

INSIGHTS INTO DEVELOPING THE YOUTH WORK ENVIRONMENT



Youth Partnership

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



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

INSIGHTS INTO DEVELOPING THE YOUTH WORK ENVIRONMENT

A thinking and action kit

Authors:

Ajša Hadžibegović
and Bastian Küntzel

Editors:

Tanya Basarab
and Marietta Balázs

Co-ordination:

Tanya Basarab,
Marietta Balázs
and Lali Bouche

Council of Europe
and European Commission

The opinions expressed in this work, commissioned by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of either of the partner institutions, their member states or the organisations co-operating with them.

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text. The source text must always be acknowledged as follows: “© Council of Europe, 2022”. All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communications, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

Cover design and layout:
Documents and Publications Production
Department (SPDP), Council of Europe

Cover photos: Shutterstock,
EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership
Illustrations: Coline Robin

© Council of Europe and
European Commission, November 2022
Printed at the Council of Europe

Acknowledgements

This volume of Insights is the practical translation of *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices*¹ (Youth Knowledge Book #26), by Marti Taru, Ewa Krzaklewska and Tanya Basarab (eds), which is available on the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership website.

1. Available at: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-worker-education-in-europe>.

Contents

HOW, WHERE AND WITH WHOM TO USE THIS BOOK TO IMPROVE YOUTH WORK	5
Mapping actors	6
IT'S WHAT WE DO: YOUTH WORK AS A FIELD OF PRACTICE, A PROFESSION, AN OCCUPATION	9
Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples	9
Youth work practice architectures	12
A NUTRITIOUS ENVIRONMENT: HOW YOUTH WORK IS ENABLED, SUPPORTED AND FOSTERED THROUGH POLICY	15
Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples	15
Ways in which policies address youth work at European level	16
Ways in which policies address youth work at country level	17
THE DIVERSITY OF PATHWAYS TO BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORKER	21
Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples	21
A path through formal education	25
Non-formal pathways	26
A JOB OR A CAREER? HOW EMPLOYMENT PERSPECTIVES, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOGNITION COME TOGETHER	31
Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples	31
Employment and career	32
NEVER STOP LEARNING: THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFELONG DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORKERS	37
Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples	37
Role of youth workers' representative and support structures	38
RESOURCES	43
Quality in youth work	43
Validation and recognition of youth work	43
Youth policy	43
Official texts, resolutions, conventions and policies	44

Chapter 1

How, where and with whom to use this book to improve youth work

Welcome to Insights into developing the youth work environment: a thinking and action kit!

This thinking and action kit was designed with change makers of youth work in mind. Whether you are a youth worker, a youth organisation representative, a trainer, a manager or educator of youth workers, a local or national policy maker, you can contribute to strengthening youth work recognition, quality and support and resourcing for the whole youth work environment in your context. The thinking kit draws on an extensive body of research on education and career pathways of youth workers carried out between 2018 and 2020, mapping realities and delving into specific aspects of youth work in Europe. The research was published in *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices* (Youth Knowledge Book #26),² in April 2020 by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. The research highlighted a diversity of practice architectures and many entry points to further developing youth work across Europe. This thinking kit and the accompanying [visual translations](#) of the research invite you to focus on the main results and take further action.

Youth work development is a continuum without a final end point. We can always improve it. [History of youth work](#) highlights that youth work development in Europe has always been tied to its context, the variety of political, social and economic factors and the intersection between young people’s realities and aspirations and the support they receive. The research on education and career pathways also shows how this diversity has evolved in different countries (and regions) into various definitions, a regulatory environment, with changes to access for formal and non-formal education (NFE) and qualifications, mentoring and career support programmes and quality development of the whole ecosystem. Therefore, this thinking kit is not a prescriptive step-by-step guide. Instead, it highlights possible elements to consider when identifying the best path forward in your context. A phrase which often appears in this thinking kit invites you to look at the particular organisational, geographic or systemic context you would like to focus on.

2. Taru M., Krzaklewska E. and Basarab T. (eds) (2020), *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices* (Youth Knowledge Book #26), Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, available at <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-worker-education-in-europe>.

Youth work development can start with a dream, followed by a reality check and a plan of where you want to go. The thinking kit invites you to check the reality of youth work, think about which aspects need improvement, see how others do it and develop a step-by-step action plan. The thinking kit's next six chapters take you on a journey, starting with youth work as a field of practice in Chapter 2, going to a nutritious environment through policy support in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 looks at the various learning pathways to becoming a youth worker, exploring in Chapter 5 the recognition, educational and career pathways. Chapter 6 highlights the importance of continuous support for youth work practitioners already in the field and Chapter 7 offers a list of resources.

To make the best of the thinking kit, let's start with a mapping exercise of your reality.

Outlined in the following chapters are the sections "Thinking together – Questions to look past the now" and "Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field". When you embark on this journey of bringing about change in the youth work field you might find it worth mapping key actors in the field in your specific context, reaching out to them and then thinking and leading change together.

Mapping actors

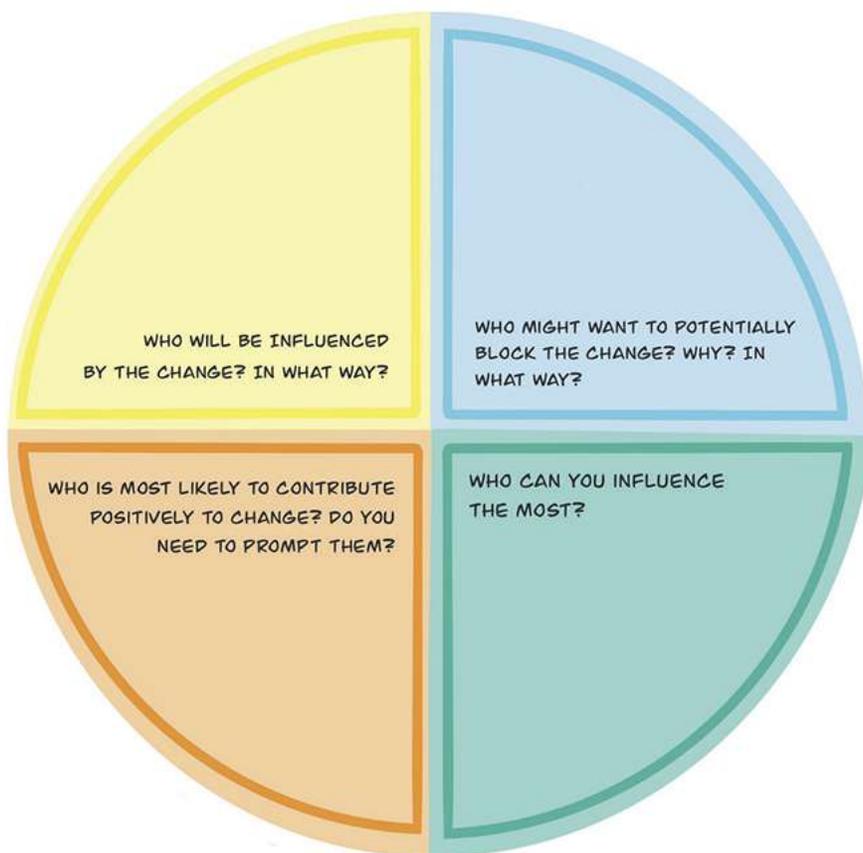
You are set to bring about change and improve state of play in the youth work field. To do this effectively and in a sustainable manner it is crucial to engage key actors, create a shared initial vision of change that needs to occur and build capacity to collaborate. Reflect on the question: who are the actors in the youth work field? Create a list. Think about:

- ▶ all those who influence the field;
- ▶ all those who may be impacted by changes in the field;
- ▶ all those who have some vested interest in developments in the field.

Make sure you think broadly and consider both internal and external actors in relation to you and the field. The diagram below could be helpful to visualise and assign actors to different fields.

When you have the list, you can implement different strategies to reach out to them. However, it is worth reflecting further and determining, for each actor, their influence potential and interest for change that you are looking to bring about. Those with the most power and interest are the key actors to whom you ought to reach out. Do so in a way which comes naturally to you and that is appropriate to the recipient (for example, e-mail, phone call, memo outlining the idea to think about together and leading to change, contact through social media). You can also reach out to the actors you have identified, gradually. Firstly, contact those with whom you have a good relationship and communication and/or those who are likely to respond positively, and then engage them in helping with further reaching out, as needed.

With other key actors on board, you can also jointly embark in exploring this publication, think about questions outlined in the following chapters and lead change together, finding your unique pathway to it.



Chapter 2

It's what we do: youth work as a field of practice, a profession, an occupation

To understand state of play in the youth work field in Europe one could look at what an individual youth worker does, and is able to accomplish as shaped by:

1. "Sayings" – how youth work is recognised, formulated, talked about and debated;
2. "Doings" – how youth work education is supported and how youth work can be a sustainable career; and
3. "Relatings" – how youth work is recognised, supported and organised so that it can relate to young people, the general public and other professions.³

Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples

A dynamic field of practice

Youth work as a practice has been and still is in a constant process of development and change. Changes within and around youth work occur and are caused by changes in the organisational, administrative and social environments where youth work operates. These changes include the increasing emergence of external forms of regulation, which occur within a nation state (welfare state) as well as between different tiers of public administration; the increasing importance of audit and measurement, targets and performance indicators; the standardisation of work; exerting financial control over jobs; individualisation and competition; and increased co-operation between societal sectors. At the same time, youth work gains a more significant function in society as policy makers expect youth work to contribute to youth socialisation and the transition from dependence on parents to independence, and to becoming active and contributing members of society, with, in particular, a social inclusion aspect and a specific focus on vulnerable young people from less advantaged backgrounds.

3. Kiilakoski T., "Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths for youth workers", Chapter 3 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.

Youth work is a field of practice consisting of a multitude of methods which address different social challenges and target different groups of young people, and it is expected to contribute to a range of social policy goals. Youth work as a practice has a long history. However, the education and career pathways of youth workers have been capturing policy makers' attention only relatively recently. The development of youth work as a field of practice is not only a matter of financial and organisational resources; it is also legislation, support systems (such as competence frameworks with recognition, certification or validation paths) and the provision of education, training and qualification systems that are all necessary for the development of youth work as a recognised field of practice, a family of occupations and perhaps, in the future, a profession or several professions. Across Europe, youth work was and still is evolving in different ways and reaching various degrees of recognition. The following four concepts have been used in the youth work field developments.

- ▶ An occupation is every activity, work, function or job that is the main source of someone's income.
- ▶ A profession is seen as a specific type of occupation which is associated with the interrelated concepts of professional autonomy and social closure.
- ▶ Professionalisation in this framework refers to the process of an occupation evolving towards a profession.
- ▶ Professionalism is understood to describe the degree and quality of practice, and the creation of a culture of quality.

Youth work is recognised and regulated as an occupation in a large number of European countries at national level. Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers⁴ identifies different ways in which youth work is regulated. National standards can vary in:

- ▶ nature (quality frameworks or occupational/educational standards);
- ▶ scope (defining youth work as a whole, or just some of its areas); and
- ▶ origin (some are developed by the respective ministries, others by youth work centres/associations).

A standard occupational profile for youth work as an occupation is the most common form, even if this is still for only half of the countries that were studied. Some of these countries also have a regulatory framework and a legal/regulatory authority to support the professionalisation of youth work. However, there are also countries where a legal/regulatory authority exists, but there is no standard occupational profile. Furthermore, 10 countries monitor numbers of professionally registered youth workers in a comprehensive manner by having a professional register of youth workers. When enquiring about their practice, positive feedback was received from seven countries in Europe which had all three regulation mechanisms in place in 2018: Belgium (German-speaking part), Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Wales).

4. O'Donovan J. et al., Youth workers education paths, Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers – Part I. Report, EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, and in Chapter 2 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.



For instance, in Malta, youth work is a profession defined by law. As such, no other profession can provide the service other than qualified youth workers. The Youth Work Profession Act (2014) also has a code of ethics and competence descriptors for youth workers. In Wales, the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (2012) consists of 41 standards, grouped into five functional areas:

- ▶ work with young people and others;
- ▶ facilitate the personal, social and educational development of young people;
- ▶ promote inclusion, equity and young people's interests and welfare;
- ▶ develop youth work strategy and practice;
- ▶ develop, lead and manage self and others.

Other professions which also deliver youth work in Wales are youth offending teams, counselling (mental health teams, independent volunteers), after-school clubs, the leisure industry and adventure play, education, the national citizenship service, social work (services) and community development officers.

In Italy, youth work competences are defined at regional level – each of the regions has its own repertory of professions, with their own competence descriptors. The youth work profession is not defined by law, and other professions, such as educators and social/cultural facilitators, can deliver youth work.

The provision of youth work is generally, in Europe, shared between different actors: state, voluntary youth sector and European support programmes. The state, either centrally, regionally or locally, through public-funded bodies or institutions, has the greatest role, responsibility and capacity for provision of youth work as it has the legal and legislative authority and the financial means to determine both the role of youth work and youth workers. The human resource capacity of the voluntary youth sector is considerable, but it is not proportionate to the youth work load it often assumes and carries. Furthermore, the voluntary youth sector has the least capacity in terms of financial and material resources. The role of European support programmes is also significant, but they tend to be measured, tailored and time bound in terms of both programme duration and funding. When responsibility for youth work and youth workers is not proportionally shared between the relevant stakeholders and partners, the sustainability of youth work provision is at risk.

Youth work practice architectures

The concept of practice architectures⁵ brings out the complex nature of youth work as a field of practice. According to this concept, a country with strong youth work practice is characterised by legislative definitions of youth work, either competence descriptions or quality assurance if not both, public support for non-formal learning on youth work for youth workers and identifiable career paths, and formal education in youth work (either in vocational or tertiary education, or on both levels). Based on these criteria the surveyed countries were categorised into four large groups with, at one end, countries with strong practice architectures and, at the other end, countries belonging to the group of practice architectures “in need of development”. Countries in the latter category may have (and usually have) defined youth work in their law, but have no description of competences a youth worker should possess or documents and procedures outlining how quality of youth work delivery is to be assured, nor identifiable youth worker career paths. In the same “in need of development” category in some cases, there is appropriate higher-level education available, in other cases there is public support for non-formal learning and in others there are associations of youth workers. However, there are no identifiable career paths in any of them. The snapshot of practice architectures from 2018 represents the developments recorded in the youth work environment at that moment. Changes in societies are constant and result from interactions between actors. Changes in the youth work environment are happening constantly and they can be initiated by any of the actors and start from any of the elements.

Practice architecture elements		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ legislative definitions▶ competence description▶ quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ vocational education on youth work▶ tertiary education for youth work▶ public support for non-formal learning▶ identifiable and sustainable career paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ an association for youth workers▶ youth work communities

5. Kiilakoski T., “Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths for youth workers”, Chapter 3 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.



Thinking together – Questions to look past the now

Look at ways youth work is regulated as a field of practice in your context and determine answers to the following questions.

What is the share of responsibility for youth work and youth workers between the state, the voluntary youth sector and European support programmes?

How is the occupational profile for youth workers defined? (If there is none, perhaps you can look at occupational profiles for professions similar and close to that of youth worker.)

How is professionalisation of youth work supported by the regulatory framework and legal/regulatory authority?

How are numbers of professionally registered youth workers monitored?

Have a closer look at practice architectures and different elements. How does it look in your context?

How is youth work discussed and how is it recognised?

How is youth work supported through formal education?

How are resources allocated to non-formal learning and career paths of youth workers?

How do youth workers relate to each other through associations?

Are there competence frameworks/portfolios for youth workers and quality standards for youth work? How are they regarded and used?



Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field

What should change in the ways youth work is regulated as a field of practice? Why? What would it look like in an ideal scenario?

Define the nature of changes you are proposing to implement

Consider (in consultation with other actors) the steps you could take to initiate these changes.

Look at all the different elements of youth work practice architectures and consider how the intended changes within one element may influence others and which steps you could take to initiate the most favourable changes.

What kind of support might you need to initiate and sustain the intended changes? How could you access it?

Consider whether European-level policy developments and/or European-level actors, knowledge and resources could be useful for your process of initiating any such changes.

Chapter 3

A nutritious environment: how youth work is enabled, supported and fostered through policy

Policy makers at all levels need to know who the youth workers are, what education and support systems they need and how their time and effort can benefit as many young people as possible.⁶

Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples

A flourishing field needs policy



Let's imagine a group of youth workers running an activity with teens in their community, preparing for a project. They are fully involved in their work, thinking deeply about the needs of the young people they work with, what the outcomes of the project will mean for them, and how to make a meaningful and sustainable impact.

At that very moment, invisible to most participants of this situation, they are being touched by several policies, strategies and plans at local, national and European level which determine available funding support, strategic priorities, quality standards and more. The content, quality and relevance of such key documents shape the work of youth workers with young people, even when they are not fully aware of it. When the key actors from the youth work community of practice are aware and knowledgeable of key documents, can easily navigate them and know mechanisms that would allow them to influence those mechanisms, it improves the chance that youth workers from the beginning of this story will have the most appropriate framework and supportive environment for their work with young people.

If you look at the youth work community of practice, you will notice a highly diverse group of profiles and backgrounds. These people share a common interest and want to contribute to the creation of a nutritious environment for youth work development. They engage in the youth policy field, are doing research on youth work and are delivering youth work and engaging with young people in a variety of ways. Findings from the research⁷ indicate that there is a general movement towards better recognition of youth work and NFE across Europe. Furthermore, governance of youth work in Europe is in a state of transition with a number of ongoing national policy initiatives. Therefore, you can find your niche for nurturing an environment for youth work from your particular position and field, be it policy, research, practice or a

6. Taru M., Krzaklewska E. and Basarab T. (eds), "Toward professionalisation? Youth worker as an occupation in Europe", Chapter 10 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.

7. Taru M., Krzaklewska E. and Basarab T. (eds), Youth Knowledge Book #26.



combination of some or all of these. A “nutritious youth work environment” is a dynamic concept with a set of elements that have proven to have worked well in different contexts across Europe. You can explore ways in which policies address youth work at European level and in different European countries, which roles youth worker representatives and support structures are taking and what constitutes strong youth work practice architecture (as described in the previous chapter). Instead of one model, there is plenty of learning to be done and many good practices to pick up, while you reflect on your own context and take action.

Ways in which policies address youth work at European level

At European level youth work is defined and recognised. The Council of Europe and the European Union have both been addressing youth work in relevant youth policy documents and strategic processes.

Most recent documents include the following.

The Council of Europe [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)4 on youth work](#) aims to encourage countries to develop their youth work policy and forms of practice, in order to support youth work at local, regional, national and European levels; and it includes the provision of a basic definition of youth work.

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people’s active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making.

Key to this definition is the fact that participation in youth work should be voluntary among young people, involve some aspect of non-formal or informal learning, and support personal and social development. Significantly, this definition also

acknowledges the importance of paid and volunteer youth workers, and the emphasis on non-formal and informal learning processes. Hence, this document provides an important indication of the means through which youth work should be delivered. Definitions of these terms, and many others, can be found in the [EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership glossary on youth](#).

The [EU Youth Strategy](#) is the framework for EU youth policy co-operation for the period 2019-2027 which refers to youth work as a catalyst for youth empowerment. It invites member states and the European Commission to develop and implement a European Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work, and support quality youth work development and provision of youth work activities on all levels.

The Council of Europe [Youth sector strategy](#) is a policy guidance and a broad political road map, or mission statement, for the period 2020-2030, which singles out youth work as a specific thematic area.

The [Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda \(2020/C 415/01\)](#) and the [European Youth Work Agenda \(2020\)](#), a strategic framework for strengthening and further developing youth work comprising the following elements: (a) political basis, (b) co-operation in the youth work community of practice, (c) putting the agenda into practice: “the Bonn Process”, and (d) funding programmes in the field of youth.

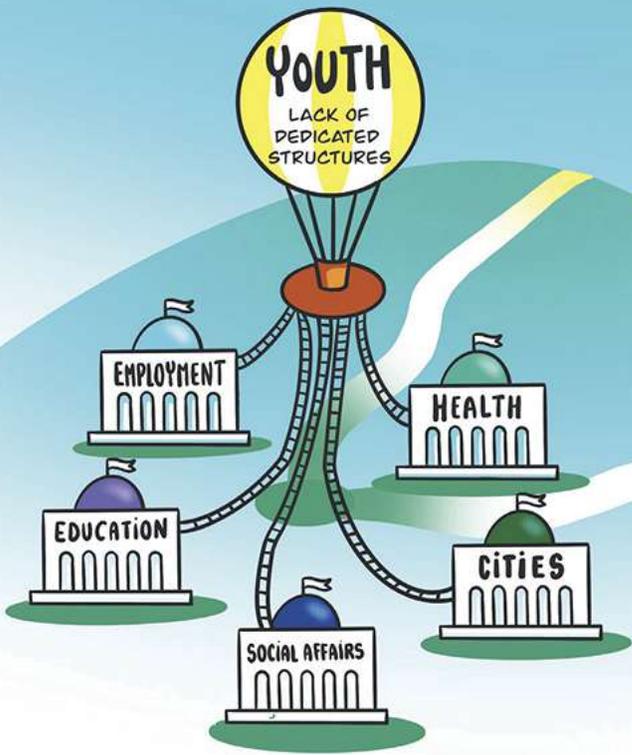
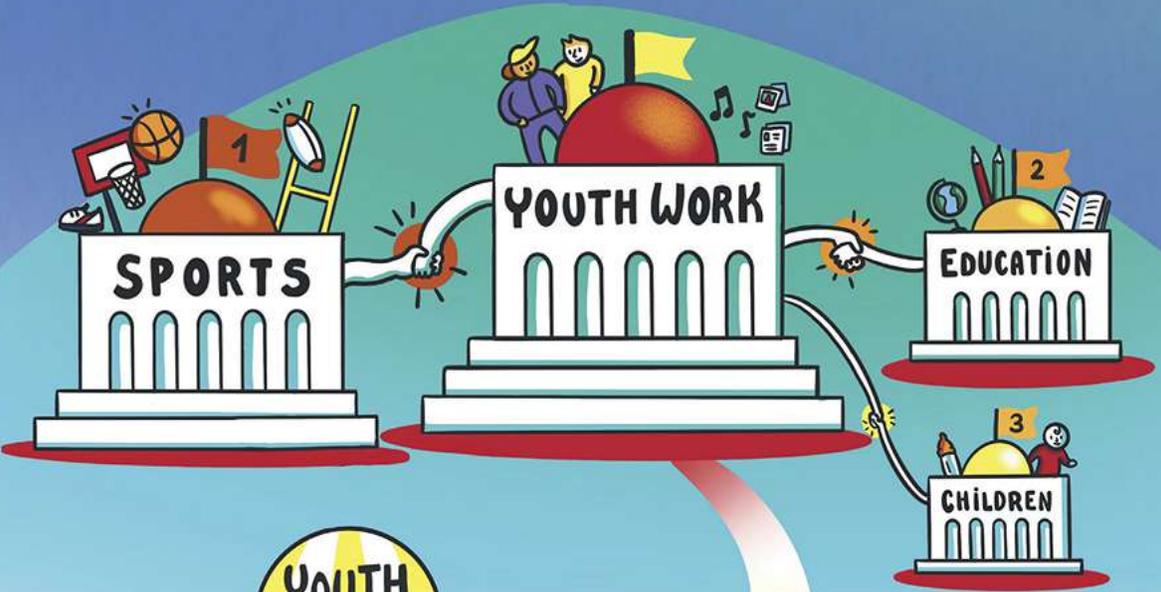
The [Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention – Signposts for the future \(2020\)](#) formulates recommendations for objectives, areas of work and concrete actions, and sets out guidelines and suggestions for the implementation of a strong European Youth Work Agenda in the Bonn Process.

Ways in which policies address youth work at country level

At European level, the youth policy developments have been significant, also in relation specifically to youth work. However, the responsibility for youth work lies primarily at national level. All across Europe, there is some form of governance and consideration in national contexts of what youth work is, who should be doing it (at least in the structures where the public authorities are directly responsible or are funding them) and what the general purpose of it is. The research initiative “Mapping educational and career paths of youth workers”⁸ has identified two key strategies and approaches to situating youth work governance in 41 countries across Europe.

- ▶ Youth work governance is situated at ministerial level. In this case it is mainly not a distinct policy arena but is conjoined with sport and/or education mainly, and also with children.
- ▶ Youth traverses different policy fields. In this case it lacks dedicated structures for the governance of youth work at ministerial level.

8. Taru M., Krzaklewska E. and Basarab T. (eds), Youth Knowledge Book #26.



Legislative definitions are one of the factors determining how developed practice architectures for education and career paths for youth workers are. The most recent development in the last decade in a number of countries was the formulation of the legislation in the form of youth (work) acts, laws or policies. At the time of mapping, only seven countries in Europe have no such specific legislation (but are treating youth (work) within the jurisdiction of generic legislation). Specifically defining youth work and/or youth workers is done in various legal documents such as a youth work act, youth act, law on youth, national youth strategy, national strategy for youth work or youth work profession act.



For instance, in Estonia, youth work is defined in the 2010 Youth Work Act as the creation of conditions to promote the diverse development of young persons, which enables them to be active outside their families, formal education and work on the basis of their free will. While in North Macedonia the National Youth Strategy defines youth work as “an organised and systematic process of education and support of 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.”

Youth work definitions in terms of occupational categories are again diverse and youth workers are in different contexts termed not only as youth workers but also as socio-cultural instructors, intercultural mediators, educators or animateurs, social workers, community workers, youth leaders, educators and trainers, cultural workers, volunteers and activists in youth organisations or youth movements. However, research outlined in Youth Knowledge Book #26⁹ indicates that youth work remains an invisible area in national career guidance.

Other forms of national recognition for youth work exist, such as recognition from civil society organisations and national youth agencies, as well as European Erasmus+ agencies and voluntary and non-governmental organisations (NGOs): through courses for youth workers and youth leaders, summer camps and other forms of training. Recognition of youth work is also situated at local levels, but this is largely undocumented and invisible at European level.

Clearly, there is no one way to define youth work at policy level and support development of education and career paths for youth workers. Context-specific complexities are to be taken into account when setting out to change and improve the situation in the field. Countries or regions, with different actors involved, initiating such processes should look at what could spark the biggest development (it may be a legislative initiative with a participatory process). [Examples](#) from different countries as well as European frameworks and initiatives compared with the identified needs of any specific country will help define what to focus on first.

9. Ibid.



Thinking together – Questions to look past the now

Look at policy level in your context and answers to the following questions.

- ▶ Where is youth work situated?
- ▶ How is it defined?
- ▶ Which actors are recognised? Are youth workers specifically recognised? How?
- ▶ Are there any gaps? You could particularly look for gaps in terms of:
 - research and evidence for youth work development;
 - monitoring and evaluation of the state of youth work development;
 - learning and support systems – type of education and/or training, links between them and type of support for volunteer and paid youth workers;
 - career perspectives for youth workers.



Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field

What should change at policy level? Why? What would it look like in an ideal scenario? What would policy need to regulate in relation to how youth work is defined and recognised?

Define the nature of changes you are proposing to implement.

Consider (in consultation with other actors) the steps you could take to initiate such changes.

How would the change(s) you propose be known to, accepted and supported by different actors?

Which support might you need to initiate and sustain such changes? How could you access that support?

Consider whether European-level policy developments and/or European-level actors, knowledge and resources could be useful for your process of initiating any such changes.

Chapter 4

The diversity of pathways to becoming a professional youth worker

The relatively small number of courses available in formal education and vocational training in youth work, except in the case of a minority of the countries surveyed, and the disconnect between the two, may be an impediment for those seeking employment or a career in the field.¹⁰

Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples

All the ways to become a youth worker

If you want to become an architect, you study architecture. Engineer? Study engineering. Pilot? There's only one way.

Some professions have a singular path towards them. "Youth worker" is not one of them.



Take, for example, Andrea, a youth worker, who took a fairly typical path to their current profession. As a teenager, Andrea often participated in activities at their local youth centre. While not inscribed to any set group, they were still a frequent guest. During the summer vacation, Andrea also regularly went on summer camps for a week or two. The leaders of those camps and in the local youth centre became real role models for Andrea and the feelings of belonging, fun, fulfilment and exploration that Andrea associated with these experiences made a strong impression. As they became older, Andrea took over some responsibility for leading a group of younger kids during some activities in the youth centre. In the summer, Andrea went from being a participant to being a youth leader in the summer camps. The organisation that ran those activities offered Andrea the opportunity to take part in some training courses on facilitation, non-formal learning as well as sending them as a participant on some training courses abroad that were on various topics which ranged from human rights to youth participation. Because the country Andrea lived in had a state-run youth-leader training and certification programme, they took part in it and after some time were the proud holders of this recognition. Slowly, slowly, Andrea became immersed in this world, writing grant applications for and then running international youth exchanges, working with the municipality on extracurricular activities for kids in the neighbourhood, managing volunteer placement programmes and empowering the youth in their group to come up with their own projects. One day, as Andrea was at a conference on youth participation, during the introduction round, they said "Hello, my name is Andrea and I am a youth worker".

10. O'Donovan J. et al., "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers", in Youth Knowledge Book #26, p. 31.

At that same conference, while having lunch, Andrea met Jesse, who had done an apprenticeship as a carpenter after school and then went to a university of applied sciences and studied social work. Today Jessie works in a neighbourhood youth centre, working with at-risk youth and engaging them in outdoor activities. There was also Pat, who had gone straight from high school into university, where they studied youth work. Today Pat works in the ministry for youth, family and sports of the regional government in their country, working on youth policy. Sam also sat with them at the lunch table. Their path to youth work was again totally different, having studied biology and then, through their activism for environmental justice, crossed over into working for the youth programme of a large environmental organisation.

They were all youth workers, and each of them had followed a completely different path to arrive at their shared professional identity.

Across Europe, there are very diverse ways to becoming a youth worker and even within the same city, region or country, individual youth workers will have taken completely different routes to arrive at this profession. It matters how purposefully the path was paved by policy and education and what it means to arrive, to become a youth worker. Before looking at the different paths to get there, let's explore the "there" for a second.





Reading this, would you be ready to be a fully competent youth worker today? If you already are a youth worker, are you living up to the standards below? If you set policy, do you provide the necessary means to even be able to live up to all these demands on someone's skill set? If you educate youth workers, are you covering all these dimensions of competence? Let's go through the check list together.¹¹



Check list:

- ▶ Are you able to communicate with young people; with different stakeholders within and outside your organisation; with partners, funders and policy makers?
- ▶ Do you have good organisational and project management skills? Do you know the administrative processes that come with the occupation of a youth worker? Would you know how to perform them?
- ▶ How are your abilities to facilitate the learning of young people?
- ▶ How are your mentoring, coaching, training and facilitation skills?
- ▶ Can you analyse the needs of young people in your area and youth groups?
- ▶ How are your conflict transformation skills?
- ▶ Would you know how to find information for and with young people about different opportunities they could take advantage of?

11. The check list is inspired by the list of the most common competences required for professional youth workers, based on data from Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, as presented in O'Donovan J. et al., "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers", p. 38, in Taru M., Krzaklewska E. and Basarab T. (eds), *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices* (Youth Knowledge Book #26), Council of Europe and European Commission, April 2020, available at <https://pjp-eucoe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-worker-education-in-europe>.

- ▶ Could you facilitate the personal development of young people, support them to reflect on their feelings and learning experiences, to empower them to believe in themselves and have self-esteem?
- ▶ Would you know how to encourage participation and active citizenship of young people?
- ▶ Could you motivate them, lead them, be deserving of their respect?
- ▶ Would you be good in managing the resources of your organisation and your project, both practically and administratively?
- ▶ Are you able to assess risk and then manage the risk that is inherent in working with youth?
- ▶ Would you be able to work together with colleagues in teams, but also co-operate directly with youth or mentor teams of young people?
- ▶ Are you knowledgeable of the legislative environment where youth work takes place? Do you know about the special rules/permissions for working with some youth groups, about the national, regional and local youth policies and how to involve young people in the policy-making process?
- ▶ How would you evaluate your intercultural competences? Are you able to work inclusively, aware of the diversity you have in your context and how to turn differences into creative potential?
- ▶ Are you a digital native and are your computer skills on par with the young people you might work with? Do you know how they use online spaces and how to reach them?
- ▶ Do you understand how society works, how to analyse and interact with it, which pathways for active citizenship are available for youth and how to navigate the obstacles?
- ▶ Would you know where to start if asked to evaluate learning methods and processes in projects or current youth policies and programmes?
- ▶ If you reflect on your awareness about the ethics of youth work, how deep and informed are these reflections?
- ▶ Are you taking care of your own constant professional and personal development processes? Do you pay attention to prevent yourself from burnout?

So? How did you fare? Could you be a youth worker? Could anybody say yes to all these questions? What needs to change so that the answer to that is yes?¹²

12. There are other documents that describe the competences important for youth workers in much more detail such as the [Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio](#) or the [ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally](#). If you are interested, we invite you to check these out and do a much more thorough self-assessment.



A path through formal education

A recent mapping of youth work practice in Europe found that only six countries have had (at the time of mapping in 2018)¹³ degree-level courses specifically in youth work. Eleven countries¹⁴ offered courses in related fields that are associated with, and provided an educational path into, youth work. There are degree-level courses in social work with a youth focus, social pedagogy and general social work, degrees in social cultural work, social animation, cultural and community education, social and pedagogical care, leisure studies and social education, youth activities and sport or therapeutic education. There are vocational training opportunities as a child- and youth-care worker, as a youth “technician”, a child and youth worker, a recreation leader, or a specialist in youth work, a pedagogical staff member in youth care or socio-cultural worker. The mapping cited here¹⁵ analysed a total of 100 courses (65 BA and 35 MA courses), degrees and training programmes from 16 countries¹⁶ that provided a structured and recognised path towards becoming a youth worker. The majority of these programmes have a caritative or preventive nature, rather than an emancipatory one. This means that they focus on the social dimension, supporting at-risk youth and contextualising youth work as a preventive measure for substance abuse or risky lifestyles. Active citizenship and empowerment are rarely the focus of these programmes.

13. These were Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (England and Wales).
14. Bulgaria, Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Romania.
15. Kovacic M., Baketa N. and Grubisic-Cabo M., “Mapping youth studies curricula: what is formal education in the field of youth studies saying about young people?”, Chapter 6 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.
16. Mapped courses are in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

What becomes apparent is the overlapping between the title of “youth worker” and other professions that include working with young people. This is a common and recurring feature in the youth field. Not everyone who is working with young people has a degree in youth work and not everyone who has a degree in youth work or an associated degree is working daily with young people. Recognition of youth work and the value of the profession for a community are closely linked to a formalised educational path to it. By offering degree-level education to become a youth worker, the community offering it also awards status and recognition to the profession overall. On the other hand, formal education can also be motivated by other factors, such as regulation, increasing comparability and limiting the openness of a professional field. The youth work field is not and should not be simply a recipient of curricula and formally awarded recognition in the form of a degree, but rather a partner and driver of creating formal education opportunities for youth workers that resonate with the needs of young people in Europe.



Finland provides a vocational (upper secondary) qualification (120 study weeks) that can also be acquired as a competence-based qualification in youth and leisure instruction. Norway has a four-year course for training child and youth workers, comprising two years in upper secondary schools and two years in apprenticeships, while Sweden has a two-year course for recreation leaders, which is provided by the Swedish folk high schools.

Germany has a number of degree-level courses in social work with a focus on “youth work”, “child/youth work” and “youth in theory and practice of social work”. Courses in social pedagogy and social work in both Germany and Austria are paths into youth work as they are in the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.

Malta has degree-level courses specifically in youth work, mainly focusing on youth and community work. The country provides both a primary degree and master’s degree course as well as a course in youth ministry, which entitles the graduates to a youth worker warrant.

Non-formal pathways

What sets youth work apart from most other fields is the ratio to which NFE is a part of the professional journey. Since a large proportion of youth work is done through NFE, the path of most youth workers includes lots of time in NFE activities as a participant and lots of training about NFE through NFE.

Where we can see a lot of differentiation across Europe is in who provides, who funds and who (if at all) accredits the competences gained through participation in NFE.

NFE learning opportunities are provided by state-supported bodies or institutions, by the voluntary youth sector, as well as by European support programmes. Often these are interwoven and interdependent, of course. A youth organisation, for example, implements a non-formal learning programme, which is financed by a nation state, a regional governmental body, or European programmes such as Erasmus+ or the youth programme of the Council of Europe. Some large youth organisations do have the resources to fund, implement and accredit their own learning paths (scouts, some faith-based organisations, large student-exchange



organisations, etc.). The European Commission and the Council of Europe also run some of their own non-formal learning programmes, through the SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres as well as the European Youth Centres. In addition, there are state-supported bodies or institutions that also implement their own educational programmes and training opportunities. The question of how and by whom these are then validated and recognised is another issue. The [Youthpass](#) is an important validation tool for non-formal learning opportunities at the European level. However, each organisation and several countries have their own mechanism for certifying, validating and recognising NFE learning, such as the Juleica in Germany or the BAFA (Brevet d’Aptitude aux Fonctions d’Animateur – childcare aptitude certificate) in France.



The Youth Work Foundation in Liechtenstein and the National Youth Service in Luxembourg provide courses on an annual basis that are obligatory for professional youth workers.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Community in Belgium issues youth worker certificates after completion of an approved training programme, the Kadervorming. The National Institute for Further Education in the Czech Republic provides courses annually for youth workers. A “Youth worker” national education programme is provided at both national and regional level in Ukraine. In Malta, the national youth agency is the main provider of training. In Austria, training institutes run by the federal regions offer basic and more advanced courses for youth workers, sometimes in co-operation with tertiary education institutions.

In Germany, a vast number of courses for specialists in child and youth services are provided by regional youth offices, socio-pedagogical further education institutions, youth organisations and associations. There were over 32 000 Juleica (Jugendleiter/In-Card – a national standardised card for voluntary youth workers) in 2016. In France, the BAFA is a recognised certificate that the member organisations of the Committee for International Relations and National Associations of Youth and Popular Education (CNAJEP – Comité pour les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d’éducation populaire) provide training opportunities for.



Thinking together – Questions to look past the now

Are the educational opportunities in your context sufficient to prepare aspiring youth workers for this complex, multi-layered and challenging work? What needs improvement?

In which ways can practice, policy and the education sector make it easier for youth workers to become equipped with the competences needed?

What was your path personally, to now be involved with youth work? What were the key moments that set and/or changed your trajectory? What were the milestones on your path? What would you have liked to learn but didn't have a chance to? What opportunities for professional development do you see ahead of you? Which opportunities for professional development exist for youth workers in your context?

How many funders of youth worker education do you know about? Is there predominantly one exclusive funder or different ones? From your perspective, how can the different bodies that implement, fund and accredit educational programmes co-operate better with each other?

What learning opportunities are there that help professionalise the field of youth work and set young people on a path towards a career in youth work? Which learning opportunities are missing?

How do you assess the effectiveness of the educational pathways that youth workers have in the area of your influence? What gaps do you see?

How are non-formal educational programmes for development of youth work competences recognised in your context?

In what ways are the programmes for youth workers that are established through policy connected, intersecting and mutually benefiting each other and how can this synergy be improved?

In what ways do you see the interdependence of formal and non-formal aspects of youth work professional development? What do youth workers need in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be excellent and through what experiences can this learning be best provided?

Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field

What should change in education paths to youth work in your context? Why? What would education paths look like in an ideal scenario?

Define the nature of changes you are proposing to implement.

Consider (in consultation with other actors) the steps you could take to initiate such changes.

You can do a similar mapping exercise for your local community. Who becomes a youth worker and how? What are their pathways? What support and obstacles do they have?

Once you have a good understanding, look at how obstacles can be removed, for whom, by whom and how. What steps are needed to achieve this?

How would the change(s) you propose be known to, accepted and supported by different actors?

Which support might you need to initiate and sustain such changes? How could you access this support?

Consider whether European-level policy developments and/or European-level actors, knowledge and resources could be useful for your process of initiating any such changes.

Chapter 5

A job or a career? How employment perspectives, educational opportunities and recognition come together

The lack of identifiable employment and career paths for youth workers can be attributed to a number of factors, most prominently the lack of recognition of the job category of youth worker on the part of governments in some countries, extending to a perceived lack of a visible career path and/or insufficient levels of financial support for those who do enter the profession.¹⁷

Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples



Let's imagine youth workers at a European meeting discussing a new collaborative youth work project idea. They are fully on board with the idea but are stuck with determining the appropriate level of engagement for each partner. Some youth workers are employed full time and see no difficulties in prioritising this new project and engaging with it as part of their everyday work, while the others who are also working full time have no extra time to make for the new project. Some youth workers are employed part time on a project basis, have no clear position and space for work and would need the funding for their engagement to be calculated as part of the new project. Some are volunteer youth workers in their context and can't imagine more than an hour or two weekly for their engagement as youth workers overall, including the new project. One partner claims they can't be called youth workers as this occupation doesn't exist in their context. While they are trying to figure out how to make a fair plan which is relevant for young people in these different contexts, they realise that in each case there is room for improvement.

17. O'Donovan J. et al., "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers", and in Chapter 2 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.

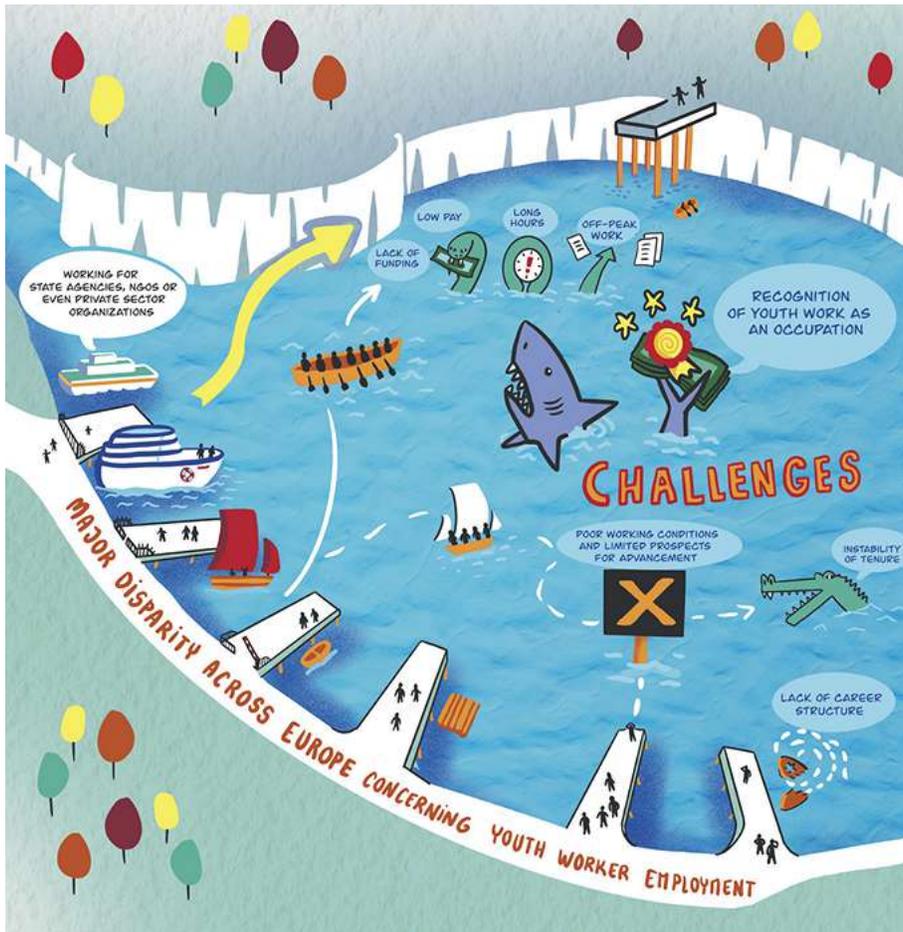


When you look at the youth workers' employment status and career opportunities, you come across several poles: the voluntary versus paid youth workers divide, state-financed provision of youth work versus the voluntary youth sector, project-based provision of youth work, internal motivation to become a youth worker based on positive experience as a participant in youth work activities versus social motivation based on a wish to help young people. Perhaps you are drawn to some of these poles more than to others. Either way, if you want to influence greater sustainability, as well as clarity in the youth work field, particularly for those navigating it as youth workers, then you are in the right place.

Findings from research indicate that across Europe, career paths for youth workers are mainly non-identifiable and they often overlap with other occupations and professions. In some countries and regions youth work can be a long-term professional career with possibilities for career advancement, and in others youth work is mostly done on a voluntary basis. Overall, youth work career prospects are fairly grim, while employment prospects are somewhat better. The number of youth workers employed or registered as employed varies widely across Europe. Youth Knowledge Book #26 offers examples and resources, and opportunities for those of you seeking change to explore the ways in which youth work practice is organised and by whom it is provided in different contexts, and to find inspiration for yours. There is no single recipe, but there are plenty of ingredients that you can learn about, reflect on in relation to your context and consider when you take action.

Employment and career

The career paths for youth workers across Europe are characterised by poor working conditions and limited prospects for advancement. Most of these pathways include working for state agencies, volunteer organisations and NGOs that have young people as their client group, in the areas of education, health and leisure. Youth workers identify as the main challenge exactly this lack of recognition of youth work



as an occupation. Additionally, challenges reported by youth workers are instability of tenure, lack of funding, low pay, long hours, off-peak work and a lack of career structure.

Representative and support structures for youth workers usually work for the improvement of working conditions, for investment in career development and recognition of qualifications. However, their role, nature and features are determined by the status and role of youth work in these countries and by the extent to which youth work is embedded and has a history in these countries and the support and recognition it gets, particularly from the state. In some instances, associations of youth workers are effectively subsumed into associations of social workers and teachers and in some they are effectively trade unions with the consequent bargaining power with employers in the state and private sectors.



For instance, in Finland, the Youth and Sports Experts Association (Nuoris- ja Liikunta-alan asiantuntijat ry, NUOLI) is a trade union and professional association focused on the well-being of its members in terms of pay, employment security and prospects, working conditions and associated benefits and support. It provides practical ethical guidance tools for everyday youth work practice. The NUOLI has some 1 300 members (approximately half in employment and half in training) in the country with a population of 5.5 million. While in Serbia, the National Association of Youth Workers (Nacionalna asocijacija praktičara/ki omladinskog rada, NAPOR) is a union of civil society organisations (CSOs). It has undertaken a very broad and varied role in relation to youth work and youth workers, including legislation, standards, quality, curriculum, training and validation. NAPOR has a code of ethics as well as an ethics council to monitor and make recommendations on ethical issues. NAPOR brings together 90 CSOs and over 2 250 youth workers in the country with a population of 7 million.

There is a major disparity in the scale of youth worker employment across Europe and employment recording mechanisms. Important fields where youth workers find employment include health, education and the broad field of civic society organisations, which are also not necessarily youth focused. Youth workers across Europe mainly find employment in youth centres, places providing advice, young people's health services, NGOs, the voluntary sector, leisure, after-school support, as well as recently in refugee projects and tourism. European-level projects are also contributing to professionalising youth work and international agencies are also offering alternate career paths. There are evident challenges in accessing jobs particularly connected with the question of recognition of youth work as an occupation and profession. The "usual" career path is that youth workers start in the voluntary sector, then progress towards employment in state agencies or NGOs.



Thinking together – Questions to look past the now

Look at youth work as an occupation in your context. What challenges are reported by youth workers in terms of employment and career prospects?

You may want to look more specifically at:

- ▶ working conditions:
 - pay range;
 - working hours;
- ▶ variety of employment possibilities:
 - types of employers;
 - thematic areas and sectors;
- ▶ stability of employment:
 - type of contract;
 - availability of funding;
- ▶ opportunities for advancement and career structure;
- ▶ availability of youth work support and representative structures.



Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field

What would employment and career opportunities for youth workers ideally look like in your context?

Define the nature of changes you are proposing to implement.

Consider (in consultation with other actors) the steps you could take to initiate these changes.

What kind of support might you need to initiate and sustain the intended changes? How could you access it?

Consider whether European-level policy developments and/or European-level actors, knowledge and resources could be useful for your process of initiating any such changes.

Chapter 6

Never stop learning: the importance of lifelong development for youth workers

To become an expert, autonomous and reflective youth worker, education alone does not suffice. In addition to theoretical knowledge, one needs to accumulate experiences and be integrated into the community of youth workers.¹⁸

Taking the wide view – Structures, policies, examples

In many professions there is a clear differentiation between the educational path towards being a qualified practitioner, on the one hand, and engaging in continued education and training to maintain professional standards, on the other. Youth work differs in so many ways. While in most professions, week(end)-long training courses are part of their continued education, it is how many youth workers across Europe have gained almost all of their professional competences, along, of course, with the actual experience of implementing youth work activities with young people.

Just as the educational path to become a professional youth worker is guided by quality standards and frameworks, continued education is embedded in the same ecosystem of ideas of what a good youth worker is, and thus what youth workers need to be equipped with, in order to provide the highest quality of youth work with and for the young people they work with.

National standards can vary in the kinds of documents they are documented in, who they are about (youth work as a whole, or just some of its areas) and who created them.

18. O'Donovan J. et al., "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers", and in Chapter 2 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.



For instance, the Estonian Youth Work Centre has developed an occupational standard for youth workers as well as a quality framework to assess youth work at the municipal level. Ireland adopted the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) in 2010 and the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups (NQSFLYG) in 2013. Both focus on the quality of youth work provision. NAPOR in Serbia has introduced national occupational standards and portfolios.

The early part of the professional career of a youth worker could be called the induction phase. This is when youth workers fully become part of the community of practice, develop a commitment and an identity that is shaped by and directed towards this community and find their own way of doing the work. This is a parallel process, which includes, on the one hand, becoming more embedded into the professional community, its values, ethos and tacit knowledge. On the other hand, a personal way of doing things is created, relating to the young people worked with and creating a personal set of reference experiences. Particularly in the early part of a youth worker's professional life, these will very dynamically shift from more community engagement to more personal development.

During this induction phase youth workers rely on different mechanisms to find the support they need. Mentoring models can provide peer support from colleagues as well as more formal mentoring and required evaluations by supervisors. There are, however, few common practices across Europe. Even within the same country, region or city, individual experiences with mentoring can vary a lot. In the end, it depends on the organisational context in which youth work takes place, if the resources, attention, competence and motivation exist to systematically support early-career youth workers through mentoring and intentional "learning on the job".

Youth workers taking part in focus groups¹⁹ talked about how important the mentoring relationship can be throughout the induction phase. The absence of a proper support system can be an important factor in diminished work satisfaction, burnout and career changes. Given that youth work can be an emotionally intense job, peer coaching, supervision and competent mentoring by supervisors can be quite foundational for the health of a professional community that does such important societal work.

Role of youth workers' representative and support structures

Many actors have an important role and valuable contribution in creating and nurturing the ecosystem of youth work and for providing youth workers with the continuous education and learning possibilities that are needed to do this. Representative and support structures of youth workers (namely youth workers' associations, networks and support organisations) promote youth work as a professional practice, support the development of youth workers and provide a platform

19. Done during the research phase for *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices* (Youth Knowledge Book #26).

for their interests, concerns and aspirations. Such structures were identified in 24 out of 41 countries,²⁰ with varying degrees of capacity to address different issues. Their prospects for sustainability also vary and are influenced by the status and role of youth work in these countries and by the support and recognition particularly from the state. Furthermore, pan-European initiatives exist, seeking through different methods and contexts, to promote both youth work and the interests and concerns of youth workers.



For instance, the [European Confederation of Youth Clubs \(ECYC\)](#) is a European network of 19 nationally represented youth work and youth club organisations in 18 countries that practise and promote open youth work and NFE and reach over 2 million young people annually. To youth workers it provides short-term training and educational resources on youth work-applied topics, always from a transnational, European perspective. The [European Network of Youth Centres \(ENYC\)](#) is a voluntary association of 16 members in 13 countries that aims to develop standards for local, regional and national centres; provide support to individual centres; facilitate study visits and other exchanges so that centres can learn from each other; and promote the study of the processes of intercultural and international learning in non-formal settings. The Council of Europe's [Quality Label for Youth Centres](#) aims to support the dissemination of quality standards for youth centres that have been developed in the [European Youth Centres](#), including quality standards for educational and youth work activities. [Professional Open Youth Work in Europe \(POYWE\)](#) aims to strengthen the position of professional open youth work through heightening its visibility and adopting common approaches to quality development.

Youth workers, whether paid or voluntary, working in a wide range of youth work settings can benefit from information, training, advice and other support provided by associations, networks or umbrella organisations, as well as by a number of bodies whose main task is to support the development of youth work, in general, and which can consequently provide related support to youth workers.

Associations of youth workers are the most common form of organisation among youth workers present in 17 countries,²¹ with widely varying membership levels. Such associations focus, in particular, on the promotion of professional practice, recognition of youth work, ethics and standards, and training and development. The provision of training and development for youth workers is one of the main roles of associations of youth workers, and it is organised in a variety of ways, however, whether in-house or contracted, it tends to be patchy and uneven. Associations also focus on promoting professional practice and recognition of youth work, including issues relating to ethics and standards. In countries in which there is an overlap or a blurring of the lines between youth work and related professions such as social work, child welfare and leisure-time activities, there appears to be a consequent overlap in associations.

20. O'Donovan J., "Associations, networks and support for youth workers in Europe", Chapter 9 in Youth Knowledge Book #26.

21. Associations in the following countries responded well about their practice: Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia and the United Kingdom (England and Wales).



For instance, in Belarus, the Association of Youth Workers comprises some 170 members and does not provide in-house or contracted development and training courses. All activities are voluntary. In Iceland, the Association of Youth Workers has some 200 members, provides training on an ad hoc basis, primarily seminars and study visits, but rarely provides training courses. In Malta, the Association of Youth Workers specifically focuses on two outcomes for youth work and youth workers: state support and professionalisation, while, Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, the national youth agency, is the main provider of training.

Networks and umbrella organisations of youth organisations, NGOs or centres at national, regional or local level are identified in nine countries.²² They provide information, training, education, support and advice to organisations, NGOs, youth centres, youth clubs, holiday camps and municipalities that provide a wide range of youth work activities and services for young people.



For instance, in France, the CNAJEP brings together over 70 youth movements and ensures that associations are represented in dealings with the public authorities; the JPA (Jeunesse en plein air) is a confederation of informal education NGOs promoting holidays for all children, while UNAT (Union Nationale des Associations de Tourisme et de Plein Air) is a national union of social tourism NGOs. Some 200 organisations in France also provide training for those working with children and young people. In Luxembourg, the Entente des Gestionnaires des Maisons de Jeunes, an umbrella organisation comprising 37 institutions that manage 69 youth centres or service providers, organises seminars, workshops and training for the staff of the member institutions. It also provides information and assistance for the member institutions concerning finances, accounting and insurance. In Slovenia, a network of youth centres, MaMa, comprising 47 member associations provides information, networking, professional support and NFE, and represents the interests of its member associations in relation to the government sector. In Sweden, KEKS (Kvalitet och kompetens i samverkan) is a network of municipalities – 43 out of a total of 290 municipalities in Sweden – and organisations that practise open youth work, and it supports them with training, seminars and coaching. While Fritidsledarskolorna is an association for high schools that offers youth work training, Fritidsforum is an association for recreation centres and youth clubs that also provide training for youth workers.

The primary function of bodies and structures is supporting and promoting youth work. They have a particular focus and purpose whether relating to the training and development for youth workers in supporting vulnerable young people, promoting good professional practice, providing information, recognising the values of youth work and through advocacy and lobbying.

22. Networks and umbrella organisations in the following countries responded well about their practice: Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.



For instance, in Belgium (Flemish Community), De Ambrassade supports 106 youth work organisations that are officially recognised under the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012. It is a youth support structure relating to practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about the youth sector. In Liechtenstein, the Youth Work Foundation conducts training seminars, which are obligatory for its youth workers. It also pays half the costs for youth workers attending external courses. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, the Training Agencies' Group (TAG) is a network for those delivering youth worker education and training, which also provides seed funding for additional training and learning events. In Finland, Allianssi is a national service and politically and religiously non-aligned lobbying organisation for youth work with more than 100 national youth and educational organisations as members.

With many examples outlined here and even more thoroughly described in Youth Knowledge Book #26,²³ it is clear that associations and networks of youth workers can take on many forms in response to different contexts, situations and needs.



Thinking together – Questions to look past the now

Look at the youth work field in your context. Who are the actors you can identify?

You may want to look more specifically at how successfully and who:

- ▶ advocates and promotes the values and role of youth work;
- ▶ provides relevant peer-to-peer learning and support to youth workers;
- ▶ promotes professional ethics and instils self-esteem and pride in youth workers.

If no such actors are identified, what alternatives can youth workers find?

Where can youth workers turn to if they need help thinking through professional challenges?

In their professional career, where might youth workers meet mentors, trainers, coaches or peers that can have a positive impact on their work and work satisfaction?

What policies, framework or support systems would need to be in place to foster mentoring opportunities for early-career youth workers?

What competences would youth workers need to:

- ▶ enter the field of youth work;
- ▶ be ready to seek mentoring opportunities;
- ▶ be ready to offer peer coaching and support;
- ▶ take steps in the organisational design and management of their workplace to ensure a thriving mentoring culture?

23. Available at <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-worker-education-in-europe>.

Leading change – Concrete steps to advance the field

What would support to youth workers ideally look like in your context? What could or should potential representatives and support structures of youth workers do? How should they be supported?

Define the nature of the changes you are proposing to implement.

Consider (in consultation with other actors) the steps you could take to initiate these changes.

What are the steps you can take to set up a mentoring system for the people who work as youth workers, both employed and volunteers?

Is peer coaching, supervision and mentoring part of the education and training youth workers are receiving in your context? If not, what are the steps you can take to make it so?

What other growth opportunities for youth workers can and should be explored in your context?

What kind of support might you need to bring about such changes? How could you access this support?

Consider whether European-level policy developments and/or European-level actors, knowledge and resources could be useful for your process of initiating any such changes.

Chapter 7

Resources

There is a wealth of incredibly valuable information out there that digs deeper into many of the topics that are touched upon here. If you want to learn more and go deeper, we recommend the following resources.

Quality in youth work

A European Charter on Local Youth Work

The Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres

Improving youth work – your guide to quality development

O'Donovan J., Promoting quality in youth work practice in Europe, 2020

Validation and recognition of youth work

National structures responsible for creating a framework for youth policy and its implementation (information collected between May-November 2017)

Other forms of national recognition for youth work

Visible value – Recognition of youth work

Youth policy

National/regional legislation on youth work

Youthwiki: Europe encyclopedia of National Youth Policies

EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership's contribution to EU Youth Wiki on Erasmus+ partner countries

Williamson H., Frás M. and Lavchyan Z., *ABOUT TIME! A reference manual for youth policy from a European perspective*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg 2021

Hofmann-van de Poll F. and Williamson H., *European Youth Strategies - A reflection and analysis*, 2021

Expert group on researching education and career paths of youth workers

Perspective on Youth Work Developments – Country fact sheets

Evelyn-Rannala I., Stojanovic J. and Kovacic M., *European youth work policy goals analysed*

Official texts, resolutions, conventions and policies

Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work

Youth work in the spotlight – Guide to Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on youth work

EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027

Council of Europe Youth sector strategy 2030

Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda 2020/C 415/01

European Youth Work Agenda

Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention – Signposts for the future

Research shows how diverse youth work has evolved in different countries and regions. This is reflected in the definitions, the regulatory environment, changes in accessing formal and non-formal education and qualifications, mentoring and career support programmes and quality development of the whole ecosystem. Starting from this reality and aiming to support the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, this edition of Insights into developing the youth work environment translates the knowledge gained in Europe over the last decades into a hands-on support tool.

The publication is designed to support change makers at national and local levels as they carry out an assessment of where youth work stands and how to plan the way forward. This publication includes a short background, good practice examples, as well as questions for reflection, guidance and checklists. It complements the Youth Work Essentials and the massive open online courses (MOOC), Knowledge Books, T-Kits, Visible Value library and other capacity-building and support tools for youth work development offered by the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int>
youth-partnership@partnership-eu.coe.int

The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

<http://europa.eu>

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

www.coe.int



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE