

Youth Partnership

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



“Putting the puzzle pieces together”

Towards a European Recognition Mechanism for youth workers

Discussion paper prepared for the Symposium
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by

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1. Overall context of the process

In 2022-23, the Youth Partnership is expanding its activities on youth work and strengthening its role in the implementation of the European Youth Work agenda, under three priority areas:

- Facilitating dialogue with the youth work community of practice
- Supporting better recognition of youth work, and
- Supporting Council of Europe and EU initiatives on youth work.

Important advances aim to be made in the recognition of youth work so as to ensure the robust implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) and the Bonn Process. These efforts are also a response to a strong demand from the youth work community of practice, as highlighted in the EYWA, to enhance and recognise youth work practice. In this context, the Youth Partnership is carrying out specific research on the recognition of youth work, in line with the policy decisions of both the European Union and Council of Europe: Council Resolution on the framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020), the Bonn Declaration resulting from the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (2020) and the Council of Europe's Recommendation on Youth Work (2017).

The ongoing study on models for the recognition of youth workers' competences will make recommendations to the two partner institutions on possible scenarios for mutual, cross-border and Pan-European recognition of youth workers' competences based on existing European and national level practices.

The main object of the study is - to identify and propose models for the recognition of youth workers' competences that will further strengthen and enhance young work practice in Europe, support the development, empowerment and well-being of young people, and, in addition, address some of the structural problems that impact on the recognition and advancement of youth workers across Europe and provide a more level playing field for them in terms of recognition and opportunity.

2. Purpose of the discussion paper

This discussion paper was prepared by the experts conducting the ongoing study on models for the recognition of youth workers' competences specifically for the Symposium "Visible Value: growing youth work in Europe". It provides an overview of the current thinking of the study's authors, and will be the basis for discussions during the symposium.

3. Key aspect 1 // Recognition of competences

3.1. In a nutshell

We are suggesting two possible web-based models for the recognition of youth workers' competences. While the two suggested models have similarities in terms of structure and methodology they also diverge in some significant respects.

3.2. Model A - Suggested scenario

Model A comprises a two-stage accreditation mechanism that works similar to those of comparable professions with diverse educational pathways (photographers and trainers are just two of many examples). Stage 1 is based on self-assessment, stage 2 on peer assessment. Similar to many other professions, in which educational pathways are as diverse as in the youth field, we are suggesting a two-stage recognition mechanism.

Stage (1) – certified youth worker – is based entirely on self-assessment. Youth workers, both paid and volunteers, can self-certify that:

- They have 5 years of youth work experience in a context that has allowed them to acquire relevant youth work competences **or**
- They have at least 2 years of youth work experience and can demonstrate that they have acquired key youth work competences during that time **or**
- They have a formal educational qualification as a youth worker.

5 years of youth work experience

All recognised youth work structures, organisations and networks are acceptable as contexts allowing youth workers to obtain relevant youth work competences, including but not limited to:

- recognised youth organisations, networks and platforms
- recognised national, regional and municipal youth centres and youth clubs
- recognised general youth work providers
- recognised specialised youth work providers.

Recognition can be documented through official registration of documents, or if these are not available or obtainable, through a previous grant of a recognised youth programme at European or national level.

Acquired youth work competences

All self-assessment competence tools available are acceptable as ways in which to demonstrate that key youth work competences have been acquired, including but not limited to:

- the Council of Europe's Youth Work Portfolio
- the Competence Self-assessment Tool of the European Training Strategy
- the EU's Skills, Competences, Qualifications & Occupations Classification
- the upcoming cumulative Youthpass under the ETS Competence Model
- national, regional and municipal youth work self-assessment tools
- youth work self-assessment tools hosted by civil society organisations
- self-assessment tools based on national qualifications frameworks

The recognition platform will not offer its own self-assessment tool, but link to existing ones.

Formal qualification

All formal degree courses for youth work are acceptable as sources to document formal qualification as a youth worker, including but not limited to:

- degree courses for youth work
- degree courses for social work with a focus on youth
- degree courses for occupational standards within youth work

Stage (2) – accredited youth worker with a specialisation – is based on peer assessment. Youth workers, both paid and volunteers, can submit a portfolio for this second stage of accreditation, which is assessed independently by two peer reviewers. Through the portfolio, they can document that:

- They have 10 years of youth work experience in a context that has allowed them to acquire relevant youth work competences *or*
- They have at least 5 years of youth work experience and can demonstrate that they have acquired key youth work competences during that time *or*
- They have a formal educational qualification as a youth worker.

The ways in which the 10 years of experience, competences acquired, or qualifications acquired, can be demonstrated, remain the same as for the first stage.

Specialisations

Specialisations can be, but are not limited to:

- municipal, regional or national youth work
- international or European youth work
- open youth work or street youth work
- youth work connected with sports, music or theatre
- social work with young people or youth welfare services
- youth work management or youth work leadership
- youth work research

Specialisations can be combined.

Peer reviewers must always be conducted by two different organisations, and neither can review youth worker portfolios from their own organisation. The peer-reviewing organisations can be, but are not limited to:

- European and national associations of youth workers
- European and national networks of youth work providers
- National youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations
- European umbrella platforms of youth NGOs (NYCs and INGYOs)

If peer reviewers do not arrive at a consensual review, a third reviewer will be involved. The results of reviews can be appealed. The appeal mechanism has still to be determined.

3.3. Model B - Suggested scenario

Model B comprises a single-stage accreditation mechanism for all youth workers but its main aim would be to provide recognition for volunteer youth workers, in particular, who have acquired or will acquire considerable competence, for which they may have little or no recognition or may not be in a position to easily access relevant education or training. An associated aim would be to thus strengthen the recognition and capacity of the voluntary youth sector.

The process would involve individual on-line portfolio based self-assessment under which youth workers, both paid and volunteers, would need to provide appropriate data and verification that they have met the following criteria

- they have at least 7 years relevant youth work experience in the last 10 years and relevant formal and non-formal education and training that have facilitated their acquisition of key youth work competences during that time **or**
- they have at least 3 years relevant youth work experience in the last 5 years, and relevant formal and non-formal education and training and can provide evidence that they have acquired key youth work competences during that time.

The details, criteria, evidence and thresholds for meeting the requisite experience, education and training would need to be further developed and determined. The method of evaluation or validation of applications is set out in Section 4.

With regard to the provision of evidence of acquired youth work competences, it is suggested that a competence framework based on, or commensurate with, one or more of the competence tools or frameworks set out in Model A and linked with, or compatible with, the European Qualifications Framework be developed.

This possible alignment with the European Qualifications Framework would also allow for further expansion and upgrading of recognition e.g. for youth workers in a leadership, managerial or supervisory role.

4. Key aspect 2 // Governance of the recognition mechanism

Governing board

The Governing board is the body that needs to safeguard the legitimacy, ensure quality and oversee the implementation of the recognition mechanism.

The Board will comprise representatives of key stakeholders: the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centres, Erasmus+ National Agencies, European umbrella organization of youth worker associations, universities providing youth work studies, training providers of youth work qualification training, international youth work organizations, youth work experts, etc.

The Governing board should meet regularly (at least once a year) to make strategic decisions and provide guidance for the implementation of the mechanism. It should have a particular

role in creating conditions for the practical/institutional recognition of youth worker accreditation within European youth programmes and national level qualification systems. It should also ensure the coherence of and clear links between the recognition mechanism and youth work studies at national level and youth worker training programmes at European level.

Under Model B the issue of governance would be encompassed by the hosting and implementation institutions as set out below.

Hosting and Implementation Institution

Potential hosts of the mechanism could include:

- a. National agencies for Erasmus + and the European Solidarity Corps
- b. Future European umbrella of youth worker associations
- c. EU-CoE Youth Partnership
- d. SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centres

The hosting and implementation institution should ensure:

- Technical conditions for the web hosting of the mechanism
- Develop necessary tools for the implementation of the mechanism (e.g. ethical code, portfolio for Stage 2, etc.)
- Provide support training, ensure quality and manage support staff (e.g. peer reviewers, coaches/mentors)
- Develop a quality assurance and appeal procedures for the beneficiaries
- Communicate and promote the mechanism within the youth work field
- Maintain close cooperation between the training providers and universities providing youth work studies
- Strive to ensure concrete incentives for the accredited youth workers at European and national levels
- Provide guidance and opportunities for the process of re-accreditation (e.g. criteria for further development, further training and learning opportunities for youth workers, etc.)

Under Model B there would be three tiers of governance, hosting, and implementation as follows:

- Potential hosts of the web-based, on-line platform: national agencies for Erasmus + and the European Solidarity Corps; Future European umbrella of youth worker associations; EU-CoE Youth Partnership; and SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centres. would be primarily responsible for the development, maintenance and promotion of the platform.
- Member States would designate an appropriate institution/agency/association/NGO for evaluating and validating applications for recognition and issuing certificates of competence in youth work practice. The designated authority would also be responsible for promoting and supporting the initiative at national, regional and local level and liaising with the host of the platform. The necessary funding would also need to be allocated to underpin this process.

- The host organization and the Member States' designated authorities would meet twice yearly to review, monitor and evaluate the initiative and make proposals for its further development and future role.

Support structures and bodies

In addition to the Governing board and the Hosting Institution, there should be several bodies created and involved in the implementation of the mechanism, as well as some complementary support systems:

- The pool of peer reviewers that need to be trained for the assessment;
- The pools of mentors/coaches who should be able to guide and support the process of portfolio development;
- Appeal and ethical committee who should be able to receive complains and decide on possible ethical infringements;
- Evaluation and monitoring of the mechanism from the beginning of its implementation;
- Easing the cross-border recognition of youth worker qualifications, from country to country;
- Additional national-level incentives.

5. Key aspect 3 // Benefits of a recognition mechanism

The core benefits of the mechanism should be:

- Enhanced professional self-awareness and self-recognition
- Confirmation of professional credibility
- Better visibility within the professional field.

In addition, the accreditation received under the mechanism should lead to some concrete benefits for the beneficiary. These might include:

- Higher fees for the accredited youth workers in the projects funded by European youth work programmes (Erasmus+, ESC, CoE EYF).
- Additional points in the selection of Erasmus+, ESC and CoE EYF projects involving the accredited youth workers.
- Recognition of prior learning through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) recognized by national providers of studies of youth work.
- Exclusive access to professional development courses for accredited professionals.