



Formal Recognition

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

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.

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° 5 in a series of five and explores 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 the 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 matters: how we talk about young people is as important as how we talk to them. Youth work and youth workers need flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity, these are at the same time a strength and a vulnerability.

Definitions and destinations matter: 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.

FORMAL RECOGNITION ISSUES

EUROPE

There is not a common standard educational framework for youth worker education at the European level. Having something like this would make youth work more recognisable at the European level and reinforce it at the national level.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

In many situations where there is formal youth worker education, the previous experience of a youth worker is not considered. 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 don't 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. 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.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Potential future development in formal recognition has to be tailor-made for national contexts and linked with recognition protocols already in place. There is a need for 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

There is not enough input from the youth work sector on the content and approach of the education of youth workers, especially the need for soft skills development.

THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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

YOUTH WORKERS

Quality

Youth work even at its most basic is giving young people space to grow and develop themselves and their skills. In the constantly changing realities of young people, research can support youth workers to update and educate themselves and therefore improve the quality of their work.

More research done on the needs of young people and the needs of youth work can also feed into the education and training of youth workers.

PROJECT MANAGERS

Cooperation and learning

There is a need for ongoing professional debate at the European level between project managers, with more national and European level cooperation. There is a need for the development of activities specifically for project managers. Such activities can be useful for three reasons, one for simply sharing practice and learning from mistakes. Another is for learning more about specific topics such as intersectionality, human rights-based approaches, gender mainstreaming, and sustainable project management practices. The third is for providing guidance and feedback to the Erasmus+ Youth programme and institutions of higher education that train youth workers.

TRAINERS/EDUCATORS

Who we are!

The educational institutions need to be including the concept of youth work trainer in their course material. This will support the development of a clear and common understanding of what the role is, where the limitations are, what is achievable, and what is not in the role.

POLICY MAKERS

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. This includes support for the development of the training and education of youth workers through both youth work and the formal education system.

Recognising accomplishments

In national policy work it is helpful to look at what other European countries have accomplished in terms of the education and validation of youth workers. There is a need to create a common and accessible space where good examples of such policy accomplishments are collected.

NA STAFF

Strong supportive role

NA staff ensure that there are environments and spaces for youth work to develop. Through utilising different tools, they can support a common direction for youth work development for such things as the validation of the learning outcomes achieved in youth work.

NA management approach

NAs need to be putting the recognition topic on a higher level to support the certification of learning processes. There is a need to boost the role of Youthpass Officers in this light - they can take a bigger role in supporting recognition but need more support within the NA structures for that.

ENGAGING WITH FORMAL RECOGNITION

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SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

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.

SUPPORT FOR FORMAL EDUCATION

There are many youth work tools, methods, and approaches that can complement the formal education of youth workers. More cooperation between youth work organisations and universities could produce some key developments.

MULTIPLE EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

Educational pathways need to include formal, vocational, non-formal, and experience, and vocational training should be treated the same as a university degree.

REGULATION

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.

INITIATIVES TO ENGAGE WITH

- European Training Strategy
- Visible Value. EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.
- Strategic NA cooperation on the education and training of youth workers: EaT SNAC
- Study on recognition of youth workers. EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership. 2023

RECOGNITION OF YOUTH WORK(ERS) - RESOURCES

- Occupational Standards for Youth Work - Estonia 2018.
- Creating Youth Workers - the Formal Education Edition. Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership.
- Educational and Career Pathways of Youth Workers - Ethical standards in Youth Work. EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, 2019.
- Mapping of tools and good practices: Mapping of tools and good practices for better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education at European and national levels. EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.
- The Youth Work Profession Act - Chapter 533 of the Laws of Malta. Making youth work in Malta a formal regulated profession.
- The Art of Ethics in Youth Work - NAPOR, Serbia.
- YOCOMO Courses - European Training Strategy. YOCOMO is the European Training Strategy project about the competence model for youth workers and how to develop the competences.