

## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



# COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH WORK IN “THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”



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## Contents

1. Context of youth work	3
2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work	6
3. Recognition	7
4. Funding youth work	8
5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision	9
6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country	10
7. Quality standards	11
8. Knowledge and data on youth work	12
9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country	13
10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work	14

## 1. Context of youth work

Since its independence, there has been much inconsistency in the youth policy in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and lack of continuity in the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes. Particularly problematic for Macedonian society at the beginning of the 1990s was the identification of young people as a separate demographic and social category, with needs specific to their age and their role in society. Although the state declares that young people are constantly part of state policies and decisions, youth policy often lacks vision and concrete solutions to the role of young people in a given social context, and whether and how this role should be regulated by central and local authorities.

Youth work in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is still not recognised as a key tool for helping the positive personal and social development of young people. Youth work is not formally regulated, standardised and integrated as part of the system of education and protection of young people and it is not equally accessible to young people in different regions of the country. To a large extent, it relies on what is provided by civil society organisations – youth-led organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that implement projects and programmes for improving the quality of life of young people. Although youth work is often referred to as a new concept in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, organised activities to support the development of young people already existed years ago, although in a different form. With independence, structural and substantial changes in the work with young people were necessary, which triggered the need for redefinition of youth work, a process that is not yet complete.

In the period when “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, youth work was present through pioneer homes and the alliances of communist and socialist youth. Measures and activities carried out by these organisations included scholarships, youth employment programmes and housing allocations. This model of youth work was guided by the ideology of self-governing socialism. Some of the structures of the previous state remained in operation after the acquisition of independence in 1991, but over time they were covered by the processes of transformation and privatisation. The Youth Council of Macedonia, which was the successor to the Union of Socialist Youth of Macedonia, was not functional. At the same time, the pioneer homes have become a potential subject of privatisation, especially because of the impossibility of local governments to take over their funding. These changes were happening in a period when the Macedonian civil sector was still in the inception phase and was unable to play a more active role in creating a functioning youth support system. The situation was significantly changed with the launch of a project to open so-called Babylon Centers, which at first were located in the premises of the existing pioneer homes. These centres were established based on an initiative funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund of the (UNICEF). The initial idea was to develop programmes that would correspond to the needs of children and young people and to fill their free time. Babylon Centers offered diverse activities for children and young people, such as developing computer skills, social skills, English language skills, and debating skills, giving them an introduction to law and journalism and

aiming at boosting their creativity. Among other things, the project's goal was to build trust among different ethnic groups, to develop programmes to fill children's and young people's leisure time, and to help them with finding employment. After the funding from UNICEF was finished, the Babylon Centers continued to function with support from the World Bank. Once the World Bank had completed its programme, most of the 23 Babylon Centers stopped working. Regardless of its closure, this project has played an important role in the development of youth work in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Babylon Centers were not directly promoted as a model for youth work, but their way of working strongly influenced large a number of citizen's associations to adopt it as a way of supporting the development of young people.

The lack of a practical and formally accepted model of youth work in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" has left space for civil society organisations to develop other, different approaches to working with young people. With financial assistance from foreign and international foundations, several Macedonian associations tried to introduce different approaches to youth work based on models from other European countries. Sharing experiences from other countries was particularly facilitated by the launch of European education and mobility programmes, in which "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" has been granted the right to participate since the beginning of the 2000s. As a result of this, youth work in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" introduced elements from England, France, Belgium, Austria and other countries. The various approaches involved the establishment of open youth centres, youth information centres, youth work on the street, activities with young people with fewer opportunities, and so on.

Another important moment in the development of youth work in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was training at the Center for Informal Education Triagolnik in co-operation with Jönköping University, Sweden. In the period from 2008 to 2011, a large number of youth workers participated in the long-term training courses. Within this project, youth centres were established as an attempt at a sustainable model of youth work at local and national levels in order to facilitate the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people, to support the exercise of their rights and to encourage them to take an active part in the community. The long-term initiative of Triagolnik resulted in establishing an undergraduate degree in leadership and youth work in the community, a programme implemented in 2011 in co-operation with the South East European University. However, only one generation of youth workers was enrolled, and with its closure, all other activities of Triagolnik in this field ended.

The last wave of serious interventions in the field of youth work began in 2012, with the initiative for recognition and professionalisation of youth work by the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). One of the results of this initiative was the creation of the Union for Youth Work, as the only professional association of youth workers in ". Following this initiative, several other projects for the standardisation and professionalisation of youth work were conducted, two of which are part of the Erasmus + programme of the European Commission, implemented by the Coalition of youth organizations SEGA and the CID, as well as the project within the framework of the IPA – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance programme for the further strengthening and financial sustainability of civil society ("Youth Workers United"). Thanks to the large number of activities in this field implemented by several different civil associations in a short period of time, the understanding of youth

work has greatly increased in the civil sector as well as between state and public institutions in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, and has created a climate for initiating specific processes towards the formalisation of youth work, such as an initiative for standards with regard to the profession of youth worker.

## 2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is one of the countries that do not have specific legislation and policies in the field of youth. The long process of transition of the country, and political and socio-economic changes have affected young people as one of the most sensitive social categories, and left them excluded from the processes of building youth policies.

The only document that provides certain directions and measures for improvement of the overall wellbeing of young people is the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 (this is the second strategy in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, the first referred to the period 2005-2015). The [National Youth Strategy](#) defines youth work as “an organised and systematic process of education and support for the authentic development of young people with the aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential. It is directly associated with the development of the local community, whereby young people not only become active participants in the process of their own development but also active participants in the life of the community.”

Other existing legal acts that cover to a certain extent youth issues are: the Law on Secondary Education, the Law on Student Standards and the Law on Volunteering. These areas covered by the strategy include: integration, sexual and reproductive health, and brain drain. Although there is adequate documentation, there is currently no overview of the progress in implementing specific strategic documents and practices, but there is also concern among youth organisations, which are rarely consulted in the development of such policies.

In the period from September 2012 to June 2013, the CID in co-operation with the NDI worked on an initiative for the legal recognition and professionalisation of youth work. In the initiative the Agency of Youth and Sports was actively included. With additional support from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Skopje, through the initiative, a specific law on youth work was drafted, together with civic associations active in the field of youth work. Even though a framework for the law on youth work was drafted, the process was terminated and the law never materialised. This was due to poor legal conditions and insufficient knowledge of the state actors, and the many unanswered questions in the area of youth work.

### 3. Recognition

The closest thing to a law on young people is the National Youth Strategy. In the current history of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, two national strategies for youth have been adopted, the first for the period from 2005-2015, and the second from 2016-2025. Youth work is mentioned in both youth strategies, under the title “Local youth work” and is noted as a priority. However, if we compare the two texts it can be noted that there is an evolution in the way of processing youth work as an activity. While the first strategy largely mixes youth work with youth participation and the activities of youth associations, the 2016 strategy defines it more clearly as a separate activity, with specific goals, priorities and challenges.

With this document, for the first time the Macedonian institutions recognise youth work as an organised system of activities that has an educational function and a stake in the personal development of young people. The strategy states that youth work in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is not yet defined as one of the key components of the process of educating, protecting and encouraging the development of young people, and concludes that it is for this reason that youth work is principally carried out by the civil society organisations. The difference in the way that youth work is treated in both documents probably points to an increased recognition of youth work at social and institutional levels in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” over a period of 10 years. With the adoption of this document, the Agency for Youth and Sports recognises and supports the processes in the field of youth work initiated by civic associations active in this field.

In 2017, 3 organisations submitted a joint initiative for the recognition of the profession of youth worker in the National Qualifications Framework (Coalition of youth organizations SEGA, Youth Cultural Center and the Association for Youth Work) to the Ministry of Education and Science (Center for Vocational Education and Training). The Agency of Youth and Sports was a partner in this initiative.

In March 2018, the Government of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” organised a thematic session on young people which was the first governmental session focused on youth issues. In this session, the government formed the Working Group for the Recognition of Youth Work, including NGOs and state institutions. This working group held meetings in order to define the standard of occupation for youth workers, based on the previously submitted initiative. In July 2018, the term “youth worker” was accepted as an occupational standard in the National Qualifications Framework, within the Ministry of Education and Science. This is by far the most significant step related to formal recognition of the profession of youth worker in the country.

## **4. Funding youth work**

No specific funding for youth work exists in the country. However, youth work activities are mostly funded by European programmes such as Erasmus + and the European Youth Foundation. In recent years, the Erasmus + has been the main funder for youth work activities in the country. With the support of Erasmus +, the Coalition of youth organizations SEGA along with the Union for Youth Work, the Youth Cultural Center and the Agency of Youth and Sports submitted an initiative for the recognition of youth work and the profession of youth worker to the government. The Union for Youth Work is currently implementing the Erasmus + programme related to further promotion and recognition of youth work

## 5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision

Since youth work is not fully recognised by the Government of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, the following institutions are involved in planning and supporting youth work through the governmental working group for recognising youth work:

- **Ministry of Education and Science.** The ministry is responsible for further integration of the concept in the National Qualifications Framework. This is currently being done by the Center for Vocational Education and Training as a separate body under the ministry.
- **Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.** The ministry is responsible for the recognition of youth work as a profession standard occupational classification system in collaboration with the Agency for Employment of and the Centers for Social Work.
- **Agency of Youth and Sports.** The governmental body responsible for co-ordination and implementation of youth policies in the country. Actively promotes and advocates for further recognition of the concept.

## 6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country

The most serious attempt to educate youth workers in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” was the training "Basics of youth work in the community", implemented by the Triagolnik Center for non-formal education, in co-operation with the Jönköping University. In the period from 2008-2011 Triagolnik conducted annual training courses with groups of youth workers, in 6 separate modules. Topics included: introduction to youth work in the community and personal development; adolescence; work with individuals and groups; work with conflict and diversity; management of youth work in the community. In addition to participating in the modules, youth workers were also given individual support in the form of tutorials, or mentoring. The final model of the training course included mandatory practical work of approximately 25 hours with young people. In 2011, the programme became part of the undergraduate studies in "Leadership and youth work in the community" in the South East European University, again with co-operation between the Center for Informal Education Triagolnik and Jönköping University, in consultation with the University of Bologna and the University of Ljubljana. The programme for undergraduate studies in youth work was created on the basis of research and analyses of the needs of young people, taking into account the problems and challenges that young people in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” face. Only one generation of youth workers was enrolled in this study programme, mainly previous participants of the training course offered by Triagolnik. The lack of interest in the study programme can probably be explained by the poor recognition of youth work at the social level, as well as the fact that the profession of youth worker is not recognised.

In recent years, professional pilot projects training youth workers have been realised, as part of several projects in the field of standardisation and professionalisation of youth work. An example is the training course entitled "Your first step is to become a youth worker ", implemented in 2016 by the Coalition of youth organizations SEGA and a partner organisation from France, as part of the Erasmus + project "Recognition of youth work", supported by the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility.

Another pilot training project was also conducted within the project "United Youth Workers ", supported by the IPA programme for further strengthening and enhancing financial sustainability of civil society, and implemented by the Youth Cultural Center in Bitola and partner organisations, Youth Association Kreaktiv, the Youth Network of South East Europe and the National Association of Youth Workers from Serbia. The programme for the pilot training project was prepared in co-operation with the Union for Youth Work, and one module of the methodology of youth work was implemented, on– peer education.

## 7. Quality standards

No specific formal quality standards, guiding youth workers and youth work activities, exist in the country. Most of the youth work quality standards are defined or developed by the NGOs that deal with youth work. The initiative for the recognition of youth workers submitted to the Agency of Youth and Sports includes proposed quality standards for youth workers, which will be further consolidated within the vocational qualifications development process (a process that should be completed after the recognition of youth work as a profession under the standards of occupation).

A coalition of youth organisations in collaboration with a number of stakeholders including the Union of Youth Work developed the Ethical Code for Youth Workers. Among the ethical and professional principles, code includes the following competences for youth workers:

- planning, organising and carrying out activities independently or under supervision, individually or in a group;
- identifying the needs of young people;
- designing and implementing programmes and projects based on identified needs;
- planning educational activities, developing skills and attitudes among young people on different topics;
- creating strategies to provide youth care and creating conditions for the exercise of young people's rights;
- implementing activities to empower young people for active participation in social and decision-making processes;
- assessing and supporting the initiatives proposed by young people;
- organising youth exchanges, festivals, camps, youth educational camps, educational programmes, managing information centres, etc.
- developing skills that increase the opportunities for youth employment;
- managing overall human resources; mentoring, co-operating, leading and guiding the activities of individuals, groups and teams;
- using materials, equipment and time in a rational manner;
- communicating with service users, groups of participants, superiors, institutions, and applying ethical principles;

applying measures for the protection of health and a healthy lifestyle, firefighting and other protective measures.

## **8. Knowledge and data on youth work**

No system of continuous documentation or study on youth work exists in our country. No data are available on the numbers of beneficiaries of youth work, or the number of youth workers operating at various levels.

The most recent in-depth research made on youth work is the publication "[Youth Work Pathways](#)", within the project "Youth Workers United" implemented by the Youth Cultural Center in Bitola with the financial support of the European Union.

## **9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country**

Data are not available.

## **10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work**

As is mentioned above, the process of recognition of the concept of youth work and the profession of youth worker is in progress. At the moment, the working group on recognising youth work continues to develop qualifications for youth workers with regard to the standard occupational classification system, based on European practices and country specifics.

In addition, a law on youth is currently being drafted. This process unites youth coalitions and networks that work on youth issues and youth policy, members of parliament, government officials and political youth wings. The law on youth will define youth work and youth workers, which will build on the adopted standard occupational classification system and the elements described in the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025.