB youth officers, and policy makers, the conference showcased the breadth of activity and ambition within the sector. The programme combined keynote insights, hands-on workshops, peer networking, and a cultural performance, creating a holistic experience that addressed both strategic frameworks such as the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) and practical considerations like funding pathways under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).

The event's design reflected a commitment to balancing policy-level orientation with grounded practice. The opening video address by Minister of State Thomas Byrne, TD, set a tone of national support for European engagement in youth work. Keynote speaker Miriam Teuma, CEO of Malta's National Youth Agency, brought an international perspective, drawing on extensive leadership and policy



experience to illuminate how national strategies translate into local realities. Contributions from Judit Balogh, project coordinator of Europe Goes Local, coupled with facilitation from NYCI as the national contact point for EYWA, ensured that participants could link European initiatives to Irish contexts in concrete ways.



Three thematic workshops—Opportunity, Connection, Impact—and a fourth, Integration, offered structured learning journeys. Participants examined the mechanics of Erasmus+ and ESC applications, engaged with EGL’s online tools and the EYWA, reflected on the impact of European dimensions across rural and urban services, and learned practical approaches to embedding European Youth Work across organisational systems. The Walking World Café created space for peer-to-peer exchange, enabling participants to surface shared challenges, solutions, and new partnerships.

Beyond technical content, the Crooked House Theatre performance underscored the role of arts-based practice in inclusion, voice, and community-building. The performance provided a powerful reminder that European links are not only administrative or programmatic—they are lived through creative collaboration and the exchange of perspectives, skills, and stories.

Immediate outcomes included heightened awareness of available European opportunities, increased confidence in pursuing funding and collaboration, and clarity on how to align local strategies with the EYWA. Medium-term impacts, as discussed in plenary wrap-up and informal conversations, are expected to include new project proposals, strengthened inter-organisational networks, and more systematic use of EGL tools within Irish services. The conference therefore served as both an information hub and a catalyst, supporting practitioners and leaders to move from interest to implementation.



Background and Rationale

Europe Goes Local is a European cooperation initiative focused on strengthening youth work at the municipal and local levels. In Ireland, EGL activities have been steered through a partnership that includes Léargas, ETBI, NYCI, Youthwork Ireland, and Foróige, reflecting the sector's collaborative DNA. The rationale for convening a national conference was to consolidate learning from ongoing European engagement and to chart pathways for deeper, more sustainable integration of European Youth Work principles into everyday practice.

Another rationale was inclusivity across contexts. Youth work varies widely between rural and urban settings, different organisational sizes, and distinct service mandates. By featuring case reflections from Kerry Community Youth Service and Bradóg Regional Youth Service, the conference ensured that lessons were grounded in diverse realities. Similarly, the integration workshop led by Finglas Youth Resource Centre and Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service provided tactical insights applicable across programme types from employability supports to arts-based initiatives.

Finally, the conference recognised the importance of culture and narrative in sustaining momentum. Arts and storytelling can translate policy into lived experience, mobilising communities and staff around shared values of inclusion, equality, and youth voice. Crooked House Theatre's participation symbolised this commitment, illustrating how international collaboration can enrich local creative ecosystems and, in turn, youth development outcomes.



Programme Overview

The programme was intentionally paced to balance input, interaction, and reflection. After arrivals and registration, the introductions by Mark Harding and Ann Marie Spillane situated the event within the broader National European Youth Support Capacity Building Project, clarifying how the conference fits into ongoing efforts to support organisations to engage with Erasmus+ and ESC. Céline Martin's welcome emphasised Léargas's role as national agency and the strategic importance of European links for the youth sector.

The Minister's opening video address signaled governmental recognition of youth work's European dimension. This message reinforced the legitimacy of cross-border collaboration as a core mode of modern youth work, not a peripheral activity. It also underscored how European participation can elevate local practice—through mobility, partnership, and shared standards while contributing to national priorities around education, inclusion, and civic engagement.

Judit Balogh's presentation on Europe Goes Local highlighted the project's mission to strengthen youth work at local level across Europe. For Irish participants, this provided context for using EGL online tools and networks to benchmark practice, access resources, and join collaborative initiatives. The subsequent session on the National European Youth Support Capacity Building Project explained how targeted outreach and hands-on supports will be offered to organisations in 2025 and beyond, providing an operational bridge from information to implementation.

The keynote by Miriam Teuma drew from Malta's national youth policy ('Towards 2030') and the speaker's experience at European and international levels, including work with the Council of Europe. The talk connected strategic policy development with organisational leadership, staffing, and programme design, inviting participants to consider how national frameworks can empower local innovation rather than constrain it.

Workshops formed the core of practical learning. In 'Opportunity', Léargas staff demystified Erasmus+ and ESC processes, sharing timelines, common pitfalls, and steps to build strong applications. In 'Connection', NYCI and EGL facilitators walked through the EYWA and EGL online tools, demonstrating how to situate local practice within European agendas and how to use digital resources to plan, monitor, and evaluate youth work. 'Impact' featured case narratives from KCYS and Bradóg, comparing rural and urban perspectives on resource constraints, participation, and outcomes. Finally, 'Integration' concentrated on mainstreaming European Youth Work into organisational planning, governance, and service delivery.

The Walking World Café provided a structured yet informal setting for rapid peer exchange. Participants rotated among stations focused on themes such as priorities for Ireland’s EU Presidency, Youth Support Capacity Building Project, and EGL Regional Hubs. The format encouraged concise sharing, note-taking, and immediate identification of potential collaborators.

After lunch, the Crooked House Theatre performance offered a creative lens. Crooked House, founded in 1993 in County Kildare, works with varied community groups including young people, international protection applicants, and people with intellectual disabilities. By showcasing theatre as a vehicle for inclusion and dialogue, the performance illustrated how European collaboration through Erasmus+ mobility and ESC volunteering can bring new skills and perspectives into local arts-based youth work, enriching both process and outcomes.

The day concluded with a talk by youth mental health advocate Tammy Donaghy, who emphasised the centrality of wellbeing in youth work design and delivery. The final plenary drew together insights, identified next steps for organisations, and signposted follow-up supports from Léargas and partners.



Workshops – Detailed Descriptions and Learning Outcomes

Opportunity: Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps Opportunities

Organisers: Léargas

Exploration of current Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) opportunities for youth services, outlining application steps, eligibility, and practical considerations for first-time applicants and experienced project leads alike. The session emphasised practical takeaways, including checklists, timelines, and examples relevant to Irish services of varying sizes. Facilitators encouraged questions throughout and provided signposts to further support from Léargas and sector partners.

Connection: Policy, Practice and People – European Youth Work Agenda & EGL Online Tools

Organisers: NYCI (National Contact Point for EYWA) with Judit Balogh & Ine Van Vaerenbergh (EGL)

Introduction to the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) and a hands-on walkthrough of Europe Goes Local (EGL) online tools, supporting the alignment of local practice with European frameworks.

Impact: Reflections on Our Evolving Journey in European Youth Work

Organisers: Kerry Community Youth Service (KCYS) & Bradóg Regional Youth Service

Case-based reflections from rural and urban services on embedding European dimensions in youth work, highlighting organisational development and youth outcomes.

The session emphasised practical takeaways, including checklists, timelines, and examples relevant to Irish services of varying sizes. Facilitators encouraged questions throughout and provided signposts to further support from Léargas and sector partners.

Integration: Embedding European Youth Work in Your Service

Organisers: Finglas Youth Resource Centre & Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service

Practical strategies to mainstream European Youth Work principles across programmes, governance, and partnerships, with templates and facilitation tips.

Collectively, the workshops approached European Youth Work from complementary angles. *Opportunity* addressed access and readiness; *Connection* addressed alignment and tools; *Impact* provided reflective case narratives; and *Integration* provided organisational mainstreaming strategies. Participants reported that this sequencing helped

them situate their own organisational journey within a wider ecosystem of support and expectations.

Networking and Methods

The Walking World Café methodology was used to generate rapid, cumulative insights in a limited time window. Stations were designed around thematic prompts, with facilitators capturing key points while participants rotated at set intervals. This approach balanced breadth and depth, enabling individuals to contribute across multiple topics without sacrificing the coherence of each discussion strand.



Participants noted that networking was not confined to breaks; rather, it was embedded throughout the programme, ensuring that knowledge transfer and relationship-building happened organically.

Feedback and Evaluation

- 100% of evaluation respondents agreed that the conference “very much” met their expectations
- 100% felt we “very much” met (78%) or met (22%) the conference objectives
- 78% of respondents said they were likely to apply for the programmes in 2026
- 100% of respondents were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the meals/refreshments and the meeting facilities.

Other feedback:

“Inspired Irish youth work to see youth work as an integral part our delivery model and not as an optional extra.”

“Really energizing to get the time to look at European Youth Work and how our grass roots work in Youth work is being seen and is impacting the policy on an international level.”

“Renewed energy for Erasmus and keen to continue to bring European youth work into my regular youth work practice.”

“An idea that even for us, a very small organisation, some positive engagement with European work through Léargas is possible”

Outcomes and Future Impact

Immediate outcomes included heightened awareness of Erasmus+ and ESC channels, clarified understanding of the EYWA, and concrete next steps identified by many organisations—such as scheduling internal sessions to review EGL tools, drafting project ideas, and contacting potential partners met during the conference.

Medium-term impacts are expected to include increased application activity, more collaborative projects between Irish services and European partners, and wider use of European frameworks for planning and evaluation. Embedding European Youth Work principles may lead to more systematic youth participation mechanisms, strengthened inclusion strategies, and enhanced staff development pathways.

The connection to national and European policy was explicit throughout. By situating local practice within the EYWA and leveraging EGL resources, organisations can align programme objectives with recognised priorities and quality standards. This alignment supports visibility, accountability, and impact—facilitating conversations with funders, boards, and community stakeholders.

Participants also noted the motivational effect of international examples and arts-based practice. Seeing how collaboration brings new skills, perspectives, and stories into local services can sustain momentum beyond the conference day. The performance element, alongside practical workshops, created a balanced experience that appealed to both analytical and creative dispositions within the sector.



Recommendations and Next Steps

- 1) **Regional Workshops:** Organisations should convene internal sessions to map current practice against the EYWA and identify priority areas for development. Using EGL online tools, teams can set specific, time-bound objectives related to participation, inclusion, and partnership. This could be then followed up at EGL regional meetings
- 2) **Funding Readiness:** Develop a checklist capturing eligibility, timelines, partnership roles, and risk management for Erasmus+ and ESC applications. Consider appointing an internal lead for European projects and scheduling regular check-ins aligned to funding calendars.
- 3) **Partnership Development:** Leverage contacts made at the conference to initiate exploratory calls, co-design sessions, or small pilot collaborations. Focus partnerships on complementary strengths—such as arts-based inclusion, employability support, or youth leadership to achieve mutual learning.
- 4) **Evaluation and Learning:** Adopt simple, scalable evaluation tools to capture changes in youth participation, skills, and wellbeing associated with European collaboration. Share findings across the community of practice to build collective evidence.
- 5) **Staff Development:** Encourage staff to engage in mobility, training, and knowledge exchange opportunities. Consider peer mentoring arrangements where experienced practitioners support colleagues new to European projects.
- 6) **Governance and Strategy:** Integrate European Youth Work principles into organisational strategies and board discussions. Align governance oversight with quality frameworks and ensure resourcing for European engagement is considered in budget cycles.

Conclusion

The EGL National Conference demonstrated the power of combining policy frameworks, practical tools, and creative practice to energise the youth work community. Participants encountered a coherent narrative linking the European Youth Work Agenda to tangible organisational steps funding readiness, partnership-building, and evaluation while also experiencing how arts-based methods broaden participation and voice. As services return to their local contexts, the real work begins translating insight into action, sustaining relationships, and iterating programmes to keep them inclusive, evidence-informed, and responsive to young people's aspirations. Success will depend on disciplined planning, courageous collaboration, and the everyday craft of facilitation. European engagement is not a single event; it is a culture of learning across borders and requires the creation of structures that embed it into everyday youthwork practice.