

Youth Partnership

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



Final Report

Regional seminar Advocating for youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe

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Executive Summary

This report encapsulates the key outcomes of the Regional seminar Advocating for youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe, held from 29–30 October 2024 in Skopje, North Macedonia. Gathering 58 participants from various sectors, the seminar emphasized advancing youth work development, addressing regional needs, and preparing for the 4th European Youth Work Convention (4th EYWC) that will take place in Malta in May 2025.

The seminar delved into critical areas shaping youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe today. Topics such as youth work recognition, mental health, climate change, and artificial intelligence (AI) were thoroughly discussed. A significant focus was placed on transforming brain drain into brain circulation by leveraging the skills of mobile youth to foster regional growth. Mental health emerged as another pressing issue, with innovative practices like Living Libraries in Bosnia and Herzegovina and standardized training programs in Serbia being showcased. Discussions on climate change emphasized the role of youth-led initiatives and localized advocacy, while AI sessions highlighted the need for ethical considerations and competency frameworks to ensure responsible integration into youth work. Sessions focused on youth work legislation highlighted the critical need for formal recognition of the youth worker profession in countries where such acknowledgment remains absent.

Participants shared a wide array of projects and practices that underscored both achievements and challenges in the field. Notable examples included the formal recognition of youth work professions in Serbia and Moldova, the participatory development of a youth policy law in Armenia, and tools for measuring the social impact of youth work in Serbia. Innovative approaches were also highlighted, such as hybrid youth centers in Georgia and initiatives integrating technology into youth work in North Macedonia. These examples reflected a growing momentum toward formalizing and professionalizing youth work across the Eastern and Southeast Europe.

The seminar's discussions also provided an updated analysis of the evolving needs and priorities within youth work. Persistent challenges remain in achieving formal recognition and adequate funding for youth work in underrepresented parts of the two regions. Advocacy efforts need to focus on creating robust national policies, particularly in countries like Türkiye and Armenia, where existing frameworks are limited. Capacity-building emerged as a consistent priority, with training programs integrating emerging themes such as mental health, climate change, and digital transformation. Furthermore, the importance of cross-border collaboration was emphasized, as regional alliances and partnerships have demonstrated significant potential for addressing shared challenges.

In preparation for the 4th EYWC, several recommendations were put forward. It is crucial to incorporate regional contexts into the convention's agenda, showcasing the unique challenges and successes of Eastern and Southeast Europe. Promoting youth advocacy is equally important, with tools like the Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development serving as a cornerstone for empowering youth workers to influence policy effectively. Strengthening cross-border cooperation and fostering partnerships will further enhance the impact of youth work, while emerging themes like mental health, climate action, and AI must be prioritized to reflect the changing needs of young people. Ensuring inclusive participation from youth workers, policymakers, and marginalized groups will

also be essential to the convention's success. The international donor community has been acknowledged as playing an indispensable role as a major stakeholder in the youth field across both Eastern and Southeast Europe.

Effective advocacy and communication strategies were another focal point of the seminar. Participants emphasized the importance of evidence-based advocacy, using robust data to highlight the social impact of youth work. Tailored, localized engagement strategies were also highlighted, with Moldova and Italy providing exemplary models. Strategic alliances, as demonstrated by joint frameworks in the Western Balkans region, showcased the power of collaborative efforts in amplifying the voice of youth workers.

This summary provides a cohesive overview of the seminar's outcomes and sets the stage for leveraging these insights in the preparations for the 4th EYWC. For readers seeking a deeper understanding, the detailed discussions, analyses, and project examples are thoroughly documented in the full report. It reflects the collective commitment to strengthening youth work across Eastern and Southeast Europe and advancing the regions' recognition as a vital component of societal development of Europe as a whole.

Introduction to the Report

The seminar titled Advocating for youth work in Eastern and South-East Europe was organized to strengthen the youth work community of practice within the framework of the European Youth Work Agenda. This event was a continuation of the Youth Partnership's efforts to foster collaboration, capacity-building, and dialogue among youth workers, policymakers, and researchers in Eastern and Southeast Europe.

The event brought together 58 participants from the youth work community of practice, including: researchers, policy makers from local to regional level, representatives of associations of youth workers, public sector, paid and volunteer youth workers, youth organisations delivering youth work, youth representatives, young people, etc. This event was only open for citizens or residents of Council of Europe member states or Kazakhstan or the Holy See.

Background

The 2024–2025 period marks a critical phase in the Youth Partnership's commitment to advancing youth work development across Europe. Key initiatives during this period focus on:

1. **Supporting the 4th European Youth Work Convention (4th EYWC):** Preparing stakeholders for meaningful participation in this milestone event.
2. **Fostering Dialogue:** Strengthening connections within the youth work community of practice at the European level and specifically in Eastern and Southeast Europe.
3. **Capacity Building:** Enhancing the skills and resources of youth workers, policy advocates, and researchers.
4. **Research and Knowledge Production:** Conducting studies and producing publications to support evidence-based advancements in youth work.

This seminar aimed to ensure the continuity of dialogue in Eastern and Southeast Europe, building on lessons learned from prior activities, research, and publications to address the region's specific needs.

Aim and Objectives

The seminar provided a platform for:

- **Sustained Dialogue:** Facilitating ongoing discussions within the youth work community of practice in Eastern and Southeast Europe regarding emerging needs, challenges, and the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda.
- **Sharing Information:** Disseminating updates on political processes and the latest developments in youth work at both national and European levels.
- **Guidance and Support:** Informing participants about available European tools, resources, and institutional support, particularly those developed by the Youth Partnership and its associated organizations.

- **Good Practices:** Highlighting and sharing successful strategies and examples of youth work development, with a special emphasis on advocacy and communication with decision-makers and public authorities.

Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

The seminar aimed to achieve the following deliverables for 2024:

1. **A Regional Seminar:** Bringing together youth policymakers, workers, and researchers, alongside stakeholders from other sectors, to facilitate knowledge-sharing and prepare delegations from the two regions for the 4th EYWC.
2. **Audiovisual Resources:** Creating podcasts, graphic recordings, and visual highlights to disseminate the seminar's key messages effectively.
3. **Updated Analysis:** Providing a comprehensive review of the evolving needs and policy changes in youth work within the two regions.
4. **Collection of Good Practices:** Compiling examples of successful youth work strategies, particularly those fostering dialogue with decision-makers and advancing advocacy efforts.

This report provides a detailed account of the seminar, documenting the discussions, outcomes, and actionable recommendations to further the development of youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe. It also highlights how the event contributed to the broader goals of the European Youth Work Agenda and its preparation for the 4th EYWC.

Day 1: Opening Session

(9:30–11:00)

The opening session of the seminar began with a warm welcome from **Oleg Soldatov**, Head of the Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje. In his remarks, Soldatov emphasized the critical importance of including young people in decision-making processes. He highlighted how such inclusion enhances transparency and enriches political processes, a point strongly reiterated in a recent session of the Council of Europe Congress. His address set the tone for a seminar focused on the challenges and achievements in youth work across Eastern and Southeast Europe.

Following this, **László Milutinovits**, Senior Project Officer from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, introduced the seminar program and the team. He encouraged participants to share practices and ideas from their regions, underlining the importance of collaboration and mutual inspiration to advance youth work practices across diverse contexts.

The session continued with a dynamic introduction and networking activity. Participants were invited to share updates about their work and achievements, fostering a sense of community among the diverse group of attendees. They then broke into smaller groups to discuss and reflect on key developments in their respective regions. Each group documented their discussions on flipcharts, which were later presented in plenary for collective insights.

Participants' Contributions

Participants provided valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in youth work development. They explored a wide range of themes, with several key points emerging:

Challenges in Youth Work

- **Gökay Özerim**, a member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR), highlighted the barriers to youth mobility, particularly for refugees and migrants. Issues such as brain drain, restrictive visa policies, and widespread mental health crises were identified as significant hurdles. Despite these challenges, Özerim noted the potential of mobility programs in addressing these issues and promoting inclusive pathways for young people.
- **Gabriel Brezoiu** from Association GEYC pointed out the disconnect between national legislation and the realities faced by young people. He stressed the need for greater public funding, formal recognition of youth work, and tailored training to make youth work a viable and attractive profession.

Gaps in Recognition and Education

- **Nik Paddison**, a freelance writer and trainer in youth work from Odd Socks doo, raised a thought-provoking question: Is education or recognition of youth work as a profession more critical? He observed that while some countries prioritize one or the other, many still lack both, underscoring the need for systemic reform.

Regional Strategies and Policies

- A participant from Georgia offered a comparative perspective, noting that while Serbia, Georgia, and North Macedonia have youth action plans for 2023–2030, the level of recognition for youth work varies significantly. For instance, Serbia and Bulgaria recognize youth work as an occupation, but Georgia faces ongoing struggles to achieve formal recognition despite new laws on youth participation and policy.
- **Tomislav Gajtanoski**, representing the Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA from North Macedonia, shared three noteworthy developments:
 1. The creation of a European Alliance for Youth Workers in March 2024, an initiative open to new members and designed to empower emerging youth movements.
 2. The rise of the Prizma European Network, which focuses on digital youth work and hybrid tools, highlighting the growing importance of integrating technology into youth work.
 3. The success of annual youth work 4th EYWCs, such as those held in Romania, which provide a platform for youth workers to discuss the future of the sector both nationally and internationally.

Youth in Conflict Zones

- **Anna Lodeserto**, from Ca' Foscari University Venice and Association Blank Pages Global e.V., drew attention to the unique challenges faced by youth in conflict zones such as

Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia. She emphasized the need for targeted research and support mechanisms to address the difficulties faced by young people in occupied territories. Motivation among these youth remains high, but sustaining it requires substantial effort. Lodeserto also highlighted the importance of non-formal education and mobility programs, particularly in Moldova, as documented in the Youth Wiki chapter developed by EU4Youth focal points.

The session concluded with a sense of shared purpose among participants, who recognized the diverse challenges faced across regions while also identifying actionable opportunities to advance youth work. The discussions served as a strong foundation for the rest of the seminar, setting the stage for deeper exploration of advocacy and development in the youth sector.

Youth Work Developments in Europe

(11:30–13:00)

The session began with an exploration of the evolving landscape of youth work policy across Europe, featuring presentations from **Marius Schlageter** (Council of Europe), **Charalampos Papaioannou** (European Commission), and **László Milutinovits** (EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership).

Marius Schlageter, Policy Advisor from the Council of Europe, opened the discussion by situating youth work at the intersection of democracy and societal engagement. He underlined that youth work is not merely a tool for fostering participation but is fundamental to strengthening democracy itself. Schlageter noted that democracy cannot thrive without active citizens, and youth work serves as a vital mechanism for instilling these values.

The Council of Europe, he explained, operates within three core domains to support this vision. Firstly, it emphasizes recognition of youth work across its 46 member states. This includes revising and implementing recommendations from the Council of Ministers to strengthen youth work policies and practices. Secondly, non-formal education and youth activism are promoted as cornerstones of effective youth work. Lastly, Schlageter highlighted the support provided through initiatives like the **European Youth Foundation**, which offers grants for youth organizations to implement impactful projects.

He also provided examples of advisory missions that the Council of Europe conducts with member states. In Latvia, for instance, the government sought advice on recognizing and professionalizing youth work, which led to enhanced quality assurance mechanisms in the sector. Schlageter concluded by outlining upcoming milestones, including the 4th EYWC, which will convene young people to address gaps and opportunities in youth work. This will be followed by a ministerial meeting where youth-related outcomes will be endorsed by member states.

Charalampos Papaioannou, Policy Officer at the European Commission's Youth Unit, elaborated on the European Union's commitment to advancing youth work through the **European Youth Work Agenda** adopted in 2020. He highlighted the agenda's focus on improving quality, fostering innovation, and ensuring cohesion across member states. Despite these efforts, Papaioannou acknowledged that youth work remains underrecognized in many parts of Europe.

The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges, including mental health issues among young people, which have since become a key area for policy intervention. Papaioannou emphasized the need for updated tools and policies tailored to the post-pandemic era. He referenced flagship programs such as **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps**, which have been instrumental in promoting youth mobility and skills development. Between 2021 and 2023, over 77,000 youth workers received training through Erasmus+, demonstrating the EU's significant investment in capacity building.

He also noted the importance of reaching underserved areas, such as rural and remote regions. Initiatives like the **Youth Wiki**, a comprehensive resource on youth work in 34 European countries, were designed to bridge knowledge gaps and provide updated information to practitioners and decision-makers. Looking ahead, Papaioannou previewed a forthcoming debate in Malta on the post-2027 EU strategy for youth, which aims to empower young people through new projects and programs.

László Milutinovits, Senior Project Officer from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, closed the session by outlining the partnership's role as a hub for supporting youth work processes. He emphasized their ongoing preparations for the 4th EYWC, which will feature discussions informed by a background reader and expert contributions. Milutinovits highlighted the partnership's efforts to ensure diverse representation, including participation from countries without National Agencies under Erasmus+.

During the Q&A session, participants raised concerns about potential budget cuts to Erasmus+ and the implications for non-EU regions such as the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership. Papaioannou assured attendees that no final decisions had been made regarding budget allocations but encouraged civil society organizations to remain actively engaged in advocacy and dialogue with decision-makers.

Milutinovits concluded by reaffirming the partnership's commitment to enhancing youth work practices through capacity-building initiatives, thematic seminars, and strategic collaborations, all aimed at advancing the field in the years ahead.

Q&A Highlights

The presentations were followed by an engaging Q&A session, where participants voiced critical concerns regarding funding, accessibility, and the future direction of European youth work programs.

Question 1: Kristijan Orešković, Croatian Youth Network, raised concerns about draft proposals suggesting significant cuts to the Erasmus+ budget. He asked: **To whom should we lobby to prevent the Erasmus+ budget from being cut by €295 million?**

- **Charalampos Papaioannou**, Policy Officer at the European Commission, responded briefly, explaining that while discussions about potential budget reductions are ongoing, no final decisions have been made. He noted that the European Parliament is still deliberating the proposals, and new commissioners are undergoing hearings. "It is too early to predict the outcomes," he remarked, urging participants to remain vigilant and proactive in advocating for the program's preservation.

Question 2: Adina Halilović from the PRONI Center for Youth Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighted the limited access to Erasmus+ for non-EU regions. She asked: **Will Erasmus+ become more accessible to the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership in its next phase?**

- Papaioannou acknowledged these challenges and emphasized that the current structural framework of Erasmus+ cannot be changed until the new programming period begins. However, he encouraged active participation from stakeholders in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions during upcoming consultations to ensure their needs are adequately reflected in future program designs.

Question 3: Mariam Gharagyozyan from the Youth Initiative Center Armenia expressed concern about potential changes to the European Solidarity Corps. She asked: **What is the future of the European Solidarity Corps, particularly for countries that may no longer be eligible to send participants?**

- Papaioannou reassured attendees that the European Solidarity Corps remains a priority for the European Commission. He emphasized the importance of collaboration between civil society organizations and national and local authorities, as well as engagement with EU offices. Such partnerships, he explained, are vital to ensuring the sustained inclusion of all eligible countries in the program.

Closing Remarks

To conclude the session, **László Milutinovits**, Senior Project Officer from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, elaborated on the partnership's central role in supporting youth work processes across Europe. He outlined ongoing efforts to enhance youth work, including preparations for the 4th EYWC in Malta. Key activities include:

- Organizing steering group meetings and collaborative initiatives with national agencies, European Solidarity Corps, SALTO centers, and alliances of youth organizations.
- Planning a large-scale seminar in January to expand knowledge-sharing and representation from Erasmus+ countries, particularly those without National Agencies.
- Developing a background reader and selecting expert contributors to enrich discussions at the 4th EYWC.

Milutinovits emphasized the partnership's commitment to creating inclusive opportunities for youth workers and ensuring the 4th EYWC is a platform for meaningful exchange and progress.

The session highlighted the shared concerns of participants regarding funding, accessibility, and future programming, while underscoring the collective responsibility of stakeholders to advocate for the continued advancement of youth work at all levels.

Youth Work Developments in Eastern and Southeast Europe

(14:30–16:00)

This session featured a dynamic panel discussion aimed at exploring the achievements and challenges of youth work development in Eastern and Southeast Europe. Moderated by **Anna Yeghoyan**, the panel included notable contributions from **Konstanze Schönfeld** (Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, Germany/Netherlands), **Kristina Zimaj** (Freelance Consultant in Youth Programmes, Kosovo), **Adina Halilović** (PRONI Center for Youth Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina), **Maka Sartania** (National Focal Point, EU4Youth, Georgia), and **Mariam Gharagyozyan** (Project Manager, Gyumri Youth Initiative Centre, Armenia).

The session aimed to develop a deeper understanding of youth work developments in these regions, focusing on national achievements and mapping ongoing challenges.

Panel Contributions

Kristina Zimaj was invited to address the measurement of results and the impact of youth work in Kosovo. She emphasized that youth work has been pivotal in equipping young people with critical soft skills. Referring to the Household Survey conducted by the World Bank in Kosovo, Zimaj highlighted how these skills align with what is most in demand by young people. She also pointed to research by the European Youth Forum and the results from her master's thesis, which underscored the central role of non-formal education in cultivating such competencies.

Adina Halilović, representing the PRONI Center for Youth Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussed recent developments in youth work recognition within Bosnia and the broader Western Balkans. She outlined efforts to develop a national framework for youth work, initiated by a key event in Bosnia. Despite these advancements, Halilović noted the absence of a unified approach to youth work across the region, with countries like Serbia and North Macedonia leading in recognition, while Bosnia lags behind. She highlighted PRONI's pioneering efforts, including the establishment of a Youth Work Academy, which she described as instrumental in advancing youth work education and advocacy. A former graduate of the academy, Adna, now leads its curriculum development, illustrating its success in fostering leadership within the sector.

Maka Sartania provided insights into how youth work is governed in Georgia and other Eastern Partnership countries. She noted that youth work responsibilities are distributed across various ministries and youth agencies. The most advanced governance structures, Sartania explained, involve youth agencies operating directly under the prime minister's office. However, while there are certification and professional training programs in some countries, recognition of skills acquired through youth work remains limited. Sartania underscored the potential of non-formal education as an alternative pathway for skill recognition.

Mariam Gharagyozyan spoke about municipal-level youth work initiatives in Armenia. Since 2022, these initiatives have been aligned with the European Youth Work Agenda and have involved local youth work actors. She highlighted programs offering mentoring, training, and study visits for municipal representatives, allowing them to integrate European practices into their local contexts.

Gharagyozyan emphasized that these efforts require extensive advocacy and awareness-raising, with local NGOs playing a central role in driving this change.

Konstanze Schönfeld elaborated on the role of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, emphasizing youth work as a core priority in the Youth Work Strategy 2030. She described youth policy advisory missions, such as those conducted in Latvia and North Macedonia, which assist member states in advancing youth work frameworks. Schönfeld also introduced the Quality Label for Youth Centers, a tool designed to improve youth center activities by establishing clear standards. She noted that five of the 14 recognized youth centers in Europe are in Southeast Europe, reflecting the region's progress in this area.

Q&A Highlights

The panel transitioned into an interactive and thought-provoking Q&A session, where participants raised critical questions about gender disparities, future trends, and the motivation needed to engage young people in youth work. The detailed responses from panelists added rich insights into the challenges and potential solutions for youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe.

Question 1: To kick off the Q&A session, a participant asked: **“What are some of the gender issues in youth work, and where do you see youth work in five years?”**

Kristina Zimaj, began by saying that when envisioning youth work five years from now in the Western Balkans region, it is important to highlight several key aspects of its potential evolution. She remarked, *“I am afraid we will still be talking about the recognition of youth work, even in five years.”*

Kristina anticipates that the scope of youth work may become slightly more diversified. Currently, non-formal education dominates the field, but she noted that other approaches, such as the integration of virtual reality (VR) in youth work, as seen in countries like Ireland, could begin to emerge in the WB region. Additionally, she foresees artificial intelligence (AI) significantly impacting the sector, just as it is affecting other sectors. She also envisions the emergence of new topics in youth work, shaped by societal trends. For instance, she cited mental health as an issue that gained prominence following the pandemic. Referring to the foresight study on the future of youth work conducted by the European Academy on Youth Work, Zimaj commented on one of the potential scenarios from the study: the possibility of youth centers merging into community centers in aging societies. She expressed skepticism about this happening in the Western Balkan region anytime soon, as the region's population remains predominantly young.

Adina Halilović, representing the PRONI Center for Youth Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, addressed the gender dynamics in her country. She explained that youth work in Bosnia has historically been dominated by female volunteers, a reflection of the patriarchal structure of society. However, she emphasized that mixed-gender initiatives often achieve more balanced and impactful results. For example, programs addressing gender-based violence benefit greatly from the active participation of both male and female youth workers, fostering a more holistic approach.

Building on this, **Mariam Gharagyozyan**, Project Manager at the Gyumri Youth Initiative Centre in Armenia, highlighted the stark gender imbalance in her country. She noted that until recently, her organization, Youth Initiative Center had only one male youth worker. Thanks to national training

programs, this number has now risen to three—a modest but meaningful improvement. Gharagyozyan underscored the importance of male involvement in youth work, emphasizing its role in breaking traditional gender norms and enriching the sector.

Maka Sartania, National Focal Point for the EU4Youth program in Georgia, offered a forward-looking perspective. She predicted that artificial intelligence (AI) and other technological innovations would transform youth work in the coming years. Sartania envisioned a more diversified field, where new tools and methods attract a broader range of individuals, including those from underrepresented demographics. Sartania offered a visionary outlook, drawing on ongoing research by the European Academy on Youth Work that deals with how the youth work will look like in 20, 30 or 50 years from now. She speculated that youth work might evolve to integrate public relations and digital engagement tools, making it more adaptive to changing societal needs. Sartania also mentioned the possibility of youth centers merging into community centers in areas with declining youth populations, ensuring their sustainability and relevance.

Question 2: *Andrej Naumovski*, President of the Union for Youth Work in North Macedonia, asked: **“How do you promote, motivate, and inspire young people to pursue careers in youth work? What would be your one sentence to encourage them?”**

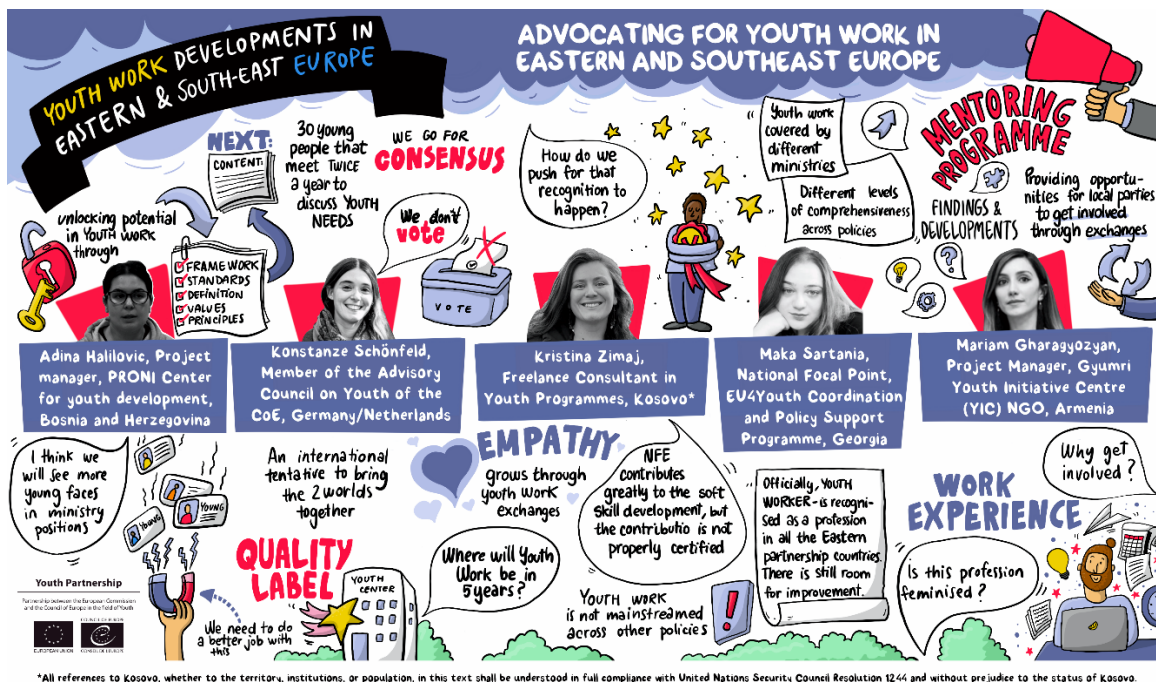
Maka Sartania responded first, describing the role of donor-funded projects in Georgia. She explained that these projects often create clear career pathways by offering job opportunities at the municipal level. Many individuals who enter youth work in Georgia are former beneficiaries of youth programs, motivated by a sense of purpose and a desire to contribute to their communities. “Youth work gives you the chance to make a tangible difference in the lives of others,” she said, summarizing her motivational message.

Adina Halilović shared PRONI’s innovative recruitment approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rather than issuing open calls for applications, PRONI actively seeks out graduates from its Youth Work Academy, offering them tailored opportunities. This personalized strategy not only ensures a high level of motivation among recruits but also strengthens the organization’s capacity with individuals already familiar with its mission and methods.

Mariam Gharagyozyan highlighted the effectiveness of internship programs in Armenia. She described how six-month internships provide young people with hands-on experience in youth work, often leading to professional roles. “Internships are a bridge,” she explained, “allowing young people to gain practical skills and see the real impact they can have.”

Finally, **Konstanze Schönfeld**, a member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, offered a broader perspective. She emphasized the importance of fostering a sense of community among youth workers, framing youth work as more than a career but a lifelong commitment. Schönfeld stressed the importance of creating a sense of community and belonging within the youth work sector. “Many youth workers view this as a lifelong journey,” she remarked, emphasizing that fostering a strong community of practice can inspire individuals to see youth work as more than just a career—it becomes a calling of a lifetime. “When young people see themselves as part of a movement that creates positive change, they are inspired to stay and grow within the field,” she concluded.

This Q&A session served as a critical component of the discussion, bringing diverse perspectives and actionable insights into the challenges and opportunities for youth work in the region. The panelists' responses underscored the sector's potential for growth, while also highlighting the collective responsibility of stakeholders to address its evolving needs.



Youth Work Developments in North Macedonia

(16:30–18:00)

This session explored significant advancements in youth work in North Macedonia, focusing on how these developments were achieved to inspire participants from other countries. Moderated by **Dragan Atanasov**, the panel included prominent contributors: **Marko Gjorgievski** (Director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility), **Sofija Arnaudova** (Coordinator of the Master's Studies in Youth Work, Faculty of Philosophy, Skopje), **Andrej Naumovski** (President of the Union for Youth Work), and **Velika Srbakova** (Youth Worker, Youth Centre Kavadarci).

The session was divided into Panel Contributions and Q&A Highlights, offering actionable insights and engaging discussions.

Panel Contributions

Moderator Dragan Atanasov opened the discussion with the question: **“What are, from your perspective, the most important youth work developments in North Macedonia in recent years? What was crucial for those developments?”**

Sofija Arnaudova emphasized the launch of the Master's Program in Youth Work in North Macedonia as a transformative development. She shared how an international youth study session

inspired the program, which integrates theoretical learning with practical engagement. “All enrolled students are required to work directly with youth in their communities, ensuring that the program creates tangible impact,” she said. Sofija also highlighted the demand for youth workers at the municipal level, stressing the importance of expanding the workforce to meet this need.

Andrej Naumovski pointed to the recognition of “youth worker” as a formal occupation as a key breakthrough. He explained that this milestone included the establishment of a four-month certification program, which has professionalized youth work and fostered collaboration with multiple stakeholders. “This recognition allows us to offer structured training and certification, ensuring that youth workers are equipped to meet the needs of their communities,” he noted.

Velika Srbakova, sharing her perspective as a youth worker, highlighted the success of the Youth Centre Kavadarci, the first public youth center established by a municipality. “Our center is a model for other municipalities, demonstrating how governmental support can drive meaningful engagement and create opportunities for youth,” she stated. Velika emphasized the importance of government recognition for such centers, which are essential for youth development.

Moderator Dragan Atanasov asked Marko Gjorgievski: **“What has been the role of the National Agency in the recent developments, and how has it cooperated with other stakeholders?”**

Marko Gjorgievski explained the role of the National Agency (NA) as a bridge between European Union standards and local practices in North Macedonia. “Although North Macedonia is not an EU member state, the NA has supported youth organizations since its establishment in 2008, primarily through Erasmus+,” he said. Marko described the agency’s efforts to introduce successful EU practices to local municipalities and youth centers through organized events. He also highlighted their focus on fostering green skills, digital competencies, and AI literacy, aligning with EU priorities.

Atanasov followed up with a question for Sofija Arnaudova: **“How do NGOs collaborate with universities in North Macedonia?”**

Sofija Arnaudova outlined how partnerships between universities, NGOs, and municipalities have been instrumental in addressing the needs of rural youth. She noted that these collaborations have facilitated the establishment of nine youth centers across the country, as mandated by national law. “Such partnerships are vital for implementing the youth law and advancing education in youth work,” she emphasized. Arnaudova highlighted the ongoing efforts of the Master’s Program in Youth Work, noting that the announcement for the second cycle of studies remains open, and more students are expected to enroll. “If any of you are interested, the second term begins in February, and we welcome new participants,” she said. Sofija also underscored the program’s alignment with key deadlines in youth policy, ensuring that it remains relevant to the evolving needs of the sector.

Moderator **Dragan Atanasov** followed up with a specific question to Velika Srbakova: **“What challenges do you face as a youth worker in engaging young people?”**

Velika Srbakova identified reaching youth aged 16–18 as her biggest challenge. She explained that her center collaborates with schools to introduce workshops tailored to young people’s interests, such as employability and empowerment programs. “This year, we adopted a new strategy that has yielded positive results, with 15 highly active young participants regularly engaging with our programs,” she shared.

Q&A Highlights

The Q&A session provided participants with an opportunity to engage directly with the panelists, yielding valuable insights into youth work practices in North Macedonia.

Question 1: Adina Halilović (PRONI Center for Youth Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina) asked: **“Is the number of projects larger now than before the establishment of the National Agency?”**

Marko Gjorgievski confirmed a significant increase in project applications since the agency’s establishment in 2008. “The rise in applications reflects the growing awareness and engagement of youth organizations across North Macedonia,” he stated.

Question 2: Adina Halilović followed up with: **“How many youth workers are currently active in North Macedonia, and how are these statistics collected?”**

Sofija Arnaudova explained that there are currently 40 certified youth workers in the country, with their profiles maintained in a publicly accessible database on the Ministry’s website. “This database not only tracks active youth workers but also serves as a resource for municipalities seeking qualified personnel,” she noted.

Question 3: Moderator Dragan Atanasov asked Sofija Arnaudova: **“How is the Master’s program in Youth Work structured, and how does it integrate practice with academic learning?”**

Sofija Arnaudova elaborated that the program combines academic coursework with practical fieldwork, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience. “Collaboration is at the core of our approach, and 30% of our students are already practitioners who bring valuable on-the-ground knowledge to the program,” she explained.

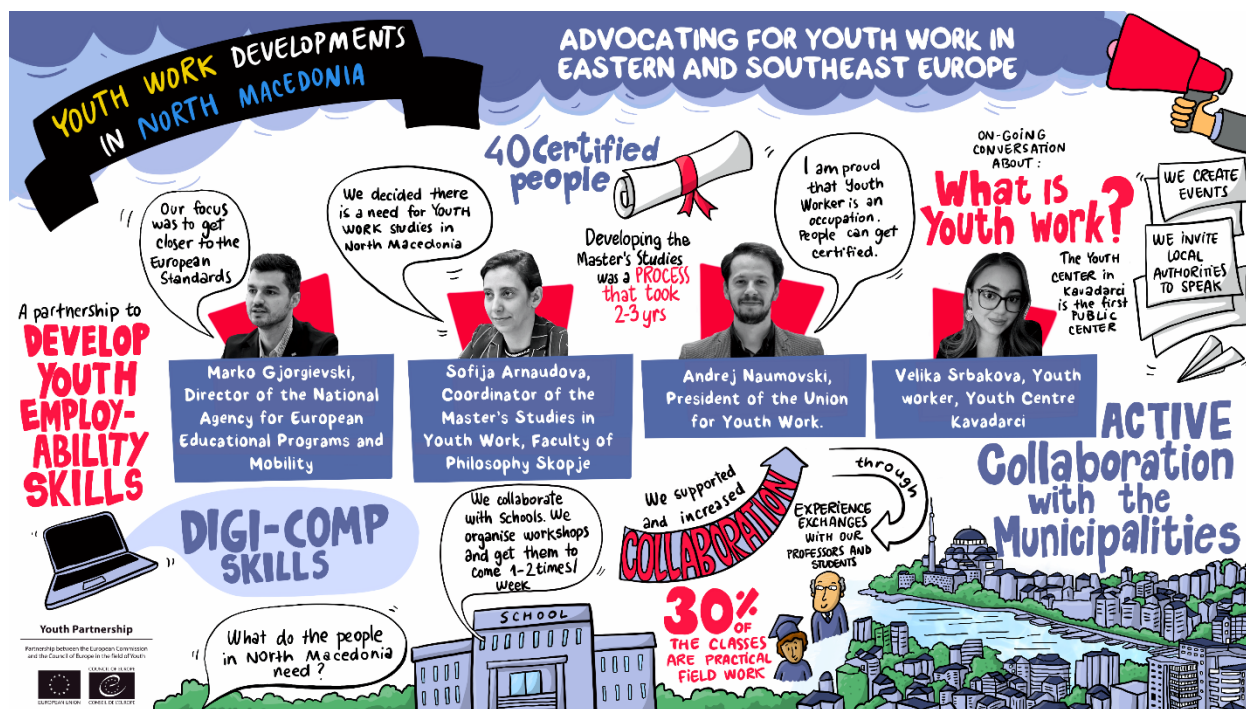
Question 4: Kristina Zimaj (Freelance Consultant, Kosovo) asked Sofija Arnaudova: **“What academic backgrounds are suitable for the Master’s program in Youth Work?”**

Sofija Arnaudova responded that the program welcomes students from diverse disciplines, including humanities, social work, pedagogy, and economics. “Our focus is on passion and commitment rather than rigid academic prerequisites. Currently, 60% of our students have a background in economics,” she shared.

Question 5: A participant followed up with a question for Velika Srbakova: **“What do you see as the biggest challenge in your role as a youth worker?”**

Velika Srbakova reiterated the difficulty of engaging youth in rural areas. She described how her center collaborates with schools to reach young people early in the semester. “This year, we focused on employability programs, which have successfully attracted older teens,” she explained.

This session highlighted North Macedonia’s significant advancements in youth work, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between national agencies, academic institutions, municipalities, and NGOs. Panelists shared practical examples and strategies, offering inspiration and lessons for participants from other countries.



Day 2: Updates from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

(9:30–11:00)

The second day of the seminar began with a comprehensive session led by **László Milutinovits**, Senior Project Officer at the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, who provided updates on various projects and initiatives supported by the Partnership. The session included a presentation on a recently published study on youth brain drain, followed by thematic group discussions aimed at fostering deeper engagement with the Partnership's key areas of work.

Opening Remarks

László Milutinovits introduced the session by outlining the core areas of the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership's activities, which are organized into three overarching domains:

1. Symposium and Publications:

- The recent symposium titled **"Young People, Democracy, and Climate Action"** was highlighted as a significant initiative connecting youth participation with pressing global issues.
- The accompanying publication, the **Youth Knowledge Book "Youth, Democracy in the Climate Crisis,"** was noted as a resource offering critical insights into the intersection of youth engagement and environmental activism.
- Milutinovits also mentioned the transition of **Coyote Magazine**, a longstanding publication of the Partnership, from print to a fully online format, reflecting evolving trends in information dissemination.

2. Support for the 4th EYWC:

- A key focus has been ensuring robust representation from Erasmus+ partner countries at the upcoming 4th EYWC in Malta.
- The Partnership is actively coordinating preparatory work with Maltese stakeholders to facilitate meaningful participation and impactful discussions at the event.

3. Research and Knowledge Gathering:

- The Partnership remains committed to building a strong knowledge base through research and the provision of expertise.
- Ongoing studies and tools are designed to address emerging needs in youth work, including advocacy and capacity-building resources.
- The session featured the presentation of the study **“Youth Brain Drain from the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Türkiye”** by **Gökay Özerim** and **Samir Beharić**, members of the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR).

Presentation of the study “Youth Brain Drain from the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Türkiye”

The study "Youth Brain Drain from the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Türkiye", authored by **Gökay Özerim** and **Samir Beharić**, members of the **Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR)**, examines the pervasive and complex phenomenon of youth emigration in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo^{*1}, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia (Western Balkans), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine (Eastern Partnership), and Türkiye. For over two decades, youth brain drain has contributed to demographic imbalances, hindered social and economic development, and depleted these regions of one of their most valuable resources—their youth population.

This research was initiated in response to growing concerns from policymakers and youth sector representatives in these regions, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth brain drain and its implications for the youth sector. By highlighting the causes, consequences, and potential solutions, the study seeks to inform policy initiatives and interventions that can mitigate the negative effects of this demographic challenge.

Key Insights and Findings

Context and Causes:

Youth brain drain in these geographies is shaped by economic disparities, limited professional opportunities, and political instability, often exacerbated by challenging economic transitions, political shifts, and in some cases, armed conflicts. The phenomenon has been further influenced

¹ * All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

by the growing global connectivity and opportunities available in European Union (EU) countries, where many young individuals from the studied geographies choose to pursue education and careers.

Impact on the Youth Sector:

The migration of young people has far-reaching effects, including:

- A significant loss of human capital, which undermines local economic growth and innovation.
- Reduced vibrancy and diversity in local communities, affecting societal progress.
- Challenges for youth organizations and grassroots initiatives, which struggle to retain active participation and leadership.

Opportunities for Strategic Intervention:

Despite the challenges, the study identifies opportunities for transformative change through the concept of **brain circulation**, where emigrants' skills, knowledge, and international networks are leveraged to benefit their home countries. By fostering strategic engagement with migrant youth, the affected regions can harness the potential of brain circulation to drive sustainable development, strengthen democratic institutions, and stimulate economic growth.

Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

1. Transforming Brain Drain into Brain Circulation:

- Encouraging young people to return to their home countries with incentives that leverage their skills and international experiences.
- Creating pathways for the exchange of knowledge and expertise between emigrants and local communities.

2. Supporting Youth Sector Resilience:

- Investing in grassroots organizations and youth NGOs to strengthen their capacity and retain young leaders.
- Promoting regional and international programs that connect migrant youth with opportunities to contribute to their home countries.

3. Capitalizing on EU Accession Opportunities:

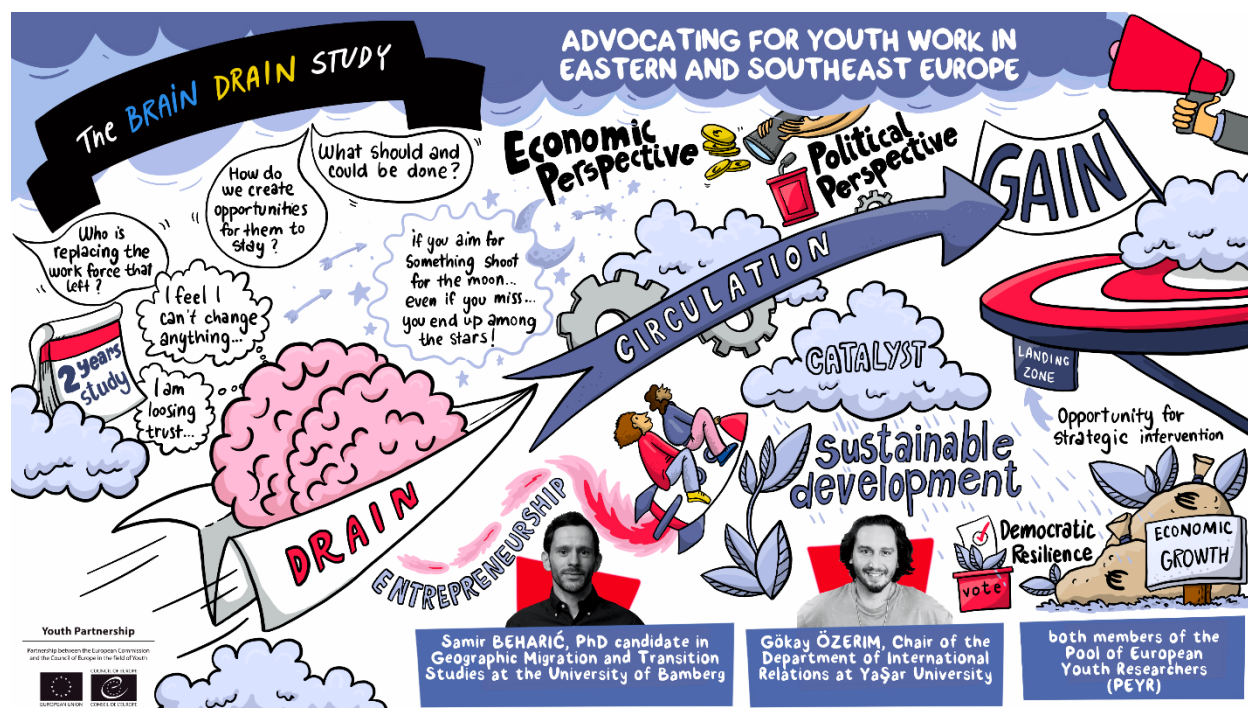
- With many of the studied regions moving towards EU accession, visa-free travel and enhanced mobility can be used strategically to facilitate brain circulation.
- Developing programs and initiatives that align with the needs and motivations of young people, ensuring their engagement in local development efforts.

Conclusion

Youth brain drain poses significant challenges for the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Türkiye, threatening the social and economic vitality of these regions. However, by adopting a

comprehensive and collaborative approach, the three studied geographies can turn the phenomenon into an opportunity for progress.

The study underscores the need for targeted policies and programs that focus on understanding the motivations of young mobile people from the studied geographies, addressing local challenges, and leveraging the talents and capacities of returning youth. By embracing brain circulation, the geographies can transform the challenges of youth migration into **catalysts for innovation, resilience, and growth**, ensuring a brighter future for their youth and communities.



Thematic Group Discussions

Following the presentation on youth brain drain, participants were divided into four thematic discussion groups to explore key issues relevant to youth work and the challenges faced in their respective regions. The groups focused on the following themes: **Rural Youth Work, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Climate Change, and Mental Health**. Each group engaged in in-depth discussions, with the outcomes to be presented in subsequent sessions.

Thematic Group Discussion: Rural Youth Work

The thematic discussion on rural youth work focused on the developments, practices, and opportunities for engaging young people in rural areas. Participants shared insights into ongoing projects, successful practices, and the challenges faced in these communities, while also offering proposals for enhancing youth work at the rural level.

Main Youth Work Developments

Participants highlighted key developments in Moldova, where small grants and initiatives have significantly contributed to building leisure time youth infrastructure in rural areas. This includes creating youth spaces and social centers that offer rural youth opportunities for leisure, cultural, and nonformal educational activities within their communities. These developments aim to foster active citizenship and a sense of belonging among young people in remote areas.

Practices, Resources, and Projects

The group discussion brought attention to successful examples of rural youth work from Moldova, Georgia, Italy, and Serbia:

In **Moldova and Georgia**, small grants have been pivotal in establishing youth spaces and social centers in small towns and districts. These spaces not only serve as venues for leisure and cultural activities but also enable the creation of initiatives like the Association of Natives (Asociația de Băştinași). This community-based organization promotes local problem-solving by engaging young people to contribute actively to the development of their villages or towns. Another significant development is the establishment of Local Youth Councils, which provide a platform for rural youth to voice their concerns, organize nonformal activities, and engage in equal dialogue with local authorities. Additionally, outreach and mobile youth work are being carried out by municipal and district youth centers as well as employment centers, though participants noted a need for further training for practitioners in these roles.

As shared by Anna Lodeserto from Ca' Foscari University Venice and Association Blank Pages Global e.V., in **Italy**, both Central and Southern regions have implemented innovative rural youth projects.

- In Central Italy, initiatives like InformaGiovani 8+, a scattered Youth Information Centre established in eight small municipalities in rural areas in 2015, have successfully engaged rural youth through community-building projects. These initiatives showcase creative approaches to youth engagement and community revitalization.
- In Southern Italy, the Erasmus+ GOOD4YOUth Project focuses on repopulating abandoned villages through youth mobility programs and the integration of migrants, supported by the EU Solidarity Corps. This project demonstrates how rural youth work can address demographic challenges while fostering inclusivity.
- Lodeserto also emphasized it is equally important to share some lessons learned and examples of efforts that did not achieve their expected results but require significant collective work, as those are often the examples from which we ultimately learn the most. In this specific case, the advocacy and policy effort around an initiative in Italy involved dozens of organisations, local public entities and individual youth workers. Together, they worked together on the advocacy work behind the revision of the Regional Law No. 176 of 2 August 2019, titled “Disposizioni in materia di politiche giovanili” (Provisions on Youth Policies). For more than a year, the group collaborated, including via the Basecamp platform, taking part in public hearings and meeting city councillors, and proposed revisions and specific contributions to the draft law to the Regional Councillors. In particular, the group was advocating that the new law should have had amendments that emphasized recognizing non-formal education as a key pillar of youth policies, aligning with

European and international recommendations on lifelong learning and skill validation. Key amendments also included promoting inclusive access to information, supporting volunteering, transnational mobility, socio-educational animation, and youth gathering spaces, while fostering direct youth participation, social solidarity, and community cohesion. The amendments also sought to expand youth policy coverage, enhance mobility and cultural exchange opportunities, validate non-formal learning experiences, and implement frameworks like the Youthpass and the National System of Certification of Skills. After more than one year of intense work, we managed to obtain the approval of the four “law amendments” but then the President of the Region resigned, and all the work was lost since there was no more windows of opportunity in the current legislation. Although these attempts were not formally successful, they still somehow helped consolidate a community around the recognition of youth work at the most difficult level in Italy, which is the local one where cooperation is frequently lacking, and this was made possible by gathering together youth workers and associations that already met at the European and international levels and shared same sensitivities due to common participation in EU projects.

In this specific case, the advocacy and policy effort involved dozens of organisations, local public entities (I participated as a Policy Officer for ANCI, the Italian National Association of Municipalities), and individual youth workers. Many of these individuals are now part of “NINFEA”. Together, we worked on the advocacy work behind the revision of the Regional Law No. 176 of 2 August 2019, titled “Disposizioni in materia di politiche giovanili” (Provisions on Youth Policies). For more than a year, we collaborated, including via the Basecamp platform, taking part in public hearings and meeting city councillors, and proposed revisions and specific contributions to the draft law to the Regional Councillors.

In **Serbia**, the project “Prospects for Young People in Rural Areas in Serbia”, implemented by the Ministry of Tourism and Youth in partnership with GIZ, aims to enhance the economic and cultural opportunities available to young people in smaller communities. This initiative highlights the potential of youth work to contribute to regional development and mitigate rural-to-urban migration.

Proposals to the Youth Partnership

The discussion concluded with actionable proposals to further support rural youth work through the Youth Partnership:

- 1. Promotion of Research and Surveys:**

Participants emphasized the importance of widely promoting existing research and surveys, such as the Youth Partnership Survey, to gather comprehensive data and insights on rural youth work. Disseminating these findings can help policymakers and practitioners better understand the needs and opportunities in rural areas.

- 2. Addressing Brain Drain:**

The group proposed a reframing of the concept of “**brain drain**” into “**muscle drain**,” highlighting the potential benefits of rural-to-urban migration when youth eventually return to their communities. They suggested exploring:

- Why rural youth choose to leave their communities.
- What motivates their return and how these experiences can contribute to local development.
- How migration can be seen as a positive process for learning and growth, ultimately benefiting rural areas.

This discussion provided a comprehensive overview of the developments and challenges in rural youth work while offering practical solutions and inspiring examples for participants to take back to their own contexts. The proposals underscored the need for continued investment, capacity-building, and innovative programming to ensure that rural youth are fully supported and engaged in shaping their futures.

Thematic Group Discussion: Mental Health

The thematic group discussion on mental health examined the critical role of youth work in addressing mental health challenges among young people and youth workers. Participants discussed developments in the field, shared successful practices, and proposed actionable recommendations for enhancing mental health support within the youth sector.

Main Youth Work Developments

Discussions highlighted the distinct challenges faced by young people and youth workers in diverse contexts, particularly in areas affected by war and conflict. Participants noted that the perception of well-being differs significantly in war or post-war environments compared to non-conflict settings.

A notable example discussed was the use of "Living Libraries" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where veterans and former soldiers share their experiences with young people. Through dialogue-based activities in high schools and universities, these initiatives promote the importance of peace and reconciliation. Veterans recount their stories, underscoring the detrimental impact of conflict and advocating for peaceful coexistence.

In Serbia, the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) has been at the forefront of youth mental health work, developing standardized programs that address the needs of both in-school and out-of-school youth. These programs emphasize the importance of holistic mental health support and provide a framework for youth workers to implement effective initiatives at the local level.

Practices, Resources, and Projects

Participants shared several examples of successful practices and resources in the field of mental health:

- **NAPOR Serbia:**
 - Developed the first standardized mental health program for youth, targeting both school-going and non-school-going populations.

- Conducts training programs for youth workers, equipping them with the skills needed to implement local initiatives on mental health.
- Launched an online platform to provide ongoing support for youth workers addressing mental health challenges.
- Secured support from the Serbian Ministry of Youth, ensuring the scalability of these programs and fostering collaboration across organizations.
- **PRONI Center for Youth Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina:**
 - The PRONI Academy of Youth Work integrates mental health into its curriculum, with a specific module addressing burnout prevention and the establishment of professional boundaries. This module equips youth workers with tools to maintain their own well-being while supporting young people.
 - Participants in the academy's training programs receive education on recognizing and addressing mental health challenges, both for themselves and the youth they serve.
- **Living Libraries in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**
 - A peace-building initiative where ex-soldiers engage with young people to share personal stories of war and advocate for the importance of peace. These sessions encourage dialogue, reflection, and understanding among youth in high schools and universities.

Proposals to the Youth Partnership

Participants emphasized the need for the Youth Partnership to prioritize mental health within its work, focusing on both young people and youth workers:

1. Burnout Prevention:

- Developing targeted programs to help youth workers recognize and manage burnout.
- Strengthening the capacity of youth workers to set boundaries and maintain mental health while supporting others.

2. Comprehensive Training for Youth Workers:

- Expanding existing modules on mental health within youth work training programs.
- Ensuring that every youth worker education program includes substantial content on mental health.

3. Support Systems for Youth Workers:

- NAPOR Serbia proposed that the Youth Partnership adopt a special focus on mental health support for youth workers, integrating tools and frameworks from successful initiatives like their standardized programs and online platform.

4. Broader Inclusion of Mental Health in Youth Work:

- PRONI Bosnia and Herzegovina suggested that mental health modules, like those included in the PRONI Academy, be extended and made a core component of youth worker education programs across Europe.

This discussion underscored the importance of integrating mental health as a core focus of youth work. Participants highlighted the need for systemic support, training, and resources to ensure that both young people and youth workers have access to the tools necessary for addressing mental health challenges effectively. The recommendations presented reflect a commitment to fostering resilience, well-being, and sustainable practices within the youth sector.

Thematic Group Discussion: Climate Change

The thematic discussion on climate change highlighted the urgent need to address environmental challenges through youth work. Participants explored recent developments, shared innovative practices, and proposed actionable recommendations to strengthen the youth sector's engagement with climate action.

Main Youth Work Developments

Recent years have seen significant strides in integrating climate change into youth work and advocacy. Key developments include:

1. Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 on Young People and Climate Change:

- The Council of Europe has urged member states to adopt measures protecting the rights of young people, particularly environmental defenders, recognizing their critical role in combating climate change.

2. Climate Change Summit (Bucharest, Romania):

- Since 2022, this summit has convened professionals from various sectors, including youth work, to discuss strategies for addressing climate challenges in the region.

3. Environmental Priorities in European Youth Programs:

- Since 2021, environmental sustainability has been a key focus in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects, with organizations encouraged to implement and report measures aligned with this priority.

4. Council of Europe Consultative Meeting on the Climate Crisis (2021):

- A platform where young people discussed the intersection of climate change, democracy, and youth engagement, emphasizing the need for a rights-based approach to environmental advocacy.

5. **Youth-Led Initiatives in Recycling and Education:**

- Examples include the establishment of recycling bins in youth centers and educational programs aimed at fostering a culture of sustainability among young people.

Practices, Resources, and Projects

Participants shared several innovative and impactful practices addressing climate change in the youth sector:

- **Sustainable NGOs Platform:**
 - Offers resources such as guidelines, an online course, and a carbon footprint calculator to help youth workers adopt sustainable practices.
 - [Learn more](#)
- **Eco Echo Program (Romania):**
 - An awareness program led by European Solidarity Corps volunteers that educates young people about climate change.
 - [Details available at geyc.ro/eco-echo](https://geyc.ro/eco-echo)
- **GoFor Exchange Program (Turkey):**
 - Focuses on environmental sustainability and justice, culminating in participation at COP29 to present a youth-led policy brief.
- **“Sete de Solutii” (Thirsty for Solutions) Advocacy Campaign (Romania):**
 - Youth and organizations successfully lobbied Bucharest Airport to provide free drinkable water, addressing a basic environmental and social need.
 - [Campaign details](#)
- **Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) Declaration (Romania):**
 - Young people organized consultations and produced a declaration reflecting youth perspectives on climate change, presented in the context of COP discussions.

Proposals to the Youth Partnership

Participants identified several opportunities for the Youth Partnership to enhance its engagement in climate-related youth work:

1. **Advocating for Intersectional Funding:**

- Current funding streams often separate climate change and youth-related initiatives. Participants proposed creating funds specifically addressing the intersection of these themes, particularly in Türkiye, where existing opportunities are limited.

2. Supporting Youth Consultations for COP:

- Strengthen youth consultations in member states to ensure diverse voices are represented in COP discussions, particularly those outside traditional structures like the European Youth Forum or Advisory Council on Youth.

3. Localized, Action-Oriented Engagement:

- Demonstrate how climate change directly impacts young people by focusing on tangible actions, such as ensuring access to drinkable water.
- Organize site-specific non-formal training sessions at locations affected by environmental conflicts, such as areas of deforestation or dam construction, to raise awareness and link youth rights to environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

This discussion underscored the essential role of the youth sector in driving climate action. Participants emphasized the need for systemic support, innovative funding, and grassroots engagement to empower young people as key actors in the fight against climate change. By integrating these proposals and practices, the Youth Partnership can further align its work with the pressing environmental challenges facing today's youth.

Thematic Group Discussion: Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The thematic discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) focused on its growing impact within the youth work sector, exploring its benefits, challenges, and the ethical considerations surrounding its use. Participants shared current developments, best practices, and proposals to enhance the integration of AI into youth work responsibly.

Main Youth Work Developments

The discussion revealed that AI is increasingly recognized and utilized across the youth work sector and the broader community of practice. However, its implementation is shaped by varying interpretations and applications, highlighting the need for standardization and ethical clarity.

Key insights included:

1. Ethical Considerations and Challenges:

- Questions often arise regarding the fair and beneficial inclusion of AI in youth work. These challenges extend to areas like project writing, management, and data collection.

2. Room for Development:

- There is a significant need for consensus on best practices and standardized approaches, particularly to address ethical dilemmas and ensure trust in AI-driven processes.

3. Building Mutual Trust:

- Discussions like these serve to strengthen the community of practice and enhance trust in AI technologies when applied to youth work.

Practices, Resources, and Projects

Participants highlighted examples of AI integration in youth work, with a focus on practical applications, ethical implications, and capacity-building:

1. Workshops and Training Programs:

- Various initiatives train youth workers on the practical applications of AI, offering insights into ethical dilemmas and providing tools to streamline project management, reporting, and activity design.

2. Support from Umbrella Organizations and Local Bodies:

- National and local organizations play a pivotal role in sharing resources and supporting AI-focused projects across the sector.

3. Ethical AI Projects:

- Several initiatives focus on the ethical use of AI in youth work, aiming to enhance accessibility and efficiency while maintaining moral accountability. Toolkits and guidelines help clarify ethical responsibilities and provide practical methods for using AI effectively.

Proposals to the Youth Partnership

Participants offered several actionable proposals for the Youth Partnership to further develop and regulate AI use in youth work:

1. Guidelines on Ethical AI Use:

- Develop a comprehensive document outlining ethical considerations for AI integration in youth work, with a focus on issues such as consent, privacy, and the responsible use of AI tools to support youth workers and young people.

2. Competency Framework for AI in Youth Work:

- Define the competences required for youth workers to integrate AI responsibly. This framework should cover technical skills, ethical judgment, and an understanding of AI's potential to complement traditional youth work practices.

3. Recommendations on Data Collection and Research Ethics:

- Publish recommendations addressing the ethical dilemmas associated with data gathering through AI, emphasizing transparency, safeguarding personal data, and ensuring informed consent.

4. **Promoting the Role of the Council of Europe and Youth Partnership as AI Advocates:**

- Position the Council of Europe and the Youth Partnership as leaders in advocating for the responsible use of AI in youth work. Reinforce the message that AI should enhance, not replace, core youth work values and practices.

Conclusion

This discussion underscored the transformative potential of AI in youth work while emphasizing the need for ethical safeguards and community-driven standards. By addressing challenges such as data ethics and competency development, the youth sector can fully harness AI's benefits while maintaining its commitment to inclusion, trust, and core youth work principles. The proposals offered provide a roadmap for integrating AI responsibly and effectively into the field, ensuring that technology complements, rather than compromises, the human-centric essence of youth work.

Advocating for Youth Work: Sharing Good Practices and Tools

(11:30–13:00)

This session focused on the critical role of advocacy in youth work development and recognition, highlighting the practical tools and strategies available to support these efforts. **Olga Kyriakidou**, Youth Worker and Trainer in the youth field and President of the Hellenic Youth Workers Association, shared the initial outcomes of the Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development and facilitated a discussion on good practices in advocacy from Eastern and Southeast Europe.

Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development

Olga Kyriakidou presented the Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development, a comprehensive toolbox designed to equip youth workers, advocates, and stakeholders with practical tools and resources for promoting youth work at both national and international levels. The kit is a resource for competence development, structured to guide users through the complexities of advocacy while providing actionable strategies.

The kit is organized around five key conceptual and strategic components:

1. Why:

- Explains the rationale for the kit, emphasizing the critical need for advocacy to secure recognition and support for youth work.

2. Who:

- Identifies the primary advocates and users of the kit, including youth workers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the youth sector.

3. What:

- Outlines the key topics of advocacy, focusing on youth work's structure and its broader architecture within society.

4. To Whom:

- Defines target audiences and provides personas to help advocates tailor their messaging effectively.

5. How:

- Offers evidence-based arguments and impact metrics to strengthen advocacy efforts, emphasizing the importance of measurable outcomes.

This toolkit represents a significant step forward in equipping youth workers and organizations with the resources needed to advocate for the recognition, funding, and development of youth work.



Good Practices in Youth Work Advocacy

The following good practices present a group of handpicked national youth work practices shared by the participants. The good practices from countries of Southeast, Eastern Europe, and the EU highlight diverse approaches to advancing youth work through recognition, quality standards, and advocacy efforts.

Mariana Țurcan's practice, "From Recognition, to Education, for Sustainability", focuses on ensuring the sustainability of youth work in **Moldova** through advocacy for continuous training, professional development, and recognition of youth workers. Key achievements include embedding

youth work definitions in national legislation, integrating "Youth Specialist/Worker" into the Occupational Classifier (2021), and advancing standards for qualifications and curricula by 2025. Despite challenges like policy shifts and limited academic integration, the practice has fostered progress through non-formal training, annual Youth Workers' Forums, and collaboration with European networks, establishing a foundation for professionalizing youth work and advocating for its sustained recognition and support.

Jelena Stojanović's practice, "Measuring Impact in Youth Work – Mission (Im)possible!", focuses on developing mechanisms to measure the social impact of youth work for advocacy purposes. Through a comprehensive research process involving **Serbia, Italy, North Macedonia, and Portugal**, the practice introduced a methodology for evaluating youth work's effects on personal and community levels, supported by robust evidence-based data. Key outcomes include a Recommendation paper and research findings that provide tools for advocacy, enhance youth work policies, and improve the quality and recognition of youth work. This pioneering methodology has high transferability potential, enabling its application across diverse European youth work contexts.

Armenuhi Petrosyan's practice, "Participatory Development of the Draft Law on Youth Policy", focuses on creating **Armenia's** first comprehensive legal framework for youth policy. This law defines the age, roles, responsibilities, and functions of youth policy actors, while enabling the development of strategic plans, youth worker systems, and youth centers. The inclusive drafting process involved over 45 stakeholders, including youth workers, civil society, and government representatives, with consultations reaching 1,000 young people across 30 communities. Following public discussions, revisions, and lobbying efforts, the draft received positive feedback from the ministerial committee. Once adopted, the law will empower state and local bodies to foster sustainable youth environments, with continuous training and multilateral cooperation to advance the sector.

Ajša Đečević's practice, "Unlocking Potentials of Youth Work in the Western Balkans", focuses on bridging gaps in the recognition, quality, and impact of youth work across the region. A consortium of seven organizations from **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Belgium** has conducted needs assessments, capacity-building initiatives, and evidence-based policy development. The project has also developed tailored training curricula and is currently creating a regional framework for minimum standards in youth work. Key outcomes include formal recognition of youth work in several countries, a regional network of youth work practitioners for sustained collaboration, and a draft quality standards framework emphasizing empowerment, inclusion, diversity, and human rights. This initiative fosters consistent, high-quality youth support services while promoting youth work as a vital contributor to personal and societal growth.

Dragana Mitrovikj's practice, "Youth Centers Quality Standards", focuses on standardizing youth work in **North Macedonia** to ensure high-quality programs and activities in youth centers. Key milestones include the adoption of vocation standards for youth workers in 2018, the accreditation of a master's program in youth work in 2023, and the 2019 publication of the *Youth Work Quality Standards*. The Union for Youth Work led the development of the *Rulebook on Youth Centres' Quality Standards*, adopted in 2021, and created an evaluation methodology to assess compliance. The methodology was tested in six youth centers by trained evaluators, with plans to finalize reporting

and establish a system for continuous improvement and quality recognition. This initiative lays the foundation for sustainable, high-quality youth work across North Macedonia.

Olena Glazkova's practice, "Youth Work on the Way of Recognition", highlights the successful approval of the occupational standard for the profession "Youth Specialist (Youth Worker)" in **Ukraine**, enabling formal recognition of youth work as a profession. Advocacy steps included a two-stage research process, translation of international professional standards, and focus-group discussions to refine the standard. The approved standard marks a significant step in institutionalizing youth work, with ongoing efforts by the Council of Europe to collaborate with universities in licensing this profession, fostering its long-term development and recognition.

Regional Practices

The session also included the sharing of advocacy practices from Eastern and Southeast Europe, showcasing innovative approaches and success stories in youth work advocacy:

- **Eastern Europe:**
 - Participants highlighted efforts to establish formal recognition of youth work through legislation and policy frameworks, supported by collaborative efforts between civil society organizations, national authorities, and international donor community.
- **Southeast Europe:**
 - Examples included advocacy campaigns targeting local governments to invest in youth centers and programs, using evidence-based arguments from the advocacy kit to secure funding and institutional support.

These practices underscored the importance of localized strategies tailored to the unique contexts of each region while leveraging tools like the advocacy kit to amplify their impact.

Conclusion

The session emphasized the necessity of strong advocacy to elevate youth work's profile and ensure its recognition as an essential component of societal development. The Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development was positioned as a pivotal resource for building advocacy competence and fostering collaboration across the youth sector. By sharing practical examples from Eastern and Southeast Europe, the session provided participants with actionable insights and inspiration to strengthen their own advocacy efforts.

Panel Discussion: Making Links with the Upcoming 4th EYWC

(14:30–16:00)

The session focused on bridging the preparations for the upcoming 4th EYWC with the ongoing developments and challenges within the youth work sector. Bringing together representatives of the hosting organizations and prominent contributors to youth work advocacy, the panel explored the

significance of the 4th EYWC, reflected on progress since the previous edition, and identified regional issues requiring attention.

The panel opened with an introduction to the 4th EYWC by **Miriam Teuma**, Chief Executive of Agenzija Zghazagh – The National Youth Agency of Malta, and **Marvik-Ann De Bono**, Programme Manager and Head of the Youth Sector at the European Union Programmes Agency. Teuma highlighted the pivotal role of the 4th EYWC as a platform to advance youth work across Europe. She reflected on the historical context, noting that the Council of Europe’s **2017 Recommendation on Youth Work** laid the groundwork for systemic changes in the field. She emphasized the importance of the **Reference Framework for Youth Work Implementation**, which provides a strategic roadmap for aligning national and European efforts to develop youth work. Teuma also discussed the upcoming Conference of Ministers, which will bring together officials responsible for youth work across Council of Europe member states to commit to implementing the roadmap at the national level.

Building on this introduction, De Bono elaborated on Malta’s role as host and the efforts to ensure diverse representation at the 4th EYWC. She emphasized the need for meaningful participation from Erasmus+ partner countries and the importance of fostering inclusive discussions that reflect the experiences and aspirations of youth workers across Europe.

Following the introduction, testimonials from youth work leaders provided a comprehensive overview of the progress made since the 3rd EYWC. **Olga Kyriakidou**, Vice President of the Alliance of Youth Workers Associations (AYWA), highlighted her organization’s advocacy efforts. Representing 10 national associations from countries including Malta, Serbia, Greece, and the Netherlands, AYWA has worked to ensure strong representation of youth workers at the 4th EYWC. Kyriakidou emphasized the need to center the voices of youth workers in discussions about their profession, stating, “Youth workers advocating for youth workers is at the heart of our mission.”

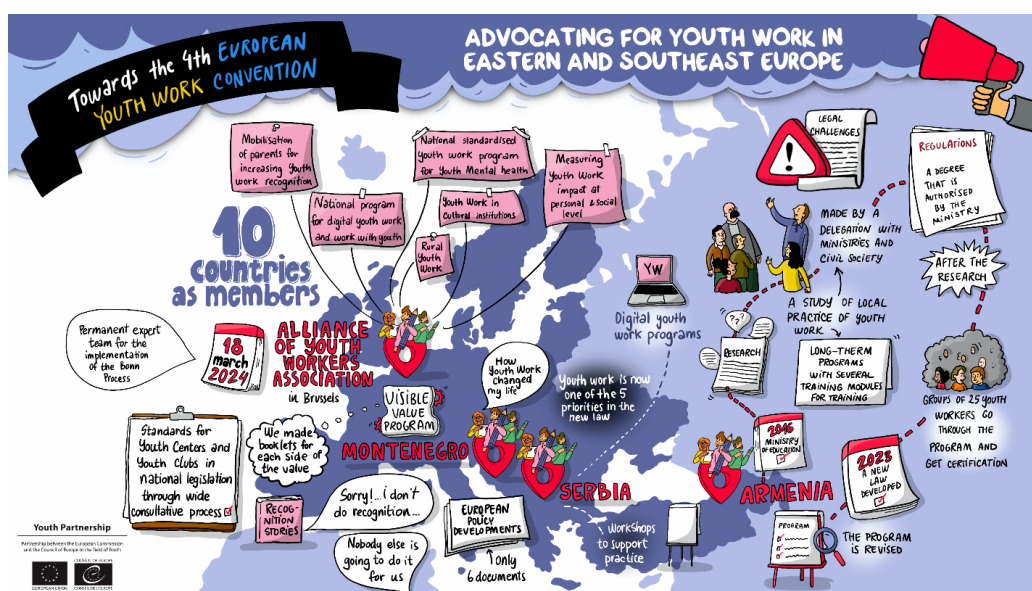
Jelena Stojanović, Executive Director of NAPOR (National Association of Youth Workers, Serbia), detailed significant milestones achieved in Serbia. Since the 3rd EYWC, Serbia has established a permanent expert team to implement the Bonn Process and developed a national plan prioritizing youth work. Stojanović explained that youth work is now one of the five goals in Serbia’s national youth strategy. She highlighted the drafting of a new youth law to formally define and recognize youth workers, the development of occupational standards, and efforts to secure job placements for youth workers in relevant institutions. Stojanović also emphasized the importance of expanding youth work into rural areas, cultural institutions, and mental health programs, underscoring the role of collaboration with stakeholders to achieve these objectives.

Armenuhi Petrosyan, Deputy Head of the Youth Affairs Department at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Armenia, reflected on Armenia’s journey toward institutionalizing youth work. She described two major research projects that have defined the principles, competencies, and tasks of youth workers, providing a foundation for non-formal education programs certified by the ministry. However, Petrosyan acknowledged challenges in updating these programs due to legal obstacles. She expressed optimism that the 4th EYWC would provide an opportunity to revisit and improve policy frameworks, ensuring the sustainability of youth work education in Armenia.

Nik Paddison, a freelance writer and trainer in youth work, shared insights from the Visible Value Project, which focuses on recognizing the contributions of youth work across Europe. Paddison outlined six key areas covered by the project, including recognition of learning, inspiring practices, national contexts, and European policy developments. While he highlighted inspiring stories from youth workers and recognition resources, Paddison noted gaps in policy development and outdated tools, calling for renewed efforts to advance recognition frameworks.

The session concluded with a discussion on pressing regional issues to be addressed at the 4th EYWC. **Kristijan Orešković**, representing the Croatian Youth Network, emphasized the importance of maximizing existing tools and strategic partnerships to foster collaboration and resource-sharing across regions. Panelists and participants alike stressed the need for greater recognition of youth work, support for rural youth engagement, and the integration of innovative approaches into youth work practices.

This panel discussion underscored the pivotal role of the 4th EYWC in shaping the future of youth work in Europe. The insights shared by the panelists provided a clear direction for the 4th EYWC's agenda, ensuring it reflects the needs of youth workers and young people while fostering a shared vision for youth work development across the continent.



Breakout Sessions: Discussion on Preparing for and Utilizing the 4th EYWC

This panel discussion was followed by a breakout session aimed at exploring strategies to enhance positioning in light of the upcoming 4th EYWC. Participants discussed how the 4th EYWC could be effectively utilized across Europe, with a particular emphasis on advocacy tools and approaches that can be applied at national and regional levels to advance youth work development. The outcomes of these discussions were carefully documented to guide future strategies and actions. Three out of five groups submitted their notes.

Group 1 Discussion

Group 1 focused on identifying ideas, strategies, and proposals to better prepare for and maximize the impact of the upcoming 4th EYWC. The discussion centered on ensuring the effective implementation of the 4th EYWC's outcomes, particularly the final Declaration that sets out guidelines and suggestions for the implementation of a strong European Youth Work Agenda in the Bonn Process, at both national and regional levels.

Participants emphasized the importance of translating the Declaration into actionable steps to support implementation at the national level. This could involve specifying clear guidelines and processes for governments to follow. Civil society organizations (CSOs) were highlighted as key stakeholders, capable of both advocating for the Declaration's adoption and providing practical support to governments in its implementation. By empowering CSOs, the Declaration could move from being a high-level policy document to a tool for tangible change on the ground.

Another proposal centered on creating a framework for regional-level implementation of the Declaration. Participants suggested that regional priorities could be outlined and integrated into the broader agenda, ensuring that specific local needs and contexts are addressed.

To make the Declaration more accessible, participants proposed the development of tailored guidelines for youth work experts. These guidelines would be designed in clear, practical language, helping to demystify the policy document and making it more applicable to everyday youth work practices. This approach seeks to counter the prevailing perception that such documents are exclusively for institutional use, a barrier that currently limits their reach and impact.

Additionally, the group recommended organizing regional side meetings as part of the broader 4th EYWC process. These meetings could provide an opportunity for stakeholders to come together and discuss regional priorities, fostering alignment and collaboration. The upcoming ministries meeting in October was identified as a potential venue for such discussions, allowing governments and other stakeholders to start shaping a regional approach ahead of the 4th EYWC.

This discussion highlighted the need for clarity, accessibility, and collaboration to ensure the Declaration's outcomes are effectively utilized. By focusing on these elements, participants sought to create a roadmap for maximizing the 4th EYWC's impact across Europe.

Group 3 Discussion

Group 3 focused on strategies to enhance regional engagement and maximize the impact of the 4th EYWC, both during the 4th EYWC itself and in its aftermath. The discussion emphasized inclusivity, advocacy, and leveraging the 4th EYWC's outcomes to advance youth work and policy in the regions.

Participants stressed the importance of broadening participation by extending invitations to Youth Work Unions, Coalitions, and NGOs from the region. This approach would ensure the inclusion of youth organizations and youth workers, irrespective of political or governmental barriers within their countries. By enabling the direct involvement of youth work practitioners and organizations, the 4th EYWC could provide a more comprehensive representation of the youth work realities in the region.

To further integrate the region into the 4th EYWC's agenda, participants proposed showcasing the specific challenges, achievements, and models of youth work in the region. This would highlight the

unique dynamics of youth work in these contexts, fostering greater understanding and collaboration among stakeholders across Europe.

The group also discussed how the 4th EYWC and its outcomes, such as the Declaration and resolutions, could serve as powerful advocacy tools for advancing youth policy and youth work in the region's countries. Participants suggested using these tools to apply both soft and hard pressure on governments, encouraging them to commit to and follow the 4th EYWC's guidelines and recommendations. By framing the 4th EYWC as a catalyst for change, stakeholders could drive meaningful progress in youth work and policy development.

An additional proposal focused on fostering greater collaboration and support between EU member states and Eastern Partnership countries. Participants emphasized the need for concrete measures, such as learning exchanges and youth work mobilities, to build stronger connections and enable mutual learning between these regions. The 4th EYWC could play a key role in encouraging EU countries to provide such support, ensuring that youth work development is inclusive and cohesive across Europe.

This discussion underscored the potential of the 4th EYWC to serve as a platform for regional advocacy, collaboration, and innovation. By prioritizing inclusivity, showcasing regional realities, and leveraging the 4th EYWC's outcomes, participants envisioned a pathway for advancing youth work and policy in the region while strengthening ties with the broader European community.

Group 5 Discussion

Group 5 engaged in a comprehensive discussion on how to position themselves effectively for the 4th EYWC and maximize its potential for advancing youth work, particularly in Türkiye. The conversation explored direct and indirect participation strategies, the utilization of the 4th EYWC's outcomes to address regional challenges, and the development of advocacy approaches at both national and regional levels.

The discussion began with the recognition of specific structural challenges faced by youth organizations in Türkiye, particularly the National Youth Council of Türkiye (GoFor). While GoFor is acknowledged by European institutions, it does not hold legal recognition from the Turkish government, which complicates its participation in the EYWC. Delegates to the 4th EYWC are traditionally determined by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, creating a significant barrier for GoFor's direct involvement. Participants stressed the importance of building strong international alliances to advocate for GoFor's inclusion as a core participant in the 4th EYWC. These alliances, they argued, could serve as a vital mechanism for ensuring the representation of GoFor and similar organizations, despite political and institutional constraints.

Acknowledging the potential for exclusion, the group also discussed indirect participation strategies. Should GoFor face barriers to direct engagement, the organization could focus on influencing the delegates who are selected to attend the EYWC. By developing targeted advocacy plans, GoFor would ensure that its priorities and perspectives are communicated through these representatives. This approach would allow GoFor to maintain an impactful presence at the 4th EYWC, even in its absence, by leveraging the voices of attending delegates to champion its concerns and proposals.

The group highlighted the unique challenges facing youth work in Türkiye, including restrictive political environments and limited recognition of youth work as a formal field. Despite these obstacles, participants emphasized the resilience and strength of youth advocacy efforts in Türkiye. They pointed out that this context provides a distinctive perspective on youth work, offering innovative approaches and opportunities for growth. By incorporating the voices of youth workers and organizations from Türkiye into the EYWC, participants argued that the 4th EYWC could address these realities and contribute to more inclusive and progressive youth work practices across Europe.

The conversation also explored advocacy approaches at the national level, particularly within Türkiye's constrained political space. Participants shared insights into how GoFor has engaged with local governments to overcome national restrictions. By establishing formal protocols with municipalities, GoFor has defined youth work practices and strategies to build the capacities of youth workers within local governments. These protocols are tailored to local contexts, allowing for practical implementation. Over time, these localized efforts aim to form the foundation for a national youth work framework, built incrementally through grassroots initiatives.

At the regional level, participants underscored the importance of partnerships and joint advocacy efforts. One notable example was GoFor's collaboration with Ligue de l'enseignement (LSU), an organization outside the immediate region. Together, they are organizing a joint event to prepare a policy brief addressing the intersection of youth work and environmental crises. This brief will be presented at COP29, demonstrating how partnerships can advance youth work advocacy on pressing global issues. Participants emphasized that similar collaborative efforts could strengthen preparations for the 4th EYWC and ensure that youth work priorities are aligned with broader European and global challenges.

The discussion concluded with a shared determination to utilize the 4th EYWC as both a platform for advocacy and a catalyst for change. By addressing structural barriers, leveraging partnerships, and aligning national and regional efforts, the group envisioned a pathway for ensuring that youth work is recognized, supported, and strengthened across diverse contexts, particularly in regions facing unique challenges like Türkiye. Through these strategies, participants reaffirmed their commitment to making the upcoming EYWC a powerful tool for advancing youth work in Europe.

The seminar provided a dynamic platform for examining and advancing youth work development in Europe, with a particular focus on Eastern and Southeast Europe. Through engaging discussions, research presentations, and thematic group work, participants collectively identified good practices, analyzed emerging needs, and offered actionable recommendations for strengthening youth work policies and practices. The outcomes of this seminar contribute significantly to the preparations for the 4th EYWC and the broader 2024-2025 work plan.

The event's outcome

The seminar highlighted the critical importance of recognizing youth work as a formal profession, encouraging youth involvement in policy-making, and tackling pressing issues such as brain drain, inequality, and mental health. Representatives from the Council of Europe and the European

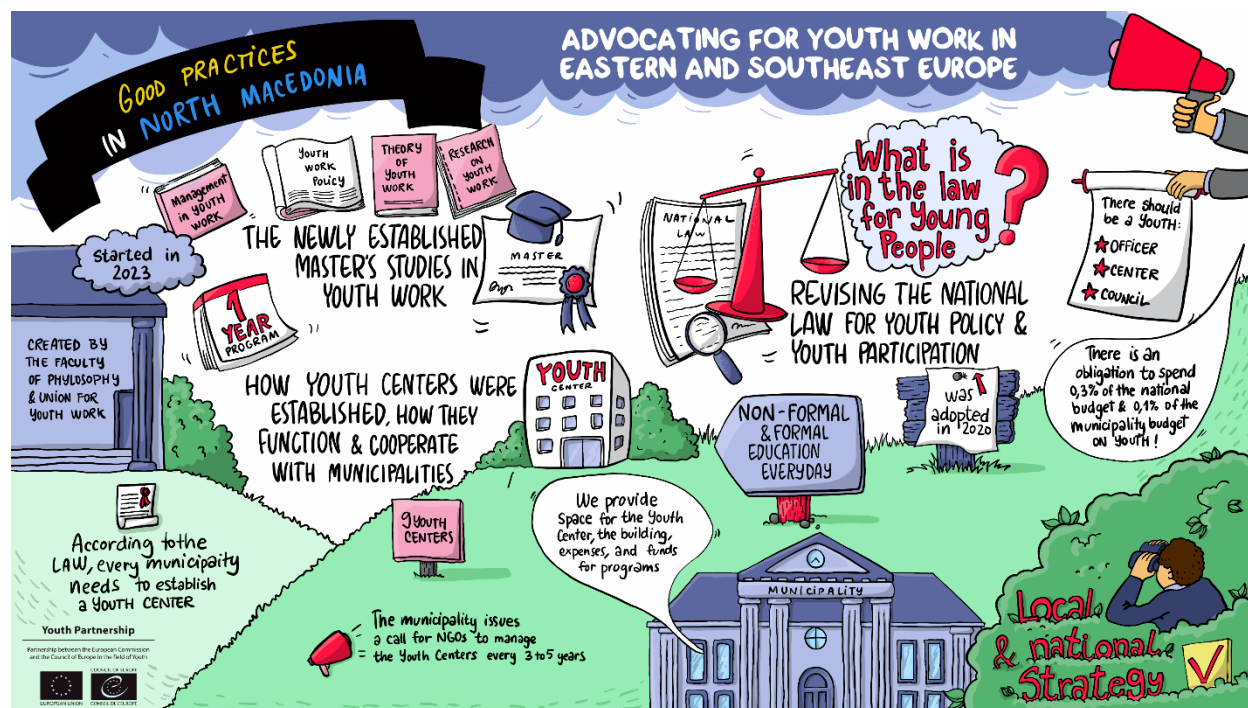
Commission emphasized that youth participation is fundamental to fostering democracy and transparency.

Participants shared insights on country-specific achievements and ongoing challenges, with **North Macedonia** standing out as a model for progress in formally recognizing youth work. The discussions underscored the need for sustained investment in youth work, particularly in rural areas, and the further development of tools to amplify the influence of youth organizations at both national and international levels.

The seminar showcased numerous good practices in youth work development, emphasizing advocacy and effective communication with decision-makers and public authorities. Participants from across Europe shared success stories, including the institutionalization of youth work in **Armenia**, the development of occupational standards in **Serbia**, and innovative programs like the Living Libraries initiative in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where veterans engage youth in peace dialogues. The examples presented illustrated the diverse approaches to addressing regional and local challenges, including rural youth work, mental health, and climate change.

Additionally, a collection of good practices was shared, focusing on fostering dialogue with decision-makers and public authorities at various levels to advocate for the advancement of youth work development.

Finally, the seminar set the stage for the upcoming 4th EYWC, where youth workers from all Council of Europe member states will convene to discuss renewed commitments and strategic advancements to strengthen youth work across Europe.



Analysis of Needs and Changes

The seminar provided an updated analysis of the needs and evolving contexts of youth work in the two regions:

1. **Recognition and Professionalization of Youth Work:**

- Persistent challenges remain in recognizing youth work as a profession. Countries such as Serbia and Moldova have made strides by defining occupational standards and creating certification programs, but many countries still lack formal frameworks or adequate funding for youth work.

2. **Advocacy for Policy Development:**

- The absence of robust national youth policies in some countries, including Türkiye, highlights the need for stronger advocacy. Participants emphasized the role of local-level initiatives and partnerships in filling policy gaps and paving the way for national frameworks.

3. **Capacity Building for Youth Workers:**

- Training programs and non-formal education for youth workers were consistently highlighted as priorities. Programs like the PRONI Academy of Youth Work and training modules developed in Armenia serve as exemplary models, but there is a need for more systemic support and updated resources.

4. **Cross-Border Collaboration:**

- Regional partnerships, such as those between youth organizations in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership, demonstrate the potential for mutual learning and shared advocacy. Initiatives like joint policy briefs addressing environmental crises, presented at international forums like COP29, underscore the importance of regional and international cooperation.

5. **Addressing Emerging Challenges:**

- Issues such as climate change, artificial intelligence, and mental health have become central to youth work, requiring innovative approaches and dedicated support. Participants proposed incorporating these themes into future policy discussions and youth work frameworks to reflect the changing needs of young people.

Recommendations for the 4th EYWC and Beyond

The seminar generated several key recommendations relevant to the 4th EYWC and the upcoming 2024-2025 work plan:

1. **Integration of Regional Realities:**

- Ensure that the unique challenges and achievements of youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe are represented at the 4th EYWC. This includes showcasing

regional models, highlighting gaps in policy and funding, and advocating for tailored support mechanisms.

2. Support for Advocacy and Communication:

- Develop targeted advocacy strategies to engage governments and public authorities more effectively. Tools such as the Advocacy Kit for Youth Work Development should be widely disseminated and adapted to local contexts.

3. Promoting Inclusivity:

- Facilitate the participation of youth work organizations and practitioners from countries facing structural or political challenges, such as Türkiye. Strategies for indirect participation, such as influencing selected delegates, should also be supported.

4. Capacity Building and Resource Development:

- Invest in the professional development of youth workers, including the creation of new training programs, resource toolkits, and certifications. Emphasis should be placed on emerging themes like digital transformation and environmental sustainability.

5. Strengthening Regional Collaboration:

- Encourage cross-border partnerships and regional advocacy initiatives, using platforms like the EYWC to amplify shared priorities and promote collective action.

Conclusion

The Regional Seminar on Advocating for Youth Work in Eastern and Southeast Europe took place on 29 and 30 October 2024 in Skopje, North Macedonia. The event served as a crucial platform for addressing the challenges, opportunities, and transformative potential of youth work in Eastern and Southeast Europe. By gathering 58 participants, incl. youth workers, policymakers, researchers, activists, and civil society representatives, the event fostered an inclusive dialogue that bridged gaps in understanding and practice. Through its structured discussions and thematic group work, the seminar emphasized the importance of youth work as a cornerstone for democracy, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Key insights from the seminar underscored the need for increased recognition and professionalization of youth work, particularly in countries where it remains undervalued or unsupported. Participants highlighted the significance of advocacy, policy innovation, and cross-sectoral collaboration as essential tools for advancing the field. The seminar also brought to light emerging themes such as mental health, digital transformation, and climate change, demonstrating how youth work must evolve to address contemporary challenges effectively.

As preparations continue for the 4th European Youth Work Convention in Malta, the seminar's outcomes offer a roadmap for future efforts. By integrating regional realities into the broader European agenda, enhancing advocacy strategies, and fostering capacity-building, the youth work community can ensure its sustained impact. By identifying good practices, analyzing needs, and

proposing forward-looking strategies, participants contributed to shaping a shared vision for youth work throughout Europe. The discussions and recommendations from the seminar presented in this report lay a solid foundation for empowering young people and reinforcing the essential role of youth work in shaping a more inclusive and resilient societies across Eastern and Southeast Europe.

List of participants

Family name	First name	Country of residence	Organisation
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DECEVIC	Ajsa	Montenegro	Forum MNE
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JOVANOVSKA	Dragana	Administrative and project assistant
Union for Youth Work, North Macedonia		
MITROVIKJ	Dragana	Secretary general
NAUMOVSKI	Andrej	President
Facilitators and rapporteur		
ATANASOV	Dragan	Facilitator
YEGHOYAN	Anna	Facilitator
BEHARIC	Samir	Rapporteur
Photo, video, and graphic recording		
LAZOV	Giorgji	Filmmaker
MARKOSKI	Nikolche	Filmmaker
RADESKI	Gorazd	Filmmaker
MACOVEANU	Renata	Graphic recorder