

My name is Karin De Kelder. I work as an Assistant Programme Manager at the Executive Agency of Education, Audiovisual and Culture in the European Commission.

It is my honour to open this conference and welcome you all.

I would like to begin by sharing some of the context in which the project, 'Youth for Human Rights', giving the reason for today's international conference on the role and the potential of youth work in Human Rights Education mainstreaming, was born.

We all remember the tragic terrorist attacks which occurred in Europe in 2015 and which reminded us of the importance of safeguarding the fundamental values stipulated in the Treaty on European Union.

In response to the terrorist attacks, the Ministers responsible for education and the European Commissioner responsible for education, youth, culture and sport adopted on 17 March 2015 the Paris Declaration *on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*¹.

The Paris Declaration calls for the mobilisation of the education and youth sector at European, national, regional and local level. It acknowledges the major role of education and youth work in tackling violent radicalisation, promoting inclusion and ownership of Europe's fundamental values. The Declaration identifies concrete policy objectives to be pursued by Member States and urges EU level action "to cooperate and coordinate, to exchange experiences and to ensure that the best ideas and practices can be shared throughout the European Union".

So in this context, in 2016 the first Call for Proposals was announced by the European Commission under which this project was selected. It called for the initiatives from civil society organisations, educational and youth work institutions as well as from Erasmus+ National Agencies in the field of Youth to combat radicalisation and strengthen social inclusion, with a special focus on young people. To that end, this project has been a response to the Call in the context of the Paris Declaration from the side of Erasmus+ National Agencies who found themselves in a favourable position to help the cause by mainstreaming human rights education in the field of youth.

This has been essentially a capacity building project, aimed to improve understanding, awareness and quality of human rights education, as well as to support youth field on the matter. The project has involved different stakeholders with an aim to build bridges in between formal and non-formal education, and making connections through the network of Erasmus+ National Agencies.

It has been a timely initiative, as there is also an anti-human rights discourse existing in European, national and local levels. This discourse politicizes human rights and human rights education, and makes it a question of taste – which it cannot be. It is vital that access to human rights education is guaranteed. We need human rights education now more than ever, as the global inequalities are widening. Teaching and acceptance of common fundamental values and laying the foundations for more inclusive societies through education - starting from an early age, is of major importance. As is the support to young people to become active citizens and advocates for human rights and fundamental values.

¹ The Declaration was adopted on 17 March 2015 in Paris by the European Education Ministers and the European Commissioner responsible for education, youth, culture and sport http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf



I am convinced that through the carefully planned and multi-layered activities of this project as well as NA's taking a more explicit and active social role on the matter, an important step has been made to secure and facilitate access for young people to their essential right for human rights education.

I look forward to learn through forthcoming discussions and panels of this event and see how the results of this project have supported the important work in the field of youth.