



Self-Recognition

Value and recognition of youth work
4-7 December 2023
Zagreb, Croatia



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.

Visible Value:

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

BACKGROUND

The conference “Value and Recognition of Youth Work” took place from 4 to 7 December 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference 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.

“The recognition of youth work comes under four dimensions, self, social, political, and formal recognition. This conference highlighted that systematically working on all four dimensions is extremely valuable and necessary. We need to be working on the different kinds of support that are needed and to work on how the recognition of youth work can be supported. To these questions we need answers and approaches.”

Antonia Gladović, Director of the Croatian NA for Mobility and EU programmes

“While it is a role of the bigger institutions, if we really want recognition, it must “start with us”. 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.”

Laszlo Milutinovits from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

No dimension of recognition stands alone, but it is also easy to fall into the trap of trying to do all four dimensions at the same time. 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.

This booklet is N° 2 in a series of five and explores self-recognition.

IT STARTS WITH US

“Hi! I am a youth worker; recognition starts with us.”

Olga Kyriakidou

Self-recognition is hugely important for many involved in youth work, for many face-to-face youth workers, the journey of recognition needs to start with self-recognition. It starts with us - meaning ourselves as individuals as well as us the community of practice.

Knowing who we are, what we do, and who else is out there, is key for moving forward. We need to be proud of our (youth) work, if we are proud and happy to show what we do, then others will value it and recognise it more, it starts and goes on with us!

#youthworkworks - the impact of youth work on children and young people - is a project in Belgium. This project promotes the necessity of asking questions about the why, the what and the how of youth work. When we ask these questions, we can start to understand about the DNA of youth work, and the more we understand the DNA, the more we are self-recognising. Youth work is about planting seeds, not just the seeds that support the personal and social development of young people but also seeds into society, which then have an impact. Self-recognition means understanding and recognising the impact of our own work.

SELF-RECOGNITION ISSUES

SELF-BELIEF

We need a united understanding among youth workers that they are youth workers, and that youth work is a profession. Many people refer to themselves as youth workers without knowing what youth work actually is or its values. Some of this comes from the programme Erasmus+ Youth where the term is broadly used without definition or boundaries. People applying for KA1 mobility that is to do with young people, so therefore they must be a youth worker.

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. There is a feeling of imposter syndrome, “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 youth work as a transition towards another “higher” profession. Youth work is a profession, and it is a career.

UNITY

Youth work differs widely from country to country and even within one country there can be multiple forms of it. Defining amongst ourselves a harmonious and broad definition of youth work would support recognition. We should also 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.

It is important to say that while we don’t need a unified approach, we do need to establish a unified understanding of the principles and values of youth work – “anything can be youth work but not everything is”.

TALK ABOUT IT

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.

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.



TOOLS

The introduction of a variety of self-evaluation and self-assessment tools will support youth workers in identifying their competences, where they excel and where they need to develop and therefore supporting self-recognition.

We need to develop and start using tools for reflecting on and reporting the outcomes of youth work in a way that are transferable to the other recognition dimensions.

THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This section focuses on the role and influence different aspects of the community of practice have towards self-recognition.

YOUTH WORKERS

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, if there is any recognised education of youth workers, and so on. It is not easy to self-recognise if the eco-system does not recognise youth work. However, whatever the stage of youth work development in a country, it still needs us, the people involved in it, to be recognising ourselves to move things forward.

Mutual support

There is a need for a European level platform for youth workers to exchange and advance, to find mutual support, understanding and therefore reinforce self-recognition. There are two developments for this, the Alliance of European Youth Worker Associations (launching in 2024) and the platform for youth workers currently (2024) being established by the European Commission.

Language

For some in the youth sector, the answer or part of the answer is the development of a common language and common understanding about youth work. It is felt that if we had this across Europe 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.

However, language is an issue for many countries, the English language term "youth work" simply does not translate in a good way or at all. This not only makes it hard to explain what we do; it also makes it harder to understand who we are amongst ourselves. Self-recognition is important, but we can only have self-recognition when we feel we are valued, and if we can't value ourselves, no one else is going to do it for us.

Research

Youth work even at its most basic is giving young people space to grow and develop themselves and their skills. Research can support self-recognition by shedding light on what we are doing. It can support us to do it better and help us understand what we are doing in the constantly changing realities of young people.

PROJECT MANAGERS

Youth work project managers have the power to define the priorities and make the best out of the available resources. They need to be more confident about this power.

Project managers need national and European level cooperation between project managers, and they need activities specifically for them. 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

What is a youth work trainer? That is a common question. In some countries there is a level of recognition but in many the concept is even more alien than that of youth work itself.

For achieving recognition, there needs to be an understanding of both the responsibilities and the limits of youth work trainers and educators' roles. Self-recognition needs a clear definition of what the role is, and so establish a shared image of the role.

POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers need more spaces where they with different stakeholders and youth workers can discuss the future of the field and so better understand their role. In national policy work it is very helpful to look at what other European countries have accomplished. Policymakers need to create a common and accessible space where good examples of policy recognition accomplishments are collected. Where they can recognise what has been achieved in this part of the sector.

NATIONAL AGENCY STAFF

There is a strong sense of self-recognition amongst many in the NA system. Partly because their roles are well defined, official, and recognised – at least within the Erasmus+ Youth system. Part of their role is to ensure environments and spaces for youth work to develop in all its needed directions (projects, policy, support activities/TCA, materials, youth work platform...). They also have a strong financial role.

ENGAGING WITH 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.

VALUING OURSELVES

There are no magic wands that make recognition happen and there are no specific tools that make recognition happen. If we believe in ourselves and in what we do, then we can show what we do, not only to ourselves but to each other as well. Learning to value ourselves, learning to value the work we do, and learning to value the impact of the work we do, is a first step for the recognition of youth work.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER

Youth work conferences, seminars, symposia, and training courses are important ways for engaging with the community of practice and connecting with one another. This is at local, national, and European levels. Such meetings enable us to recognise who else is out there and learn about and value what they are doing. Community building the sector and networking are a core part of self-recognition.

THE BONN PROCESS

Both the European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn Process support this process and in themselves become more real and feasible through the exchanges that happen when those engaged in youth work meet. They also support the development of youth work by those in the sector and provide evidence of what is being achieved in the sector, for, with and by young people.