



# Value and Recognition of Youth Work

*Conference in Zagreb, Croatia*

*4 to 7 December 2023*



“When you have youth workers united, things start happening.”

Participant



Organisers: Sandra Miladin, AMPEU Croatian National Agency for the EU youth programmes, and Elke Führer, JUGEND für Europa, German National Agency for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth, Erasmus+ Sport and European Solidarity Corps

Facilitators: Ajsa Hadzibegovic and Snezana Baclija Knoch

Digital Communications: Domagoj Moric

Rapporteur: Nik Paddison

Photographer: Ivan Mijic

Administrative support: Manda Pocrnic and Petar Dukic Croatian National Agency for the EU youth programmes

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“What inspired me most from the conference is that I realised that there is a whole community around Europe that strives for recognition. This is something hopeful for the future of the community – recognition will eventually come through!”

Participant

The conference “Value and Recognition of Youth Work” took place from 4 to 7 December 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference engaged stakeholders from the community of practice in professional debate on recognition. This report explores the outcomes of the conference.

This report begins by providing some deeper background information into the conference, it then explores the state of play in terms of youth work recognition and the key milestones that have led us to where we are today. The report goes on to provide snapshots about each of the four dimensions of recognition and provides insights into recognition based on the reflections and insights of the participants of the conference.

There is a section dedicated to the future of youth work and its links with recognition, there follows an exploration of recognition issues and needs, which comes from community of practice stakeholder groups. The report closes with some key messages about recognition and final words from the participants and organisers.

The conference was primarily organised by AMPEU, the Croatian National Agency for the EU youth programmes, led by Sandra Miladin, and JUGEND für Europa, the German National Agency for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth, Erasmus+ Sport and European Solidarity Corps, led by Elke Führer. The conference itself was led and facilitated by Ajsa Hadzibegovic and Snezana Baclija Knoch, both of whom used their extensive knowledge and expertise in recognition work to guide the participants, speakers, and contributors into getting the maximum out of the conference while at the same time putting the maximum into the conference. Domagoj Moric was the Digital Communications person and Nik Paddison was Rapporteur. Both played an integral role, especially in supporting the facilitator team.



## CONTENTS

<a href="#">Executive Summary</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Contents</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">About the Conference</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Aims of the conference</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Programme</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">The Start of Something Big...</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">The Milestones of Recognition</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Snapshots of Recognition</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Self-recognition - it starts with us</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Social recognition - when others understand</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Political recognition - policies, papers and movement</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Formal recognition - it matters and is needed</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Insights into Recognition</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Self-recognition</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Social recognition</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Political recognition</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Formal recognition</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Future Trends and Recognition</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">What is the future of youth work?</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">What are the implications for the future?</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">What are key areas youth work needs to evolve in?</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Planning Recognition</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Youth workers</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Project managers</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Trainers / educators</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Policy makers</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">NA staff</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Closing the Conference</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Key recognition messages</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Final comments</a>	<a href="#">41</a>

## ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

“Youth work matters, and it deserves proper recognition! The SNAC EYWA wants to contribute to making youth work seen, heard, and recognised.”

Elke Führer

The conference “Value and Recognition of Youth Work” was part of the strategic partnership of 16 National Agencies (NA) for the implementation of the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps and four SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres (SALTO RC), which are keen to implement and strengthen the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) through the Bonn Process.

The conference aimed at empowering those stakeholders, who are already engaged in the professional debate on recognition. It was a space where they could look for additional cross-border exchange and inspiration, resources, and practical tools as well as strategic alliances within and beyond the youth work community of practice. It also aimed at contributing to the recognition of youth work and providing a platform for further reflection on youth work recognition, which is one of the eight thematic priority areas of the EYWA and Bonn Process.



### European Youth Work Agenda

The EYWA is a strategic framework, which aims to develop and strengthen youth work. It provides tailwinds for all those active in the youth work field and thus also to young people and their situation.

### The Bonn Process

The Bonn Process is the implementation of the EYWA and a common response to the fragile situation of youth work. With eight priority areas, it gives structure to the efforts across Europe.



## Why a SNAC EYWA?

With this long-term strategic cooperation project, the network of NAs contributes to the EYWA and the Bonn Process through the implementation of concrete activities, community-building, and visibility of youth work development in the context of the Bonn Process. With the resources of the EU youth programmes, the partners want to mobilise means for turning ideas for youth work development into real projects.

## AIMS OF THE CONFERENCE

### Related to the state of play

- To share and explore good practices and strategies for strengthening recognition and to bring together what is already happening within the youth work sector (from different recognition dimensions and from different countries)
- To learn about good practices in relation to recognition in other sectors
- To create an overview of the current state of recognition of youth work (building on a communication campaign prior to the event and a collection of initiatives during the event)

### Related to communication

- To create a common message about the value of youth work that can be communicated to others external to our field with one voice

### Related to the future

- To empower participants and facilitate capacity-building to increase commitment to recognition (by increasing knowledge, tools, resources, networks, etc.)
- To develop strategies and action-planning to further strengthen the recognition of youth work
- To develop strategies and action-planning to create strategic alliances with other sectors
- To explore the opportunities of the EU youth programmes for implementing measures to strengthen the recognition of youth work

## PROGRAMME

The above aims were translated into a two-day dynamic programme that fully engaged the participants and provided multiple opportunities for them to share their expertise and knowledge. There were also inputs from a number of key actors from the field. The conference programme provided a lot of space for sharing about the four dimensions of recognition, especially about the state of play as well as about the needs for further development.

## Day one: Taking stock

The first half of the day was dedicated to exploring the state of play in terms of youth work recognition and the key milestones that have led us to where we are today. Representatives from the community of practice provided snapshots of recognition, each snapshot representing one of the dimensions of recognition. The participants reacted to each snapshot, sharing their experiences and knowledge of what was going on according to each dimension.

The afternoon was dedicated to youth work recognition practices. The participants shared about aspects of recognition they are involved in or know about from their realities. They provided information on what is being done, what is missing and what still needs to happen. Ten workshops showcased the practices of participants in detail allowing for full examination and understanding of the practices.



## Day two: Looking to the future

Day two began with three key actors exploring together in a panel discussion the concept of youth work 'evolving' and what it means for youth work recognition. The participants were then asked to reflect on what they had heard and their own knowledge of youth work, first as individuals and then in stakeholder groups.

The afternoon was dedicated to developing plans for further development in the recognition of youth work and to summing up all that had been shared, explored, discussed, and analysed. Participants ended the conference with country based and personal pledges for their own next steps - 'youth work recognition: to be continued...'

*We shouldn't lose focus. Our field is very dynamic and we shouldn't lose focus in persisting and advocating for the recognition at the different dimensions.*



## THE START OF SOMETHING BIG...

“Collaboration, sharing ideas, education, and training is key.”

Participant

Antonija Gladović, Director of the Croatian NA for Mobility and EU programmes opened the conference. In her speech she stressed how important such a cross section of the community of practice being present was. She encouraged everyone to contribute to strengthening the recognition of youth work, based on their knowledge and skills and according to their profession.

It is important for youth organisations to be aware that their daily work is a contribution to the recognition of youth work. They need to be aware that what they are doing is a part of the Bonn Process and that their contribution is significant.

There are many other stakeholders in or connected to the youth sector that can and should contribute with their knowledge and expertise to help strengthen the community of practice, promoting the recognition and validation of youth work.

Every member of the community of practice is involved in the recognition of youth work, which has four dimensions: self, social, political, and formal recognition. Some are involved in just one dimension while others are connected to multiple dimensions. This conference highlighted that the youth sector needs to be systematically working on all four dimensions and understanding the connection they have one to another. She emphasised that the sector needs to be recognising what has been achieved and understanding what more needs to be done.





The four dimensions are described below:

## Self-recognition

Self-recognition starts with us! It is about recognising who we are, what we do, and knowing the value our work has. It is also about recognising who else is part of the community of practice and recognising what it is they do. Self-recognition includes being able to gather evidence of what it is we do. Self-recognition means being able to see the developments that are needed to improve the quality of youth work.

## Social recognition

Social recognition is when others gain a better understanding of what we are doing. It is about the social players acknowledging and valuing the positive impact of youth work and non-formal learning/education on young people and therefore on their communities as a whole. In practice it means that both the community (the public) and the other sectors (NGOs, private, municipal, media, institutions, education, etc.) not only know what youth work is, but have a positive attitude towards it. In essence it is about gaining visibility for young people, youth work, and the organisations providing this work.

## Political recognition

Political recognition is when young people and or youth work are included in policies about young people and/or are the focus of policies. This can be at local, regional, national, and international levels. It is about youth work getting onto the political agenda, entering legislation, and becoming a part of political strategies - and supporting the involvement of young people and youth work in those strategies. It is the political level acknowledging and recognising youth work and the value of youth work.

## Formal recognition

Formal recognition has two areas of focus. It refers to the 'validation' of learning outcomes and the 'certification' of learning processes in youth work through recognised and accepted certification. It also refers to the training and education of youth workers, either within the context of youth work itself or through the formal education system. This

includes the recognition of competencies acquired when entering formal education; official accreditation of non-formal education/learning programmes by formal accreditation bodies; licensing of youth workers and youth work trainers; officially recognised occupation of 'youth worker' by the state, etc.

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/about-recognition>

Željka Josić, State Secretary of the Office for Demography and Youth, backed this up saying that "it is our duty to support young people in their role in society". She also stated that the results of youth work are clear, and we need to be doing more to make them clear to the wider society and at the political level.

Laszlo Milutinovits from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership (Partnership) explained that they are fully engaged in the recognition of youth work. He also noted that while it is a role of the bigger institutions, if we really want recognition, it must "start with us". He also highlighted a logic for the connections between the four dimensions of recognition.

Once the process of self-recognition gets established, then we will see more recognition at the social dimension. As social recognition develops then the political recognition can come more into play because of society demanding more and therefore more policies will come. With more policies the recognition process automatically influences the formal aspect, and we will see more validation and certification of youth workers.

## Participants response

The participants provided a response to these opening speeches and remarks through a series of questions in a Mentimeter. The questions asked who they felt is responsible for recognition, whether they see themselves as being involved and if they see the effects of recognition. Below are some of the core responses, the full responses can be found in Appendix 2.





## THE MILESTONES OF RECOGNITION

“Recognition is the result of interaction, dialogue, and cooperation between different sectors.”

Participant



### European Union

Elke Führer introduced the milestones achieved by the cooperation project “SNAC EYWA”. These included aspects connected to Europe wide community building, especially related to the Bonn Process. The Bonn Process has been gaining visibility with the development of social media channels, its own website, and its newsletter.

The Bonn Process has been working with the community of practice through the Bonn Process Meet-Up’s and the Bonn Process Exchange Forum on National Processes. Both activities taking place annually since 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Elke explained how the SNAC EYWA focuses on the recognition of youth work. The direction for this comes from the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention: “Investment in more strategic and co-ordinated efforts and resources is needed to make youth work better understood, visible, and credible as a distinct work arena.”

There is a concerted effort coming from the Bonn Process and therefore the SNAC EYWA for the promotion and recognition of youth work, these include things such as developing

communication plans for the community of practice, to showcase the impact of youth work, enhancing collaboration with the formal education sector, establishing a think tank on the education and training of youth workers, and conducting research on existing professional standards for youth workers.

There is also a push to link EU funded youth projects with the Bonn Process to support the implementation of activities and to develop youth work further in a local and very specific way.



## EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

Laszlo Milutinovits highlighted some key milestones that the Partnership is either running or is involved in. They have been developing Visible Value since 2014, originally just as a part of their website highlighting stories of how youth work changed lives to recognition of learning and recognition of youth work resources from across Europe. Visible Value has now developed into a series of seminars and symposia, and the Visible Value webpage is now much more strongly and directly focused on the recognition of youth work.

As part of the Visible Value project, they hosted the symposium “Growing youth work in Europe” in June 2023. The symposium offered the space for peer learning, networking, and exchange on the involvement and actions supporting the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda as well as for identifying objectives, priorities, and support needed for youth work development in Europe.

They are also part of the review of the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work CM/Rec(2017)4, which has been widely received across Europe, it being both utilised and appreciated. While the content is still very much relevant, the context of Europe and youth work in Europe has already changed.

Part of their agenda for their next two years is on strengthening and developing quality in youth work through innovation and recognition.

Laszlo also announced that the 4th European Youth Work Convention has been taken on by Malta and will take place in May 2025.





*Youth work recognition pays off!*

## SNAPSHOTS OF RECOGNITION

“Being recognised means getting a thank you from everyone around me. Thanks. For what you're doing, it's very important. That for me is recognition.”

Participant

Four members of the community of practice had been asked to share a short input, a snapshot, of their thoughts related to one of the dimensions of recognition. After each snapshot, the participants had the opportunity to explore it in small groups and add their own thoughts and feelings about the dimension.

## SELF-RECOGNITION - IT STARTS WITH US



Olga Kyriakidou, Kids in Action, Greece, and representing the “Alliance of Youth Workers Associations” (AYWA), explained about the development and establishment of the new European alliance of youth workers association and its importance for the recognition of youth work.

She started her input with “Hi! I am a youth worker”. She went on to say that recognition “starts with us”, a short phrase that was becoming an important mantra for the conference. Olga emphasised that knowing who we are, what we do, and who else is out there is key for moving forward.

This was echoed by many participants, who explained that for them the journey starts with self-recognition - it starts with us - meaning ourselves as individuals as well as us the community of practice. This was emphasised by other participants who stated that we need to be proud of our (youth) work. The feeling being that if we are proud and happy to show what we do then others will value it and recognise it more.

Olga also acknowledged that self-recognition is factored by the conditions of the country a youth worker is living in - whether youth work is recognised in law or not, whether there is any recognised education of youth workers, etc. It is not easy to engage in some aspects

of self-recognition if the ecosystem does not recognise the youth worker. However, whatever the stage of youth work development in a country is, it still needs each individual, the people involved in it need to be recognising themselves to move things forward.

Some felt that if we developed a common language and common understanding about youth work, we would be in a better position when explaining what youth work is doing and how it contributes to young people's wellbeing and society. In addition, it was also pointed out that language and youth work is an issue for many countries, the English language term "youth work", simply does not translate well or at all into some languages. This not only makes it hard to explain what we do; it also makes it harder to understand who we are amongst ourselves.

## SOCIAL RECOGNITION - WHEN OTHERS UNDERSTAND



Kristiina Pernits from the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre presented an update about Youthpass and how such tools and frameworks support social recognition and feed into the validation procedures.

Social recognition is when others understand, when the society around us acknowledges and appreciates what we do. Young people receive a Youthpass certificate, because they participated and learned something in a youth work based project or activity. Youthpass contributes to social recognition, because these same young people are part of society, maybe they only participate in one international activity and have no other connection to youth work, but from that experience they have some degree of understanding of youth work. When working with young people and engaging in Youthpass, we need to be creating a reflection process, so the young people become able to speak about their learning experiences in youth work, thus making the value of youth work visible.

Through Youthpass we can highlight practice examples of youth work supporting the development of young people. Social recognition makes progress when we share how youth work helps young people, and when young people are able share their experiences. The European Youth Portal Help Desk receives continuous requests from people asking if they can still get a Youthpass certificate for something they did some years before.



Youthpass also speaks for itself: over 1.6 million Youthpass certificates have been given out, simple maths shows, the more there are, the broader the reach.

One misunderstanding about Youthpass is that it is a tool for gaining employment. It was never an intended outcome for Youthpass, but many young people do use it for this purpose. The participants shared that in their experience employers have mixed reactions towards it, but some do recognise its worth. The question was asked if it should be promoted as a tool for employment or at least to add to a CV? If so, how can it be made into a more solid document? If this happened, would it make Youthpass a stronger tool of social recognition?

## POLITICAL RECOGNITION - POLICIES, PAPERS, AND MOVEMENT



Charalampos Papaioannou, Policy Officer - European Commission, explained that at the political level they were still taking steps forward after the pandemic. One major element of political recognition was the European Year of Youth 2022. In many countries it created a strong starting point for talking about youth work and for pushing the European Youth Work Agenda. Directly from this Year of Youth, the Governments of several countries are exploring the possibilities for the recognition of youth work and youth workers in law.

Other developments that are influencing political recognition are the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ and recognising the need to update the European Youth Strategy 2019 to 2027, which was written before the European Youth Work Agenda and needs to take this into account. Furthermore, a Council resolution on youth work is expected within the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Both the European Union and the Council of Europe are active in terms of events, actions, papers, and recommendations related to young people and youth work. Political recognition, at least at the European level, is strong.

Participants were very happy to hear about the many things going on at the European political level and expressed the importance of communicating all such information regularly with youth workers, who are active locally. It was also mentioned that this kind of information needs to be made available in short and understandable ways and in each member country language.

In terms of political recognition, the participants were happy to share that when recognition is happening at the European level it really helps for pushing national or local decision-makers for more recognition. It was also felt that pushing local authority personnel responsible for youth to attend European youth work events has a knock-on effect at the local and national levels, events such as the Bonn Process Meet-ups or Exchange Forum on National Processes.

Youth organisations also need to be informing local and national authorities about the work they are doing on a regular basis, highlighting the successes and changes being made in young people's lives. Also, as part of political recognition work, youth work organisations need to be lobbying local and national authorities to influence policies.

## FORMAL RECOGNITION - IT MATTERS AND IS NEEDED



Hilary Tierney, Centre for Youth Research and Development, Maynooth University, Ireland, presented an overview of what is happening in the world of formal recognition. She began by looking ahead, mentioning the upcoming Belgian EU Council Presidency, the revision of the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work, and 4th European Youth Work Convention in 2025. She encouraged the community of practice to be looking for 'commonalities' that support formal recognition of youth work and youth workers.

For formal recognition we need to be consciously fostering and growing the community of practice. We need to be keeping in mind non-formal and formal partners and pathways and be conscious of 'power' differentials between actors. We need to ensure those, who participate in youth work, have the opportunity to become youth workers (if that is what they want), and we need to continue to articulate the connection between quality and formal recognition - articulating the benefits for young people. In terms of the education of youth workers we need to broaden the conversation about competences to include professional identity, judgement, and ethical practice.

The language of youth work also matters, how we talk about young people is as important as how we talk to them. This is something that needs to be learnt by youth workers. It is





important that youth work and youth workers develop flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity, these are at the same time a strength and a vulnerability.

Formal recognition of youth work and youth workers can help safeguard youth work as an empowering non-formal learning process that is co-created with and alongside young people.

*We know our profession and we know what the results look like – the abilities to make change, to lead people, to inspire. We should be speaking about this to other sectors.*



## INSIGHTS INTO RECOGNITION

“There needs to be a clear process towards the future of recognition in every country, but Europe focused.”

Participant

The participants were asked to give more detailed information and opinions regarding recognition from their perspectives as members of the community of practice. They were asked to record what is happening, what they are doing, what they see being done, and what more is needed for each of the four dimensions.



## SELF-RECOGNITION

### What is happening?

Some participants reported that they have acted as role models in supporting young people to access institutions or organisations, thereby showing what youth work does. Others have been advocating for youth work and the sector, creating understanding amongst those outside. Though it is still acknowledged by many that explaining youth work to those who do not know is difficult. Not because of a difficulty in finding the right words but by the fact that many people just simply cannot comprehend the concept. Most people automatically jump to conclusions that what is being talked about is teaching, social work, or some form of psychology.

## What do we need?

### Self-belief

We need a united understanding among youth workers that they are youth workers, and that youth work is a profession. There is a feeling of imposter syndrome amongst some, “who am I to get this recognition, do I deserve it”. We need to believe in the value of our profession. We also need to discourage ourselves and others from seeing it as a transition towards another profession. Youth work differs widely from country to country and even within one country there can be multiple forms of it. We do not need a unified approach, but we do need to establish a unified understanding of the principles and values of youth work. This was something that was an objective of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention and explicitly stated in Action Point 5 “Towards Common Ground” of the Final Declaration: “Youth work and its forms, conditions and practices in Europe remain so diverse, there is a need to continue work on exploring the common ground of youth work and its standards and concepts. There is a need for mutual development and the exchange of practices in youth work in Europe.”

### Communication

More dialogue needs to be established to make youth work visible and understandable for everyone. We need to work on mainstreaming youth work terminologies among the rest of civil society and other NGOs. The more we talk about and share the stories that come from our work, the stronger the recognition process will be. We need to become creative in how we present youth work, we need simple explanations, we can introduce visuals, we need to be constantly presenting our work to the general public and decision makers. For all this to work, we need to trust in the process and believe in ourselves.

### Cycles

The main link that self-recognition has to the other dimensions is to social recognition. Further development of social recognition particularly will help with personal confirmation and validation - self-recognition - which will in turn support social recognition.

### Tools

Self-evaluation and self-assessment tools support youth workers in identifying their competences, where they excel and where they need to develop, and therefore supports self-recognition. Other tools we need to develop are for reflecting on and reporting the outcomes of youth work in a way that is transferable to the other recognition dimensions.

### Harmony

We should not be aiming for the “standardisation” of what a youth worker is. We need to be valuing all the different profiles of youth workers and to identify the minimum that they have in common.

## SOCIAL RECOGNITION

### What is happening?

There has been an increase in institutional knowledge and awareness of youth work in many countries. In one example from Estonia, the youth sector has introduced “community practice” as part of a citizenship course at high schools. In Slovenia, the head of the youth department at national level is actively promoting the youth field to high school principals and teachers - this is providing youth organisations greater visibility and is creating collaboration between formal and non-formal education sectors.

Several countries now have a national association of youth workers, often these bodies work with other bodies and institutions outside of the youth sector. Many youth work bodies are creating targeted campaigns promoting youth work to schools, parents, other sectors, etc. In other areas, youth workers are stepping out from just working with the young people in their organisation. They, with their young people, are becoming involved in community building and setting themselves up as spokespersons for youth.

Social recognition is putting pressure on political recognition. The pressure is coming from the communities and neighbourhoods themselves, which impacts the municipalities and ultimately the national level, too.

### What do we need?

Recognition work needs to be a priority of all youth workers.

### Young people

We need to involve more young people in talking about their experiences and what they get from youth work. This will help raise public awareness and support for youth work.

### Instruments

We need an increase in the certification of youth workers, showing the competences. We need to promote Youthpass more, so it gains greater recognition outside the youth sector.

### Networking

We need more cooperation with other stakeholders, who work with young people, sharing with them what we bring to the table and seeing what they bring to the table.

### Society

Where youth work is not understood or is not being taken seriously, we need to be raising the visibility of its positive impact. This can be done by connecting with families, schools, municipalities, other NGOs, and the wider community and sharing the positive messages with them. We need more means of empowering youth workers for such recognition work with instruments like online courses on advocating for their work.

## Research and reports

There is so much in youth work to be shared, but often much is missed or not realised. It would be good to have an independent institution to evaluate learning outcomes in youth work for young people. We need more research on the impact of youth work, the effects of youth work, and the need for certification. Reports from such research would then need to be made user friendly and made available for youth workers to use to promote their work.

## Common message

There is much to say about youth work, but knowing the relevant things to say to different people is not always easy. We need to be using the language of the people with whom we are communicating. We need a stronger narrative, and we need more thought as to how to effectively communicate the impact of youth work on young people's lives. A common strategy and a common message on the values and impact of youth work would be a strong step for social recognition.

We need European and national campaigns on the value of youth work. Such campaigns would inform the general public about youth work. They can be through social media, mainstream media, advertisements, flyers, promotion stands at events or busy public locations, and so on.

It would be helpful to have the translation of all the commonly used youth work terms in all European languages.

## POLITICAL RECOGNITION

### What is happening?

Youth work and youth work policy has increasingly been in the focus of the European Union and the Council of Europe in the last years. Among the many political documents and initiatives, the European Youth Work Agenda 2020, the Recommendation on Youth Work 2017, and the upcoming Belgian Presidency focus on youth work policy, show this tailwind.

At national level, there have been numerous national youth work strategies and action plans introduced. In some countries actors from the youth work field are gathering the political stakeholders and lobbying them with a common message. In another country they have introduced youth worker professional standards. Social protection and better status for freelance youth workers has been established somewhere else. While there is a lot of interest in youth work at the level of European policies, we need more national policies to follow.

The political dimension is influencing the formal dimension through policies and papers related to youth work. The more the political level legitimises youth work and puts



pressure on the system to create the “profession”, the more the realised need for educational programmes to support the profession.

## **What do we need?**

### **Political level understanding**

For many politicians, youth work equals social work which equals school and education. Too many ministries and political leaders do not know what youth work is, in most countries there is a severe lack of political understanding of youth work. We need to build a greater understanding of what youth work is at the political level. The youth sector needs to be in constant dialogue with the decision makers so they will start to understand the effects and importance of youth work. We need to be aiming at having youth workers involved in youth policies, youth work policies, and decision making.

### **Lobbying and advocacy**

Youth workers need to be empowered to lobby for youth work, we need to be showing that youth work empowers young people, and we need to be helping those at the political level understand its importance. We need to ensure decision makers are invited to youth work events, conferences, and major activities – especially those at the European level. Coverage in media and social media of the importance of youth work and of stories about its impact act as a useful tool for visibility and for creating pressure for political action.

### **Legal frameworks**

In general, there is a lack of youth work policy across Europe, and in too many instances there is no law or legal framework for youth work. We need to be pushing for the development of and introduction of national policies, guidelines, and frameworks to ensure the professionalism of youth work.

### **Funding**

In general, there are a lack of funding mechanisms in most countries, we need financial commitment at national and municipal levels for a youth work budget. Something that is structured, stable and long-term, and moves beyond project-based funding.

### **Networking**

We need to be developing networking and cooperation between European partners to share youth work policy frameworks, especially between those who have policies in place and those who do not. There is also a need for a stronger synergy between the EU and national governments regarding youth work developments and policies.

### **Language**

There are translation issues for many languages, ‘youth work’ and ‘youth worker’ simply do not work in translation. We need to be thinking about how to develop these words so they can be translated.

## FORMAL RECOGNITION



### What is happening?

This varies dramatically between countries. For quite a few there is nothing to report here, however, in others there are steps being made. Some countries have a national qualification certificate for youth workers, in others there is a vocational certification and recognition of youth work at the formal level - Slovenia being one example, though it is a programme that is not being widely used.

At the European level, we have the ETS trainers and youth workers competence models.

### What do we need?

#### Europe

For some there is a need for a common standard educational framework for youth worker education at the European level. For them this would make youth work more recognisable at the European level and reinforce it at the national level.

#### Previous experience

There was a strong recommendation that the previous experience of a youth worker be considered when countries develop formal education courses for youth workers. Previous learning and previous experience must be considered and given recognition.

#### Competitive in the market

With the formal education of youth workers there needs to be cooperation with the job markets, with formal recognition should come competitive salaries and other social benefits.

## **Universities and youth work**

In some countries, especially the smaller ones, universities do not want to make new programmes. In other countries there is a lack of understanding of the unique nature of youth work and how to teach it. We need to be pushing for formal education models that are open to the dynamic of the youth sector. If formal education is not done correctly, the danger is that the value of youth work will go down. Quality must come from the courses and then the value will increase.

Countries with the formal education of youth workers need to be sharing and pooling their curricula and approaches to the education of youth workers. This would support the further development of youth worker education in countries that already have it and at the same time be an inspiration and push to those countries where there is no formal recognition or education of youth workers. There are many youth work tools, methods, and approaches that are already complimenting formal education, yet we are still not being recognised as important players. We need to be claiming the impact we are having.

The participants highlighted the need for educational pathways to include formal, vocational, non-formal, and experience, and that vocational training should be treated the same as a university degree.

You cannot have formal recognition without the other dimensions. We need youth work to become an educationally regulated profession, this will give youth work a lot of status in society. Pushing for formal recognition is a top-down approach that will create a spillover effect and initiate actions for the other dimensions of youth work recognition.

## **Government support**

Potential future development in formal recognition has to be tailor-made for national contexts and linked with recognition protocols already in place. We need the establishment of working groups which will cooperate with their respective governments for developing professional standards where they do not exist or evaluating them where they do exist to support the universities in developing curricula.

## **Lobbying**

The youth work sector needs to be lobbying the formal education sector on the content and approach of the education of youth workers, highlighting the need for soft skills development. We also need to be lobbying for new job positions and correct salaries.

Although no dimension of recognition stands alone, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying to develop all four dimensions at the same time. One of the outcomes of this session was that participants concluded that we need to take it slowly, focus on small things, and take small steps. We still need to develop a good synergy between EU and national governments concerning youth work, this will be a good support for recognition at all levels.



*Youth work recognition will not work for as long as the states will not define and agree on a common framework to be implemented.*



## FUTURE TRENDS AND RECOGNITION

“I realise that there is a whole community around Europe that strives for recognition. This is something hopeful for the future of the community – recognition will eventually come through!”

Participant

A panel discussion was held to explore future trends in youth work and how they link to recognition. It was titled “Youth work evolves. What does it mean for youth work recognition?”. The panellists were Geert Boutsen, who is lecturer in socio-cultural work and is involved in research on the impact of youth work. Marko Kovačić, a youth policy expert, who explores changes in attitudes and behaviours of young people and their implications on the future of youth work. And Gisele Evrard, a futures of youth work researcher, who is currently involved in the Futures of Youth Work project, which is interpreting signals identifying emerging trends that will shape the landscape of youth work in the coming decades. Below are some of the key areas that came up in their very facilitated discussion.



### WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF YOUTH WORK?

The future holds change and omnipresent crises, this is not only difficult for us, but it is especially difficult for young people. The values, norms and behaviours of young people are in a constant state of flux. There is also a lack of peace in the world, COVID created a lot of mental and emotional conflict for young people, and since 2022 young people are seeing one war physically close and another one newly started being non-stop in the media and social media.

Statistics show that young people not in employment, education, or training are on the increase, the number of young people in poverty is increasing, and there is a rise in young people feeling disillusioned with social services. Young people are losing their faith in democracy, with a strong lack of trust in politicians and democratic structures, and young people are more likely than ever to support a leader who does not care about democracy.



Youth work is contextual, and youth work is political, and it needs to keep being so, especially in a world that is getting so polarised. The future is not projecting much brightness right now. Youth work needs to be focusing on critical thinking and slowing down the isolation that many young people feel from the political structures.

Youth work needs to be constantly updating itself and its understanding of young people, their trends, and their needs. The relationship between young people and youth work needs to be strengthened. Youth work is not a cure for everything, but it has a role to play. Youth work needs to become politicised, meaning it needs to be supporting civic engagement, working on democracy, promoting citizenship, promoting peace, and advocating for and with young people on issues that affect them.

Young people need balance in their lives, and youth work needs to become a provider of that balance. Youth work is a safe space and needs to ensure that it remains a safe space. The safe space needs to be a place where young people can learn, experiment, and be themselves. One of the keys for creating a safe space is playfulness.

Youth work also needs to be developing more in terms of providing skills and personal development for young people.

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

The panel pointed out that social recognition is important for the future of youth work, but it is also a big challenge. They challenged the conference to be asking who in society do we want to focus on and what do we want to tell them.

They identified three core areas for future focus: 'young person as an individual' and their personal development, 'community building', and 'civic engagement'.

It was pointed out that the European Academy on Youth Work has been implementing a research project called "Futures of Youth Work" and is asking people connected to youth work from around Europe to be so-called signal spotters. Below are some of the things that are being highlighted as implications for the future.

### Intergenerational dialogue

If we only focus on the young people, we are not seeing the bigger picture. Our populations are getting older, we need to develop intergenerational cooperation and make a stand about what the position of young people in an ageing society should be. Erasmus+ Youth and other actions need to go beyond young people, we need to start thinking about how we work with other generations.

## **Mental health and AI**

These are two big topics, and there are links between the two that are starting to be seen. Youth work also needs to see technical development in its practice, in part related to AI but also much more broadly.

## **Conflict and de-rooted young people**

Youth work will be conflict affected more and more, we need to work out how we equip youth work and youth workers for this. More and more young people are becoming de-rooted, meaning not living or connected to family and the historical physical location of upbringing.

## **Rights and values**

Young people are becoming more critical and more aware of their rights and at the same time more isolated. In terms of values, we are educating young people in the values of today - e. g. appreciation of nature and wilderness - but maybe in 2050 wilderness will be almost gone. We need to be thinking about the future of the values rather than just the here and now of these values.

The recognition of youth work is a prerequisite for tackling all these issues. At the same time though we need to be asking whose responsibility is it to prepare youth workers for all of this? Ultimately it is ours. We need to be tailoring the education of youth workers in a future-fit way, because we are the ones who should sense what they need.

## **WHAT ARE KEY AREAS YOUTH WORK NEEDS TO EVOLVE IN?**

Peace and democracy, while there are numerous projects that support peace and democracy, we need specific funding schemes for education and youth work to tackle such issues.

Academia needs to focus more on the education of youth workers. Formal education needs support from the sector to include reflection about the above-mentioned problems and future scenarios within studies and programmes.

Capacity building is a key part of the future. All of us need to be a part of this, contributing through meetings like this conference. Youth work needs to be much more critical, and we need to be rethinking its practice and keep evolving.

We are being attentive and talking about the future, exploring how we as youth workers can get more involved to pre-empt some of the things that are becoming issues to which we then need to respond. This is hope, this is the DNA of youth workers. The power for change is the community of practice.



*The DNA of youth workers is responding to the  
issues in society, and we need to become even  
more proactive!*

## PLANNING RECOGNITION

“Youth work works, and youth workers need to be working on their self-recognition and social recognition while fighting and advocating for political recognition.”

Participant

Stakeholder groups were formed; youth workers, project managers, trainers/educators, policymakers, and NA staff. They were asked to reflect on what recognition means for them as that stakeholder group and what they think or believe they can do to improve it.

## YOUTH WORKERS

### Local and global

While things may look pessimistic, we need to be positive and realistic. Most face-to-face youth workers think mainly at the local level because that is where their work focus is. However, they also recognise that while the EU and its policies seem far away, there is a need to know about these policies and to have some understanding of the realities of youth work in other countries. Youth work does not only exist in Europe, but all around the world. Having a worldwide understanding of youth work is a good thing.

### Who is a youth worker

Many people refer to themselves as youth workers without knowing what youth work actually is and its values. Some of this comes from the programme Erasmus+ Youth where the term is broadly used without definition or boundaries. In contrast there are still a lot of people who are doing the work of a youth worker but do not recognise themselves as such.

### Policies and political

Youth work needs to understand that it already has a political dimension. Part of the work is empowering young people to make their voices heard. Another part is trying to push decision-makers to recognise the needs of the young people and to involve them and the youth workers in policy making.

### Quality

Youth work even at its most basic is giving young people space to grow and develop themselves and their skills. Research can support us to do better what we are already doing in the constantly changing realities of young people. Research should shed light on what we are doing.

As youth work gets more recognised, one of the concerning aspects is that big companies can come and bid for the work, especially work that is oriented towards young people in



difficulties and social exclusion. These companies are not coming from a needs-based approach but from a profit-based approach. Often such companies are contracted for quantity not quality. Contracts are based on how many young people can be passed through the system rather than the development a young person experiences as a result of being worked with. Outsourcing often diminishes the quality of youth work.



## What can we do?

We need a European level platform for youth workers to exchange and advance - Alliance of European Youth Worker Associations is part of the answer to this, and the platform for youth workers to be established by the European Commission is another.

We need to speak up more about what we do, we must make our work more visible in communities and for all target groups connected to young people: parents, schools, social services, police, probation, judges, etc. The more political recognition we gain, the better the social recognition we will have. Also, better policy recognition should come with increased financial support that will allow the sector to improve the quality of youth work and also the coverage (working with specific marginalised youth for example).

Cross sectoral cooperation is a must as it helps to support young people in their needs and adds value to society. In addition, it creates more recognition. One approach is having youth workers integrated into other systems, such as schools, hospitals, prisons, etc. The more the integration the more the other sectors will recognise the importance of our role.

The youth workers felt that there needs to be more research done on the needs of young people and the needs of youth work. They felt that while they know a lot about what they do, there is still more that needs analysing and understanding. The more information we have the more we can push for better policies and policies that meet the ever-changing realities around us.



## PROJECT MANAGERS

### Becoming proactive

We are too often reacting; we need to be proactive and mindful about the trends that are coming up in the future. This is also in terms of societal pressures, political pressures, and shrinking civic spaces. As project managers we do have some level of power, and we need to be defining our priorities accordingly.

### Burnout

Burnout, fatigue, and mental health problems are becoming more frequent among project managers, as a result many people are even leaving the field - an issue that also affects large numbers of youth workers.

### Funding

Project funding is generally accessible; however, ongoing costs are most often not considered. We are implementing projects and at the same time writing new projects to secure stability. We often hear about funding results very late, so sometimes we have to fire employees because there is no money to keep them. Institutional and sustainable funding is needed and should be installed at all levels.

Even with the project-based funding there is a concern that the needs the funding is based on are not the actual needs that are being faced by the young people. However, one good thing is that the priorities of the programme Erasmus+ Youth are broad and do give us the possibility to tackle the challenges in local realities.

### What can we do?

We have the power to define the priorities and make the best out of the available resources. So, we need to be more confident about this power and include future trends and proactiveness in our planning.

We need to keep professional debate at European level going, we need more national and European level cooperation between project managers, and we need activities specifically for project managers. Such activities can be useful for two main aspects, one for simply sharing practice and learning from mistakes and the other for learning more about specific topics such as intersectionality, human rights-based approaches, gender mainstreaming, and sustainable project management practices.

## TRAINERS/EDUCATORS

### Who are we?

We should develop a common understanding about the question of what a youth work

trainer is. In some countries there is some kind of recognition but in many the concept simply does not exist yet.

## **Trends**

It is essential to understand the needs of the groups we work with, to know about the changes and trends taking place. Knowing this we can adapt to ensure relevancy for the target groups we are working with.

## **Holistic approach**

Training and education work requires a holistic perspective on how the whole system works - the youth sector and society as a whole. We look at what is important at the national and European levels. We compare the needs of our space to the ones in other countries and try to find common points.

## **What can we do?**

### **Who we are**

For achieving recognition as youth work trainers, we first need a clear common understanding of what our role is, so we can share an established image of our role.

### **Responsibility**

We need to understand both our responsibilities and our limits. We need to raise our individual awareness of what things are achievable and what things are beyond our control. We need a clear definition of what our role exactly is, where our limitations are, and what we should not be being asked to do.

### **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing has to be a central point of our work. While we have some level of responsibility for the wellbeing of those we are working with, we should also have our own wellbeing as a strong part of our focus. It is too easy, especially as a freelancer, to keep taking on work. However, the more work we take on and the less we look after ourselves, the more likely the quality of our work will decrease. We need to be aware of our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The International Youth Work Trainers Guild is currently running a KA2 project called the Holistic Trainer. This project focuses on the wellbeing of trainers.

### **Embracing change**

Most of the participants we work with share the same societal values as us, however the world is changing and so are the young people. We need to be ready to understand why someone might have what we consider to be anti-democratic ideas and how we can work with them.



## POLICYMAKERS

### European level

There are many processes at the European level that are important for national recognition. We need to be sharing this information, exchanging practices, and ensuring we do not start several parallel processes.

### Local to European

It is important to know and understand the situation at the local level. We need this knowledge, and we need to be using this to develop policies from the local to the European level to get concrete action for the youth work field.

### Bonn Process

Youth work policies reinforce the Bonn Process and give an overview of the status of the European Youth Work Agenda in all the countries.



### What can we do?

#### Crisis

The notion of crisis can be a tool for the recognition of youth work. We can use crises for positive change through the development of policies that tackle the crisis by ensuring youth work is represented as a key factor in such policies.

#### Spaces for sharing

We need more spaces where various stakeholders, including decision-makers and youth workers can discuss the future of the field.

## **Recognising accomplishments**

In national policy work it is very helpful to look at what other European countries have accomplished, we need to create common and accessible spaces where examples of policy accomplishments can be collected and shared.

## **Youth test**

We need to be integrating the youth perspective across policy areas when designing or changing policies. The Commission is introducing a 'youth check' by using the Better Regulation tools and consultations under the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy. The 'Youth Test' is being developed, so that all new legislation and policy is subject to a youth focused impact assessment, including consultations with young people.

## **NA STAFF**

### **Strong supportive role**

We ensure environments and spaces for youth work to develop. With our different tools we can support a common direction for youth work development (projects, policy, support activities/TCA, materials, youth work platform, etc.). We also have a strong financial role.

### **Policies**

With new policy priorities, sometimes we respond very quickly and support policy documents very ambitiously. Also, in changing political situations we should reflect on the core needs and role of youth work so ensure a balance in our overall direction.

### **What can we do?**

#### **Priority topics**

We need to be better at organising our work since most NA capacities are limited. We should not all be jumping on every topic but should commonly prioritise specific topics to work on as an entire NA network.

#### **NA management approach**

We need to be putting the recognition topic on a higher level – we can include it in Business Meetings and work on it strategically. We need to boost the role of Youthpass Officers in this light - they can take a bigger role in supporting the recognition at national levels but need more support within the NA structures for that.

#### **National and international**

NA staff should be involved in more national working groups and connect national and European realities to reach the full potential of youth work. European projects like 'Learning mobility' and the 'Europe on the move' project can be more used at the national level.



Current European policies have a lot of potential to support national developments with further impulses, National Agencies can serve as bridges there.

### Research data

There are lots of research reports, we need to be accessing them and using them.

*We need to develop and implement a big European campaign which will make the value of youth work visible to the broader public, show the potential of youth work for young people and for societies, but also to discuss the difficult framing conditions to find solutions and make youth work more attractive and better-off.*





## CLOSING THE CONFERENCE

“I think I will start in my organisation by spreading the word that Europe has a lot to offer connected to youth work.”

Participant

The two days closed with the participants identifying the things from the conference that they felt the sector needs to keep in mind or act on in the future for the further recognition of youth work. The participants shared key messages for the sector as a whole. Some of the messages are recommendations and some are calls for action.

One of the conclusions from the conference is that recognition is providing support for youth work development, and it is a process that should be continuously communicating the value of youth work within and beyond the youth work field.

## KEY RECOGNITION MESSAGES



### **It starts with us**

There was a repeated message from the beginning of the conference which is important to be repeated in the concluding remarks, “it starts with us”. The community of youth work practice needs to be proud of its own role. When we share about being proud of being a youth worker and what we achieve for and with young people, it is encouraging for the sector as a whole.

There are no magic wands that make recognition happen, and there are no specific tools that make recognition happen. It is youth work practice that makes recognition happen

and the promotion of that practice. We need to be showing the wider community what we do, how we do it and the results that come from it. We need to use events and projects such as the Youth Capital or the European Year of Youth. These provide great platforms for the promotion and recognition of youth work.

We need to be developing and implementing more big European campaigns, which will make the value of youth work visible to the broader public, show the potential of youth work for young people and for their societies.

We know what youth work does, so we need to be in the community pushing what we do and showing what we do. The example of Youthpass - there are 1.6 million Youthpass certificates issued - shows the more there are, the broader the reach.

## **Cross-sectoral approach**

We need a stronger cross-sectoral approach. We know our profession, and we know what the results look like – the abilities to make change, to lead people, to inspire. We should be speaking about this to other sectors. The conference highlighted three approaches:

Formalised cross-sectoral approach:

- Building cooperation to have youth work in or with schools, youth workers in prisons, youth workers working alongside social workers

Non-formalised cross-sectoral approach:

- Youth work is having such an impact locally that other sectors are reaching out to youth work to gain support for the young people they are working with.

Natural cross-sectoral approach:

- Youth work taking part in local festivals and celebrations, youth work at job fairs, youth work taking part in civic actions and demonstrations in support of the voiceless

## **Civic engagement**

In the last 20 years we have seen a succession of crises, economic crisis, employment crisis, COVID, etc. All of these are important for youth work to be involved. However, the current crises of wars and attacks on democracy by many governments is the most relevant to youth work - it directly relates to the values and principles of youth work, it hits at the root of youth work. Youth work needs to recognise its political role and be proactive towards civic engagement and democracy.

We need to be calling on our governments for long-term processes and process-oriented approaches to youth work. To establish platforms, so that we can connect better within our countries and across borders. To have platforms where we can access and share resources. We need to lobby for stable funding.

## FINAL COMMENTS

This final section shares the closing reflections of the participants where they express their achievements, commitments, and their evaluation of the conference.

### Achievements

Participants felt that the conference had created space for self-recognition through the connecting of youth workers. They felt this gave them a commitment to stay connected and to take concrete actions, each in their own field. The conference provided opportunity for community building and networking and most importantly for bringing a deeper understanding of the concept of recognition. Participants also remarked that both the European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn Process became more real and feasible through the exchanges that happened with people involved in it.

### Commitments



Participants committed to speaking up and sharing the message to make youth work more visible as well as passing along the empowerment that was felt during the days of the conference. They wanted to bring the agenda of recognition beyond the conference. Many felt that they had an important role to play in the process of the recognition of youth work.

People shared that they would keep on learning, connecting, and strengthening each other by contributing to the dialogue between different actors of youth work regarding the four dimensions of recognition. Some made concrete action plans and steps for working more closely with the Bonn Process, while others said they would check how far their national realities are in this process.



In terms of youth work itself, some recognised that the core values of youth work were reinforced for them as a result of the conference. Others were committed to mainstreaming the term youth worker.

To further influence and inspire and be open and be inspired.

“I look forward to the time when I no longer have to explain what youth work is.”

Olga Kyriakidou

