



# Social Recognition

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



## 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.

Visible Value:

<https://pip-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° 3 in a series of five and explores social recognition.



## WHEN OTHERS UNDERSTAND

Social recognition is when others understand, when the society around us acknowledges and appreciates what we do.

Youthpass provides an opportunity to engage in and promote social recognition. Young people receive Youthpass 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 to share their experiences. The European Youth Portal Help Desk receives continuous requests from people asking if they can still get Youthpass for something they did some years before. Youthpass also speaks for itself: over 1.6 million Youthpass certificates have been given out, the more there are, the broader the reach.

## SOCIAL RECOGNITION ISSUES

### YOUNG PEOPLE

Not enough young people are being involved to talk 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 that needs to be shared but often so much is missed or not realised. 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 we are communicating with. 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.

## THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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

### YOUTH WORKERS

#### Explaining

Explaining youth work to those who don't know is frustratingly difficult for the majority of us. 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.

#### Cross-sectoral cooperation

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.

Cross-sectoral cooperation helps support young people in their needs and adds value to society. In addition, it creates more recognition. Youth workers integrated into other systems, such as schools, hospitals, and prisons, are hugely important for social recognition. The more the integration the more the other sectors will recognise the importance of our role.

### PROJECT MANAGERS

#### Prioritising

One of the criticisms that project managers sometimes have for themselves is that they are too often reacting to crises when they need to be proactive. Social recognition needs them to be mindful about the trends that are coming up in the future, to define the priorities accordingly, and make the best out of the available resources. If youth work is tackling the issues that matter it will gain recognition in the communities, it operates in.

Funding generally dictates direction and is often not based on the actual needs that are being faced by the young people. However, the priorities of the programme Erasmus+ Youth are broad enough that project managers can engage with this programme and tackle the relevant challenges in their local realities.

## TRAINERS/EDUCATORS

Trainers and educators have a less direct influence on social recognition. In terms of training courses and educational programmes, the social recognition is generally coming from the participants and students in their interaction with society - either as young people or youth worker students. However, it is vitally important that both training courses, workshops, and higher education courses hold relevance to life outside of the learning experience.

Training and education in the youth sector requires a holistic perspective on the sector and society as a whole. It is essential for trainers and educators to understand the needs of the groups they work with. To know about the changes and trends taking place in society. Knowing this means being able to adapt to ensure relevancy for the target groups being worked with. It is also necessary to look at what is important at the national and European levels.

## POLICYMAKERS

### Spaces for sharing

There is a need for more spaces where various stakeholders connected to the youth sector, including decision-makers and youth workers, can discuss the future of the field. 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 youth work and thereby supporting social recognition from the local to European level.

### Crisis

The notion of crisis can be a tool for social recognition. Crises can be used for positive change through the development of policies that tackle the crisis. When these policies are being developed it is important that youth work is represented and seen as a part of the solution. When this happens and youth work is seen by society as doing its part to support young people in the crisis, then social recognition is happening.

## NA STAFF

### NA management approach

There is a common understanding amongst many NA staff that they need to be including the recognition topic more in their work – both in their joint NA meetings and to work on it strategically. One approach is through Youthpass Officers who could take a bigger role



in supporting recognition at the national level – Youthpass being a tool that supports social recognition. However, this would need substantially more support within the NA structures for that to happen.



## ENGAGING WITH 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.

## PROMOTING WHAT WE DO

It is youth work practice that makes social recognition happen and the promotion of that practice. We know what youth work does, so we need to be in the community pushing what we do and showing what we do. However, in most cases youth work does not automatically produce tangible results, so while gathering evidence is not necessarily difficult, it is often difficult to show it. There are some tools that show or highlight that evidence in a tangible way and Youthpass is one example. It asks those who engage with it to record what they have gained from their learning experience in youth work. There are currently over 1.6 million Youthpass certificates, many being used to show others what has been achieved. There are many other such tools that can be used to show the achievements of young people.

## EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS

Events and projects such as the European Youth Capital and the European Year of Youth provide great platforms for the promotion and recognition of youth work. The development and implementation of more big European campaigns will make the value of youth work visible to the broader public and show the potential of youth work for young people and for societies.

## CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH

Social recognition also needs actors from other sectors acknowledging and valuing youth work, this can be most easily achieved through a cross-sectoral approach. There are three approaches for linking youth work with other sectors. There is a formalised approach where agreements are made for youth work to be operating in or with schools, in prisons, or working alongside social workers. There is a non-formalised approach where youth work is having such an impact locally that other sectors are reaching out to gain support for the young people they are working with. And there is a natural approach where the local youth organisation is ensuring its active presence and the active presence of the young people in local festivals, celebrations, and community events.



## **MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE**

Social recognition happens when the wider community and the other sectors - particularly those who work with young people - know what youth work is and value it. This happens when there is visibility through the youth organisations understanding how to create messages for different target groups: local municipalities/politicians, parents, other young people, local media, other sectors, etc. Social recognition comes through youth work continuously developing presentations, making posters, creating social media content, and communicating with mainstream media.