

# VISIBLE VALUE GROWING YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE

Handbook to support  
reflection and action



By Zara Lavchyan,  
Dragan Atanasov  
and Tanya Basarab

Based on the outcomes of the visible  
value seminar on the European Youth  
Work Agenda

## Youth Partnership

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



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# Visible value – Growing youth work in Europe

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based on the outcomes of the visible value  
seminar on the European Youth Work Agenda

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# Introduction

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**W**elcome to this handbook on growing and developing youth work in Europe which aims to support the youth work community of practice at national and local levels.

Are you a member of the youth work community of practice in Europe? Are you trying to advance youth work development in your context? We hope this publication will be a helpful resource for you. It aims to support interested parties to boost youth work development in their countries, starting with analysing the situation, identifying objectives to advance, actors to co-operate with, and challenges which may arise in the implementation process, as well as finding inspiration through how others have approached these challenges.

Since 2010, landmark youth work events, standards and processes have been launched at the European level. These processes have led to two important European-level policy documents: Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work<sup>1</sup> – the most encompassing European standard for youth work development at national and local levels, and the 2020 European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA),<sup>2</sup> a framework document for European co-operation on youth work development adopted by the European Union Council and endorsed by the Council of Europe (the Organisation) youth statutory bodies.

Since its establishment, the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership has worked on capacity building, knowledge gathering, history recording, analysis and support for development of youth work at all levels in Europe. This publication builds on those excellent resources, the European policy standards and the resources developed by the community of practice and the two partner institutions. It was planned to be support for the seminar “Visible value – Strengthening the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda in Eastern and South-East Europe”, organised by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 15 and 16 November 2022. Before the seminar, the editors prepared an overview of the youth work realities in the two regions and launched a collection of good practices from the participants. During the seminar, many of those resources were shared and the editorial team added details to contextualise the practices and highlight the learning from them.

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1. <https://rm.coe.int/1680717e78>.
  2. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42020Y1201\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42020Y1201(01)).

The handbook starts with an introduction to European youth work concepts, history, milestone events and legal frameworks, and the priorities and commitments to their implementation by the Council of Europe and the European Union. The next part presents the realities of youth work in the two regions, based on studies by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, and identifies the global and European contexts, the common objectives, and challenges, as well as the role of different members of the community of practice. The handbook aims to give practical guidance, including reflection questions, ideas for action and good practices to inspire those actions.

As with all EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership initiatives, this handbook is the result of a very engaging and rich regional capacity-building seminar, which brought together over 75 policy makers, youth work practitioners and their organisations, young people, youth organisations, trainers, educators, and researchers who are working daily on youth work development in countries of eastern and South-East Europe. The visible value seminar explored all aspects of youth work development that the community of practice in the region considers important. These are presented thematically with examples of initiatives. This handbook builds on the results of the seminar and transforms the learning into what is relevant for the whole of Europe, including standards, support tools and programmes developed by the Council of Europe and the European Union, through their Youth Partnership and by the community of practice in the participating countries.

We invite policy makers, youth work practitioners, actors planning or implementing strategies for youth work development at organisational, local or national level, to use it. We encourage trainers and educators to include the handbook in the reading lists, curricula and activities. Managers and leaders in youth centres, organisations or public bodies can explore within their own structures any topic reflected in this handbook and find inspiration for further action. Youth workers and youth work organisations can use it to sharpen the focus of their advocacy and volunteering activities. So, call up your community of practice friends and let's dive into the contents together!







# Growing youth work in Europe

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## The concepts, developments and milestones

The year 2020 was memorable for many reasons, bringing much contact and movement to a halt on a global level to manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also had important consequences for the youth sector and for youth work. It also marked a crucial step forward in European co-operation on youth work development. Germany held the EU presidency and the Council of Europe chairmanship at the same time and, in preparation for that role, it offered to host the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (EYWC). Preparatory work on the convention and its outcomes had started already in 2018, only one year after the adoption of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work. To give a boost to the implementation process of this Council of Europe standard-setting document, Germany proposed a policy framework at EU level, by enshrining some of the results of the convention in the EU Council Conclusions on a European Youth Work Agenda.

This was an important step in an almost 10-year process, through which, for the first time, the two European institutions supporting youth policy and youth work implementation in Europe had agreed on a framework agenda for co-operation at European level, identifying commitments for each institution but also for co-operation through their Youth Partnership, supporting youth work development across Europe for the coming period. These commitments were developed with wide engagement of the youth work community of practice at the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, as expressed in its final declaration: “Signposts for the future”.

To reach this point of strong commitment to youth work development, much research, policy, and capacity-building work had been carried out by the youth sector in Europe. There are several important milestones. Youth work was the focus of the first covenant of co-operation signed by the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth in 1998. The covenant supported capacity building of youth workers through advanced training for trainers in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

In 2010, Belgium organised, under its EU presidency, the 1st European Youth Work Convention. The final declaration called, among other things, for better recognition of youth work. This mobilised youth work actors around an agenda for advancing youth work recognition through the “Pathways to recognition” process. Another

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3. Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe curriculum and content manuals by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/other-publications#ATTE>, last accessed on 19 December 2022.

10-year project collected, analysed and debated the roots of youth work and its hi(stories). *The history of youth work in Europe*<sup>4</sup> includes seven volumes of country and thematic chapters and an important contribution to building an identity of youth work in Europe. Under its Council of Europe chairmanship, Belgium organised the 2nd European Youth Work Convention in 2015. Its final declaration called for a European policy framework to guide the youth work actors across all member states in developing strong youth work. Demands and objectives were more ambitious, and the Council of Europe stood up to the challenge and adopted, in May 2017, Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work – the most encompassing European policy framework to date.

Other notable projects that stemmed from the 2015 convention include the research mapping educational and career pathways of youth workers in Europe, the publication “Essentials of youth work” and the launch of a related massive open online course (MOOC) by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. The MOOC has now been transformed into a self-paced course available for all actors. The research results revealed high levels of diversity and highlighted the need to support countries at different stages of youth work development, based on the state of their practice architectures. It helped policy makers at European and national levels to understand which aspects of youth work policy they needed to prioritise and invest in. Finland kept education of youth workers on the agenda throughout its Council of Europe and EU presidencies in 2019.

Finally, Germany closed the cycle by hosting the 3rd European Youth Work Convention and adopting the EU Council Conclusions on a Framework for a European Youth Work Agenda.



Find out how youth work is defined, regulated, recognised and developed as an occupation and professional practice, what types of associations and structures youth workers join, how they are supported on the job, what type of career perspectives they have, what role mentoring, supervision, education and training offers they have and much more on the Youth Partnership resource page.

## The European Youth Work Agenda and priorities for the coming years

The final declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention identified eight signposts and measures to develop youth work through existing policies, instruments and approaches. It also called for setting up co-ordinated implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda at the national level, following commitments already made in the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work in 2017 and for strengthened co-operation at European level to achieve those priorities.

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4. *The history of youth work in Europe* by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/history-of-youth-work>, last accessed on 19 December 2022.



While all these priorities are connected, developing and expanding, the youth work offer is the main challenge for the community of practice, with the declaration of the last convention calling for a “basic youth work offer for all young people all over Europe”. The starting point and the format of this offer should remain diverse, encompassing inclusive, rights-based and value-driven youth work that is engaging, empowering, and which supports young people’s development. Progress on any of the other priorities should be considered in connection to priority one: how the youth work offer can be further developed and expanded; how can as many young people as possible have access to youth work spaces where they learn, have fun, develop and grow their hearts and minds?

Research from the history of youth work project shows that the roots of youth work lie in social work, social pedagogy and education. In most countries, a combination of factors has led to the way youth work has evolved and therefore this bridging role is a strong part of youth work identity. Youth work has been a referral service and has provided guidance for many young people. As research shows, in times of crisis youth workers make valuable contributions, often being the reference persons for young people, but also helping young people engage in group activities or referring them to other support services. In other words, youth work has proved its added value for young people’s development, and this is one of the reasons it has moved to the core of European youth policy.

Since the process of the European Youth Work Conventions started in 2010, youth work has become an explicit goal of youth policy. From ensuring the community of practice is working in the same direction on youth work development, to investing in quality of youth work, to strengthening cross-sectoral ties, promoting recognition, innovation and tackling challenges – these have been adopted in youth policy goals that aim to strengthen youth work development.

Youth work is part of youth policy in many countries, while in a few countries it is regulated by specific youth work policy acts. Since the adoption of important framework documents, such as resolutions and recommendations from European institutions, governments have agreed on common guidelines for developing a strong policy and strategic framework for youth work at national and local levels. These documents assign specific objectives to public authorities and encourage other actors to contribute.

Organisations of youth work practitioners, and service providers, educators and trainers have all assumed part of the objectives and so the community of practice is a rich network of actors working towards a better recognised and supported youth work offer, available to as many young people as possible. Youth clubs and youth centres, youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth work associations and umbrella structures, youth information and counselling services, municipal youth services, policy makers and researchers are all engaged with the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda and are making their contributions. The EYWA, the two European strategies in the field of youth, and the recommendation on youth work are all important instruments which support the community of practice in achieving the eight priorities. This publication includes many examples of how members of the community of practice are implementing European Youth Work Agenda goals.

Quality youth work covers not only more youth work, but also developing and ensuring minimum quality criteria and standards. “Signposts for the future” refers to the principle of a basic youth work offer for young people all over Europe. In generating a quality youth work offer, the declaration acknowledges the importance of local policy making alongside European policies, as youth work is essentially implemented at local and national levels. Hence, the proposed measures include building local alliances, the creation of spaces for youth work, providing capacity building and sustainable funding.

Quality development in youth work refers to structures, initiatives and guidelines that can support practice based on the values and principles of youth work. Quality development is about creating and implementing quality standards, establishing occupational standards for youth workers and building new networks and structures for co-operation and co-creation, but also utilising existing ones. Ultimately, the idea is to foster and strengthen the structures, systems and frameworks that already exist, to support co-operation between different stakeholders and to push for further developments as needed, to ensure that young people want to participate, engage and take advantage of the learning possibilities that youth work offers.

Acknowledging that there is still not enough attention dedicated to the promotion and recognition of youth work, the EYWA calls for more investment in strategic and co-ordinated efforts and resources to make youth work better understood, visible and credible as a self-sufficient field of work. The declaration calls for organising events, setting communication plans and defining common terms, and joining efforts in the promotion, communication and dissemination of youth work-related contents. This should allow for better presentation of the impact of youth work and for creating a common narrative that can be used for its promotion. Concrete measures for political, formal and social recognition should follow.

Part of those measures is the mainstreaming of youth work as an integral part of youth policy. Incorporating youth work into policy making needs to be done at all levels, starting from the local level and continuing to the European level. The needs and measures regarding youth work should be integrated both vertically and horizontally, following the call for a horizontal approach to be applied to youth policy. These policies should be developed by applying a rights-based approach to participation, recognising young people and youth workers as stakeholders whose involvement is essential. For all of this to be achieved, strengthened co-operation is necessary between different stakeholders from the very local to the European level.

Pooling the resources of the youth work community of practice and those beyond it, advocating for even greater cross-sectoral co-operation on youth and youth work is high on the agenda. For youth work to move in the same direction, it is essential to explore, exchange and build on examples of different styles of good practice. But what is perhaps equally important is to go beyond the youth work community of practice and to communicate the value of youth work and engage effectively with different sectors. The strategic and operational approaches to cross-sectoral and horizontal co-operation on youth work at all levels are priorities today.

More resilient youth work structures are required that are grounded in evidence-informed innovation principles, encompassing long-term thinking, reflexivity and strategy-based work, so that youth work can respond to the emerging challenges and be a safety net for young people in times of uncertainty. A spirit and culture of innovation in youth work practice are essential to help incorporate issues that matter to young people nowadays into the practice, as well as to successfully navigate the transformations happening at local, European and global levels.



Do you know if these European policy standards are translated and available in the official language(s) of your country? Find out what specific measures related to developing youth work your government took, based on these documents. If little action has happened, why don't you ask for a multistakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting, where these questions can be discussed?

## **European Union and Council of Europe commitment to implementing the European Youth Work Agenda**

Today, more than at any other moment in recent history, youth work is high on the policy agenda. Youth work is an explicit objective of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 and the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. This means that the youth sector across Europe has youth work as one of the key priorities in its field of action, starting with policy commitments to funding for implementation of projects, networks, capacity-building actions and investment in experts in this field. This is a big achievement and the result of decades of calls and advocacy for youth work development in Europe.



which calls for more co-ordination of processes on youth work development through the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. Large-scale projects such as “Europe goes local” (focusing on developing municipal youth work) or peer-learning activities on higher education and validation of youth workers are examples of initiatives supported by the European Union.

These European framework documents aim to guide actors at local and national levels, in particular policy makers and policy implementers, to adopt these European standards and translate them into their national policy priorities. In this sense, the transnational projects, conferences, research and capacity-building activities are the forums through which these standards can be discussed, understood and transposed into national and local implementation frameworks. For example, since the adoption of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, many countries in Europe have evaluated how youth work is fairing and developed policy objectives and implementation plans for strengthening it. These policy frameworks and the European Youth Work Conventions have been replicated to some degree in national systems, involving representatives of the community of practice and sustaining a forward-looking dialogue on youth work development. The visible value seminar focused on countries from eastern and South-East Europe, analysing the state of play and learning from the main youth work actors and initiatives.



How do you see European frameworks and policies reflecting the needs of the youth work community of practice and structures at national and local levels? What limitations or opportunities do you see currently? If this is not yet happening, set up a meeting with key youth work actors in your country to define a strategy for strengthening the work at a national level and discuss how the European standards can guide that work.

## Youth work development and the EYWA at national, regional and local levels

Youth work development has been making its way into the policy priorities at international, national and local levels. The community of practice has been in the forefront of the advocacy efforts for its positive role and added value in the lives of young people throughout their different transitions in various corners of Europe.

Processes at a European level often have a steering role in these developments. They become platforms upon which the community of practice meet and share, and discuss needs and trends, shaping their own vision of the response of youth work to young people’s changing lives. There is always new impetus, new inspiration created when European processes go national and local. The events such as the adoption of CM/Rec(2017)4 Recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on youth work, the three European Youth Work Conventions and their declarations, the creation of the European Youth Work Agenda and establishment of implementation mechanisms directly impact the development dynamics. In



many countries, these events and processes have steered, initiated or accelerated changes in the youth work policy and practice. In one place this may be reflected in the development of a new youth work strategy, or recognition of the youth worker profession in the national qualifications framework; in another, the state may begin funding youth worker training curriculum developments, and in another place this may lead to the setting-up and networking of a number of youth centres across the country, with shared standards for quality assurance mechanisms.

Most of these European frameworks are not binding. They rather give recommendations based on which political processes, dialogue and joint efforts can become possible, leading to important transformations and improvements at national and local levels.

The Recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on youth work and the European Youth Work Agenda, among other things:<sup>7</sup>

- ▶ offer a framework to define the practice, its role, its place on the map of policies supporting youth; provide better knowledge of the shared concepts;
- ▶ reiterate the values and principles for quality youth work which is accessible and open for all;
- ▶ describe the contexts, challenges, limitations, possibilities and opportunities;
- ▶ set priorities and development needs;
- ▶ provide insights into emerging themes, instruments and trends impacting the youth work practice;
- ▶ include guidelines for joint national and local level actions for various stakeholders;
- ▶ give impetus and ideas on the development of the field and define actors and responsibilities;
- ▶ stimulate motivation for innovation in youth work practice;
- ▶ set up platforms for exchange and development of the community of practice and promote allocation of resources.

These documents are not written in offices in Strasbourg or Brussels. They are shaped through inclusive and participatory processes, with active input from youth work practitioners, young people and their organisations, policy makers, professionals and volunteers, whose day-to-day work is dedicated to ensuring their quality and impact for young people. There is often a fear that flames fade away after a while, that adopted documents stay on a shelf and are not used where needed, that they are too far from local realities and cannot have any impact on the policy decisions as such. Country and regional contexts determine the opportunities, the fertile ground, the political will, but the potential of using this rich base of support is unlimited. It is essential to recognise that these resources can only serve their purpose if they are put into everyday practice steered by the community of practice itself. The first step is to make sure that the information

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7. [CM/Rec\(2017\)4 Recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on youth work](#), last accessed on 1 April 2023.

about these resources is analysed, translated and disseminated. Joint reflections with the local and national actors are to be initiated to see how the international processes can provide support, and what, how and when they can help to improve policy and practice locally.

In addition to the agreed European frameworks that define the youth work sphere, countries, based on internal analysis, need to define concrete national and local objectives. There is not one correct way to proceed. There are many paths and strategies, different starting points, levels of impact, priorities and instruments and various useful partners and stakeholders along the way. Each community of practice must find its own way.



How well are the European frameworks, measures and opportunities known in your country? What can you define as needs and stimuli for steering youth work development at national and local levels? You could convene a meeting or set up a group to discuss your involvement in the EYWA implementation through the European-level support instruments.

## Youth work actors at national and local levels

Communities of practice have been defined as a process of social learning when “people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions and building innovations”. The youth work community of practice needs to be fully inclusive, incorporating all kinds of youth work, whatever method or format it builds on, and all kinds of youth workers, whether they are paid or voluntary, in a life-time career or a short-term or part-time commitment, educated through formal curricula or through non-formal training, and in all 50 countries represented at the Convention. Final declaration, EYWC 2020.

Youth work development has always happened through collaboration between broad communities of practice. Joint actions and reflections provide the setting for pooling resources and using all leverage to move things forward. Every part of the community of practice has its own expertise, and thus plays a vital role. This part of the handbook presents a non-exhaustive list of actors, and a short road map of possible actions that they can initiate and follow at national and local levels to advance towards the youth work development goals. These ideas for action are combined based on measures outlined in various documents, tested by practical work, prompted by analysis and reflection.<sup>8</sup> It does not mean all of them have to be taken up.

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8. [Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention Signposts for the future, Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda \(2020/C 415/01\)](#), last accessed on 1 April 2023.

## Youth work providers



### Actions youth work providers can take:

- ▶ developing projects and programmes expanding the youth work offer;
- ▶ developing accreditation standards, programmes, labels to ensure quality youth work;
- ▶ setting up advocacy measures to advance the youth work development goals;
- ▶ lobbying for youth work to be included in youth policies, local development programmes;
- ▶ developing innovative new approaches and instruments for working with young people;
- ▶ designing methodologies of work for generalist and specialised youth work practices;
- ▶ developing materials on youth work in national languages;
- ▶ translating the European frameworks and documents and passing them onto national level actors;
- ▶ steering the synergies among the community of practice at local, national and international levels;
- ▶ creating positive narratives and stories about youth work;
- ▶ developing youth worker training systems and frameworks;
- ▶ establishing links and joint possibilities between formal and non-formal educational offers for youth worker training;
- ▶ initiating and maintaining professional platforms, associations, networks and pools of youth work practitioners for professional exchange and support.

### Youth work educators



### Actions the youth work educators can take:

- ▶ developing youth worker training schemes and models;
- ▶ developing youth worker competence frameworks;
- ▶ creation of educational materials for youth worker training programmes;
- ▶ creation of tools and methods supporting the youth workers' practice;
- ▶ establishing links and joint possibilities between formal and non-formal educational offers for youth worker training.

### Research and knowledge community



### Actions the research community can take:

- ▶ advocating youth work-related research;
- ▶ feeding the practice with studies;
- ▶ developing models for working with different groups of young people;
- ▶ providing analysis of existing and emerging practices;
- ▶ developing competence frameworks for youth work practitioners;
- ▶ training youth workers in using basic research tools;
- ▶ providing information and data, knowledge to inform decisions on youth work;
- ▶ carrying out analysis and predictions for emerging issues related to and relevant for the youth work policy and practice;
- ▶ mapping and supporting the expansion of the stakeholders in the field;
- ▶ piloting new approaches and tools supporting the youth work practice;
- ▶ compiling consolidated resources and data for the actors in the field.

### Policy makers



### Actions policy makers can take:

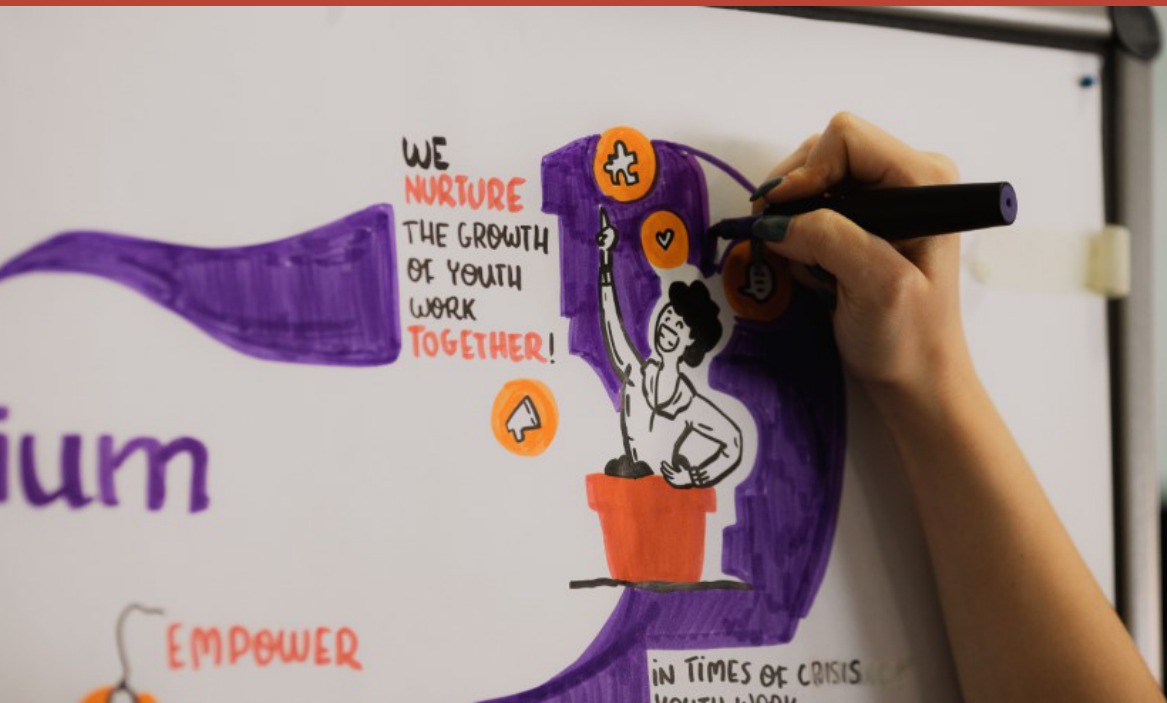
- ▶ officially defining youth work concepts that provide a legal basis for operations;
- ▶ adopting strategic goals, frameworks, legislation, sustainable structures, priorities and resources for youth work;
- ▶ defining the scope of the youth work actors, giving them a mandate to work with;

- ▶ promoting the sphere and recognising formally its contribution to young people's development;
- ▶ working on sustainable financing for youth work;
- ▶ providing platforms where different actors can work collaboratively and support each other's actions;
- ▶ facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue, communication and effective co-ordination with other sectors, as well as related policies to attract expertise and resources to youth work;
- ▶ facilitating public–private dialogue, processes and platforms;
- ▶ promoting and ensuring access to youth work for all young people;
- ▶ supporting financially and institutionally the youth organisations and youth work providers;
- ▶ establishing frameworks, strategies, programmes and pathways for the education, training, capacity building and professional development of youth workers;
- ▶ providing an enabling environment and conditions for innovative youth work practices;
- ▶ ensuring a youth work offer is available and accessible at the local level, with focus on rural communities and vulnerable communities;
- ▶ mainstreaming youth work into youth and other related policy strategies;
- ▶ setting up systems for recognition of competences acquired through youth work interventions;
- ▶ sustaining multistakeholder participatory expert groups supporting policy decisions and work;
- ▶ supporting recognition of the youth work profession and its inclusion in national qualifications frameworks;
- ▶ developing competence frameworks that define the core of the abilities and qualifications of the youth workers, recognised by the state and non-state actors;
- ▶ carrying out monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of the youth work practice;
- ▶ promoting the value and role of youth work to society at large and to specific groups of young people.



What are the most active networks in your country? Are there processes to encourage synergies between them? Is there a youth work umbrella structure to take a lead on advocacy efforts? What can your structure contribute to such platforms?





WE  
NURTURE  
THE GROWTH  
OF YOUTH  
WORK  
TOGETHER!



IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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EMPOWER

# Realities, challenges and opportunities: youth work in eastern and South-East Europe

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**T**he world of youth work in eastern and South-East Europe and Caucasus operates in a complex reality. The history and current socio-political developments leave their trace in the youth field and impact the way policy is implemented. The two regions, of course, are very different, and each country even has its specific development dynamics, pressing issues and challenges, experience and youth policies. These regions also share some challenges related to the Soviet and socialist past, open and frozen conflicts and escalations in recent history, political challenges with democratisation, and so forth.<sup>9</sup>

Despite specific social, economic, political, cultural and developmental contexts impacting greatly young people's lives in these regions, there are some common difficulties and challenges that these countries are facing. In youth policy and youth work ecosystems some parallels can be found to better understand the situation and work towards improvements. Young people and the youth sector in other parts of Europe also experience some of these challenges and they can learn from the responses developed by countries in these two regions.

## REALITIES

### *Lost in translation: understanding youth work*

Despite the increased attention to youth work in recent years on a policy level, with legal frameworks and definitions being put in place, there is still a lack of a larger common, recognised and accepted understanding in both regions of what youth work is on a larger societal level. In terms of social recognition, youth work is often thought to mean "young people working", and subsequently, youth workers are confused with young people in employment. Youth work is often discussed in the context of employability and entrepreneurship programmes for young people or jobs that are done by a young person. Part of the reason for this confusion is linguistic, especially in some European languages where the terms for youth workers and young employees are very similar. The lack of recognition of the profession and occupation in wider society adds to this confusion. This often leads to youth work being confused with youth participation, youth-initiated projects, youth activism and undertaking any projects with young people. Hence, often, everyone identifies themselves as a youth worker, even when they do not do youth work nor possess the competences linked to a youth worker's profile. If youth workers and others working with young people lack a commonly accepted reference point, there is confusion about who is doing youth work and who supports young people in other ways.

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9. For more details and research findings, consult the seminar website <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/visible-value-seminar>.





How is the concept of “youth work” perceived in your country? What can the community of practice do to clear up any possible confusions? Use the resources from the Visible Value library on recognition of youth work, by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, to support action in this direction.

### *Legacy of the past*

The region has a rich history of working, with and for young people. From the Soviet and socialist heritage to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, from ideology-supported youth structures to non-formal and self-organised youth spaces, digital and mobile youth work – the patchwork is diverse but scarce.

Youth work today carries this history forward and continues to develop new approaches at high speed. Somehow all the different realities, contexts, practices exist and sometimes they even coexist in the same space. There are youth centres financed and set up by the state, some facilitated and maintained by international organisations, others developed by international youth programmes and NGOs; some function in the context of “culture houses” or “youth palaces”, and others still float between hobby clubs and extracurricular activities. Nevertheless, youth centres, youth clubs and other youth spaces are more often the exception than the rule across the two regions.

### *Youth work for all?*



There is a lack of sustainable youth work infrastructure equally accessible for urban and rural youth. Young people from many rural communities in the two regions face mobility challenges and have very limited access to information.

In a situation when there are almost no youth centres or any youth work services in rural areas, young people find it even more difficult to benefit from youth work. Meanwhile, the limited financial and human resources prevent youth work organisations from engaging rural young people. Often that is precisely the group that would benefit most from permanent youth work offers. Physical spaces for youth work contribute to more visible and accessible youth work programmes. This is also a prerequisite for building trust and relations between young people and youth workers – essential characteristics of youth work.

### Local youth clubs in Bosnia and Herzegovina



The Network of Youth Clubs was founded in 2007 on the initiative of the PRONI Centre for Youth Development and in co-operation with local communities and the Government of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In total, 26 youth clubs were established in local communities, offering space for young people to participate in activities that promote culture, peace, human and youth rights, as well as in educational and sports activities, activities for promotion of volunteerism and activism. The youth club network has a volunteer programme as well, giving young people the opportunity to be active members of the community. As youth club leaders, PRONI employs only youth workers who have participated in PAOR – the PRONI Academy of Youth Work.

The recently adopted Law for Youth Policy and Youth Participation in North Macedonia defines the concept of youth centres and obliges local municipalities to establish and fund them. In this way, public funding should be assured for the functioning of youth centres. Some municipalities from Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo\*,

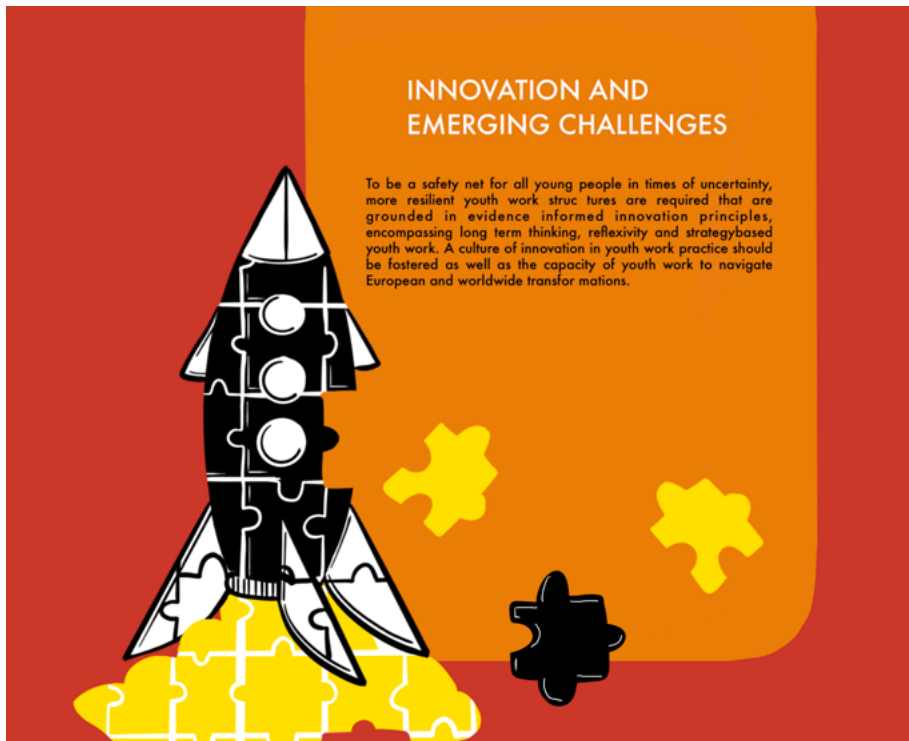


\*All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Montenegro and Serbia also finance youth centres and youth clubs. Romania passed the youth law, with a specific chapter for youth centres, defining youth work professionals and youth centres as validators of competences acquired through youth work interventions.

In general, open youth work and youth spaces have gained more recognition and trust. The sector is constantly searching for innovative ways to adapt youth work to young people's changing lives and aspirations. This means looking into new ways, tools, spaces, types of communication, services, themes, and more participatory practices in planning and implementation of youth work.

### *Youth work in times of multiple crises and transition*



The Covid-19 pandemic has also had serious consequences for youth work practice. Despite unprecedented challenges, youth workers were expected to adapt. During the pandemic, youth work in many places was quick to respond to the changing circumstances and moved to the digital sphere.<sup>10</sup> Youth workers served as the first contact point and offered mental health support to young people when the healthcare system could not offer any service. In many parts of Europe, including in the two regions, youth work had to adapt to yet another new reality. Youth

10. For more details and research findings consult the Youth Partnership website with studies on [the impact of Covid-19](#) on the youth sector.

centres and youth work spaces played a crucial role in supporting internally displaced people and young refugees. Many youth centres changed their purpose and introduced new approaches in their work. Meanwhile, youth workers in other places needed to learn very fast how to address war-related circumstances of young people in Europe.

### Corridors – Dialogue through co-operation: trauma-sensitive youth work project for Armenia and Georgia



The German project “Corridors” aimed to improve competences of youth and social workers in trauma-sensitive work when they work with youth from conflict-affected communities. The project is currently being finalised. In the first stage of the project, 15 practitioners from Armenia and Georgia were trained in a trauma-informed approach when working in the community affected by armed conflict. Guidelines for youth, peace and social workers on trauma-sensitive work were also created, and are available at <https://www.opencorridors.de/>.

The youth work community from the two regions has been following digital youth work development in other countries and trying to integrate it into their work. The pandemic accelerated this transformation, but not all the countries were ready for this. Youth work organisations are still lacking strategies, competences and the tools for all-digital facilitation of learning or for hybrid youth work. As recent research shows, young people in these regions value face-to-face contact more. Digitalisation in the region tends to divide more than unite the community of practice, especially on questions of working with young people living in rural areas or young people living in poverty. Lack of access to high-speed internet, or to functioning personal devices, as well as low digital skills are some of the reasons for this reluctance towards digital youth work.



How have the pandemic, tensions and conflicts influenced youth work in your context? What responses and solutions have been put in place? How has the state supported the expansion, diversification and adaptation of youth work practice to the emerging needs?

## CHALLENGES

### *Youth and youth work: a political priority?*

Based on the experiences in both regions, one can state that youth and youth work are high priorities when political will is strong and that it is exposed to many risks when the country, government or individual politicians responsible for the sector do not have a strong commitment to it. Elections usually draw attention to young people’s situation when their votes can deliver political gains. However, most often youth policy is merged with other areas, such as education, demography, sports, research, culture, information, family, social protection or tourism, which risks diffusing it among other priorities and target groups.

Lack of prioritisation of youth work means lack of recognition, outreach, standards, financing, regulations and resources for quality assurance, lack of support for professionalisation of the practitioners and investments in the structures, infrastructure and sustainable work. Part of a conducive ecosystem for youth work development is to have it high on the policy agenda. When priority is not given to youth work, the practice lacks the possibility to grow, expand, improve quality and obtain resources to become more accessible and inclusive.

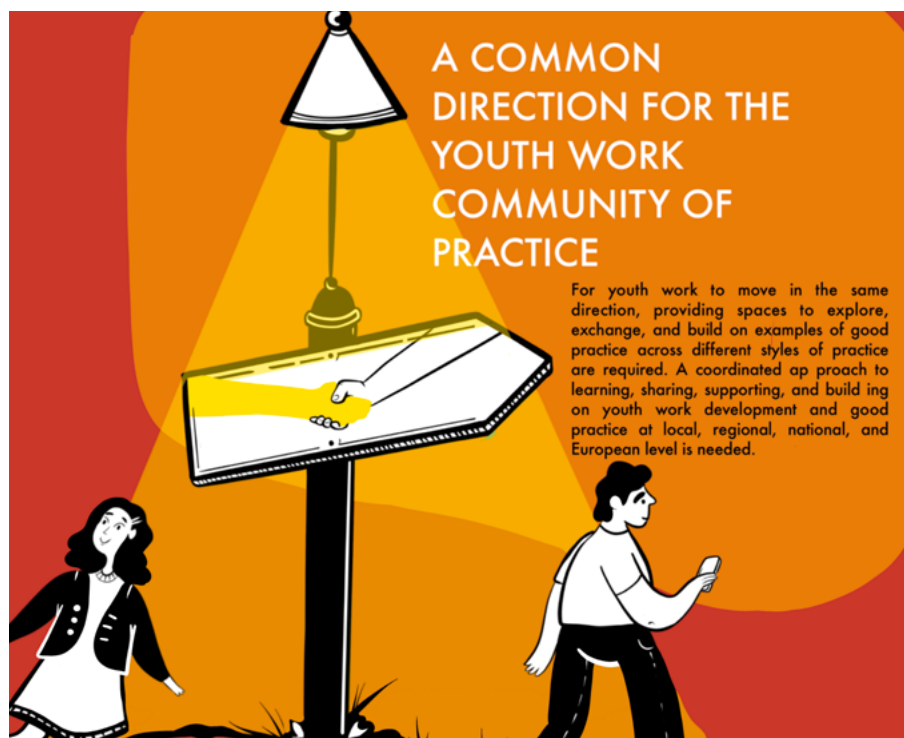
### A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH WORK DEVELOPMENT

The Bonn Process offers a framework for the youth work community of practice to consider what it could be doing for youth work itself. However, the growth of youth work throughout Europe would be even better served if European institutions further aligned their visions for youth work within their respective youth strategies. This requires a joint letter of commitment or memorandum of understanding, connecting the Bonn Process to wider panEuropean education and learning initiatives.



Is youth work reflected in youth policy strategies in your country? What are the challenges connected to it? Are there political allies and policy makers who could champion supportive youth work regulation? What can the community of practice do to improve that?

## Legally defined and framed as a sphere



Youth work practice has been gaining some political and legal recognition. Most countries have strategies, laws or acts which define the fields of action, the profession, educational opportunities, spaces and infrastructure, funding and resourcing. All countries in South-East Europe and a few in eastern Europe now have a definition of youth work and/or youth workers in policy documents. This is usually done in laws targeting young people, though youth work is mentioned and defined also in national youth strategies, regulations, state decrees, and other youth-related policy documents. There are initiatives in some countries specifically on youth work policy. Formal recognition of youth work is advancing as well. Armenia and Moldova have youth work and the youth worker profession defined in policy documents. These include what youth work offers and the main duties of youth workers. While there is political will to open up to the needs on the ground, sustainable support for youth work development is yet to be assured. Challenges remain in implementing already adopted policy frameworks in the youth sector, often slowed down or blocked by political changes. Changes in government are a feature of the youth sector in these regions, and can be either a threat or an opportunity. Youth policy objectives and youth work should be more strongly linked to young people's needs. Openness and participatory policy making on youth work need to be assured so that communities of practice can have a say.

## Youth work is a high policy priority in the Republic of Moldova



The main legal document that regulates youth work in Moldova is the Law on Youth, which defines the main principles and objectives of the youth policy, the state interventions in the youth area, and the requirements from youth policy stakeholders. It also defines the main notions related to youth work. Youth work in Moldova is supported through programmes and a financial mechanism for youth work implementation, and a methodological framework for quality youth work and building youth work infrastructure. Additionally, "specialist in youth work" has been added to the Occupation Classifier of the Republic of Moldova. While currently there is no accredited vocational training course for the occupation, the government recognises and supports the training courses conducted by youth organisations, continuous training in youth centres and certificates obtained by youth workers within international youth programmes.

## Youth NGOs as agents of youth work development

The general shrinking of civil space also affects the youth field in the regions. Increasing undemocratic practices in some countries threaten the youth work practice, limiting the initiatives and activities of young people. A general mistrust towards NGOs, often sparked by political decisions and attitudes, is evident. This is quite a paradox, since NGOs have been the main driver of youth work development in the regions. Many of the youth work offers and opportunities have been provided by national, regional and local NGOs, their volunteers and professional staff. Through grants, civil society organisations have developed and sustained youth work. Nevertheless, in some countries NGOs are disregarded, controlled or blacklisted, pushing youth workers to change their careers and leave the practice. Strengthening national youth organisations and their umbrella structures, such as national youth councils, who can be good advocacy agents, is key to developing youth work.



How are NGOs perceived in the country and how does it impact their work? What possibilities do they have to influence decision making at the local level? How easy is it for youth organisations to voice their views and enter a dialogue with the youth policy makers?

## Youth worker qualification, education and training

In very few countries of the two regions can the profession of youth worker be learned in a formal education institution. However, in most countries, NGOs set up programmes to train youth workers and the ministries responsible for youth offer certification of such training courses. This is rather opportunistic positive co-operation that does not necessarily offer any further recognition or guarantee for the quality of the educational standards. Curricula are not usually standardised but



they are connected to or rooted in European youth work training and competence frameworks (Council of Europe youth worker portfolio or European Training Strategy (ETS) competence model for youth workers to work internationally). In Armenia, the state funds support an annual long-term training course with practice and mentorship for youth workers. The curriculum is based on the youth worker competence framework inspired by the Council of Europe tools. Youth workers in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova can follow NGO-led training programmes with a certification at the end. The Serbian Association of Youth Workers has developed an extensive curriculum and offers training for youth work practitioners in the country. Ukraine and Moldova invest in capacity building of youth workers in their network of youth centres with support from the Council of Europe and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) respectively. Formal education is offered in Azerbaijan and Belarus.

### All stakeholders around one table in Serbia



In May 2021, the Youth Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (co-ordinated by the Minister for Youth and Sports) established the permanent expert team for the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda. The team consists of 16 representatives of institutions, as well as representatives of the national association of youth workers (NAPOR) and Eco-centre Radulovacki, holder of the Council of Europe quality label for youth centres. NAPOR co-ordinates the work of the expert team. Some of the priorities that the group works on include: providing spaces for youth work, developing the national programme for digital youth work and work with youth, defining national qualifications for youth workers, revising non-formal education curricula for youth workers, and establishing formal education programmes, a process that started in September 2022.



Youth workers often have self-directed learning and career paths. People who have been involved in youth work as adolescents or who have been volunteers in projects and NGOs go on to become youth workers themselves. Their employment prospects are not clear and often depend on the capacity and projects of their organisations. Some countries have developed competence frameworks and advocate for youth work to be included in national qualifications framework systems, advancing youth work recognition as a profession. Occupational standards for youth workers have been recently created in Serbia and North Macedonia, leading to youth work being recognised in the national qualification frameworks. Here, non-formal education for youth workers is recognised through the national system of adult education. In Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2014, the profession of Expert Associates on Youth Work is included in the classification of the Agency for Statistics and an intensive non-formal educational programme is organised annually to train youth workers. Ukraine and Romania have achieved similar results by enshrining in law the formal recognition of youth workers. In Moldova, only youth work specialists can provide youth services, while the Law on Youth also defines youth workers acting on a voluntary basis. Codes of conduct, possibilities of learning youth work in formal education settings, and receiving state-recognised diplomas are still very limited in both regions. Even more limited discussions are happening on the quality of educational standards, occupational standards, ethical standards, the role of supervision and work in practice.



Where is youth work taught in your country? Do you have a youth worker competence framework or professional standards, guiding educational paths? Can you work with a formal education institution, on a joint educational programme for youth workers?

### ***Resourcing and financing youth work: needs exceeding the offer***

Even though in many places there is either a dedicated youth budget, or local budgets financing youth work activities and structures, the needs seem to be greater, and are not covered by national or local financing. Budget deficits directly affect regional and local youth work. Youth work is unequally spread between urban and rural areas, with larger cities able to offer more infrastructure and funding. Another challenge is that national funding is often project based and limited to yearly budgets, and it targets specific groups. There is a need to consider investing in and financing sustainable youth work structures, infrastructure and long-term youth work programmes. Sustainable funding is essential to ensuring quality youth work that respects standards agreed in national or European policy frameworks. These include essential principles in youth work, such as inclusion, access, equality or participation of discriminated groups.

Public-private co-operation is still a challenge, though this could be a way to bring resources into the field. There are a few examples of interesting solutions in the regions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina organisations co-operate with the private sector to ensure employment of youth workers, while in Moldova the potential for co-operation is explored between youth centres and youth clinics. In Romania the practitioners connect donors to jointly contribute to the common goal – extending the network of youth centres.

Lack of sustainable funding has consequences related to the practitioners. It means high staff turnover, resignation and departure of qualified youth workers to more stable employment and loss of expertise to other sectors or regions. Not only is there a lack of recognition for youth work as a valuable profession, but the salaries and benefits for paid youth workers are low and insecure. This, coupled with a lack of funds for quality professional training and education makes it harder to attract and retain youth workers. For youth policy stakeholders this clearly means that more decisive actions are needed from the policy makers, both for better formal recognition of youth work, and for supporting it with adequate funding.

In some countries, funding to regime-friendly organisations is still a practice. This means that the scarce public resources are made more easily available for organisations affiliated to ruling parties, or the ones who follow state or a certain political ideology. Shrinking space for youth civil society also means shrinking space for youth work practice, as attested in the two studies on the impact of Covid-19 on eastern and South-East Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Looking at the ratio of national to international funding, it is evident that often a country's resources are not enough to cover the needs and growing challenges of youth work, especially in times of crisis, wars, escalated conflicts, pandemics, refugee inflows and so on. International funding has almost always exceeded the national resources in the two regions and greatly influenced youth work development. Changes are often steered by large international programmes, often with funding from the UN, EU or international development agencies, who, in co-operation with ministries, are implementing structural transformations and reforms. On the one hand, such initiatives support big changes. On the other hand, external organisations drive priorities and there is less flexibility to adapt to the country or local needs or those of specific vulnerable groups.



What are the main funding streams for youth work in your country? Do they offer structural, administrative funds to sustain youth work organisations? Are there alternative sources that youth organisations are using, in addition to public funds? Can you set up a donor co-ordination meeting every six months, and set up a space in which to co-ordinate the funding efforts and disseminate the information on opportunities for all?

## OPPORTUNITIES

### *Networking and exchange of practices: collaboration in youth work*

Structured dialogue, processes and channels of youth work development are not yet fully established in the region. There is unexplored potential for engaging civil society actors and youth workers in all relevant decisions, but this practice does not seem to be present across the regions. Nevertheless, some countries have set up national working groups or professional associations for youth work development

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11. "Towards a better understanding of COVID-19 impact on young people and on the youth sector in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus"; "The impact of Covid-19 on young people and the youth sector in South-East Europe"; last accessed 1 April 2023.

(for example Serbia, Armenia, Ukraine). These have become platforms for joint research and policy development. As an example, Bulgaria has created a national working group and national advisory body to promote youth work in the country. Serbia has set up a permanent expert team for the implementation of EYWA, which involves representatives from relevant ministries, national agencies, youth councils, youth centres, the national association of youth workers and the regional youth co-operation structures. Many countries regularly hold national conferences and meetings of youth workers as forums for exchange and capacity building (Georgia, Moldova). It is important to have such formats as joint decision making, consultative systems and bodies that ensure co-creation at a national level.

A strong community of practice provides an important safe space for sharing youth work knowledge and opportunities, for mutual support and the exchange of good practice. There is a growing need and request for spaces where the youth work community of practice can meet. There are not many events and activities in the regions currently, which would undoubtedly strengthen and bring the community closer together, transforming it into a strong support system at the national level. As Hilary Tierney, a professor from the Maynooth University in Ireland said, the community of practice should become a community of praxis, which means the integration of “being, thinking and doing” into the youth work.

### **Conference to raise awareness of the European Youth Work Convention in Georgia**



In 2020, the youth agency held a large conference to raise awareness of the Youth Work Convention among youth workers and young people. Only up to 80 participants could participate in the event due to Covid-19 restrictions, but the conference was also streamed live through online platforms.

During three days of activities, the participants discussed and developed recommendations on the Youth Work Convention priorities and analysed how they related to the national youth strategy and policy concept.

A stronger community at local, national and international levels can be a better advocate for other dimensions of youth work recognition. It is now important to build on the positive momentum and reach out to a broader community, building multilevel, multifaceted dialogue and sustained communication. The networking and flow of information within that community should be systemic; knowledge transfer between experienced youth workers and newcomers, and between stakeholders in different communities and countries will lead to important changes. The community of practice that met in Sarajevo, like the previous conventions, highlighted the importance of sustaining regular meeting spaces and continuing to strengthen the co-operation bridges.



What are the main state structures, umbrella organisations and professional groups that can support youth work development in your country? What spaces exist for their joint work? Can you initiate a meeting with key people and structures and come up with a mechanism for sustaining joint reflection and action to advance youth work?

### *National umbrellas of youth workers*

Organisations providing youth workers, field professionals, volunteers and administrators have been at the forefront of the development of the sector in the region. Youth programmes fund expertise, competence and knowledge development, advocacy, and dialogue with policy makers. Associations, pools of youth workers, networks and platforms for dialogue and co-operation consolidating the practitioners in the regions are very few. Some smaller groups within national or regional NGOs exist, but they do not replace the role of national youth worker umbrellas. There are national associations of youth workers and/or youth work providers in Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and North Macedonia. In Georgia and Ukraine there are award competitions for youth workers, supporting recognition of individuals. In Serbia, the national association of youth workers is the contact point for the national EYWA implementation group.

A stylized illustration of a woman with dark hair and a necklace, sitting in a white car. She is holding a megaphone in her right hand. The car has a yellow arrow icon on the front. Surrounding the car are several social media icons: a play button, a thumbs up, a star, and a speech bubble with a heart. The background is a gradient of red and orange.

**PROMOTION AND RECOGNITION**

More strategic and coordinated efforts are needed to make youth work better understood, visible and credible as a distinct work arena. Developing a common language, a set of terms supporting a widely shared general definition while leaving enough space to adjust and connect to local contexts and realities, will help create a common narrative.

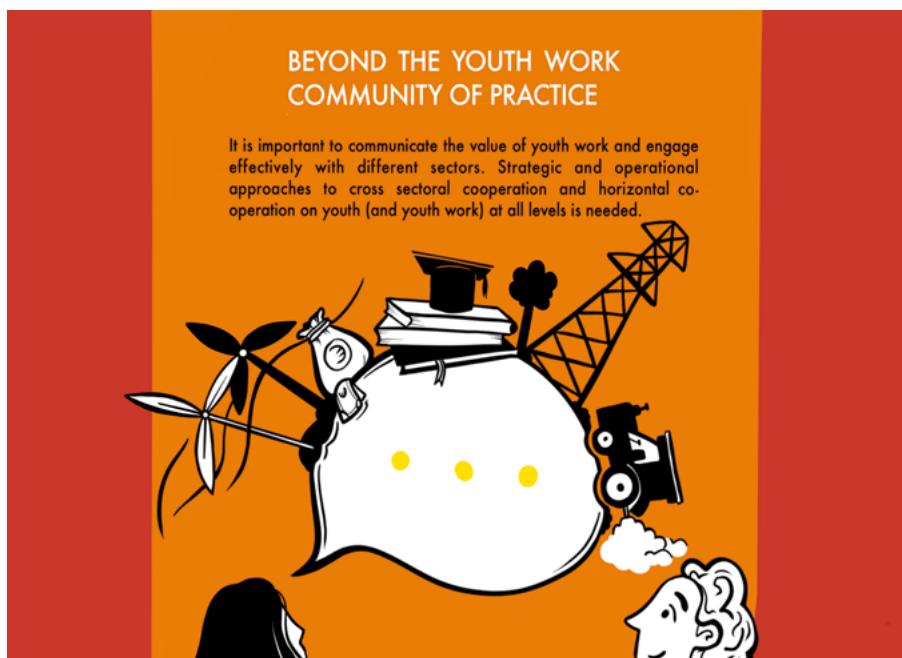
The impact of such national networks is big; they often initiate and lead processes for youth work recognition. Many policy frameworks and processes have been developed jointly by policy makers and the professional associations. These networks also collaborate internationally. Since the research on education and career pathways of youth workers highlighted the role of such umbrella structures for youth workers, there has been a growing interest in setting them up in different countries and strengthening their recognition and representation in European youth work policy making. Having declared their interest to collaborate at the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, there are currently important Erasmus+ projects on setting up European-level representation structures of youth workers' associations. Such positive developments encourage association processes at national level in countries where they do not yet exist.



Is there a professional association or similar platform of youth workers? Are they part of any decision-making body at a national or local level? If such associations are not in place, conduct a mapping of interested organisations/experts and set up a meeting to discuss the establishment of such a structure in your country.

Cross-sectoral co-operation remains a challenge across the two regions, especially between stakeholders from the youth sectors and policy makers for sectors outside of the immediate circles. At the same time, the value of such co-operation is seen as very high – at least among youth work practitioners. While still complaining about the lack of understanding, interest and political will from governments, youth work practitioners acknowledge that progress is possible only through partnership and co-operation with the wider public sector. Education, employment, health, social affairs, leisure and national security are only a few of the sectors with which youth work needs to explore possible synergies. Involving other sectors will play an increasingly important role. There is already awareness of the importance of cross-sectoral work, and this co-operation of youth work with actors from other spheres will only grow – not only with the public sector, but also with formal education, the business community, the IT sector and others. More practices and models from other sectors will be adapted to youth work, especially as youth workers are looking for new ways to reach more young people and to respond to emerging needs. Since youth work will be expected to respond to young people's needs and future social trends, inevitably some of its methods and approaches will also change. Youth workers need to learn how to communicate better about the work they are doing, as well as how to share about the value of youth work more successfully. National working groups for the EYWA are seen as an instrument for this, bringing together all areas of governance and working together towards the same goals. However, this is only possible if such working groups are established and functional, which is not the case in most countries.

## Cross-sectoral co-operation



How does the youth work community interact with other sectors, such as social education, leisure, health, and so on? Think about how you could reinforce the links and help create spaces and opportunities that would strengthen the cross-sectoral ties supporting the youth work sphere.

## Ensuring quality of youth work

Initiatives on quality standards for youth work settings, youth centres, youth houses, programmes and structures are scarce. Although several youth centres, notably in South-East Europe, hold the Quality Label for Youth Centres of the Council of Europe, a single accepted and promoted quality assurance instrument and accreditation system does not exist. There is interest in the two regions to explore issues of quality in youth work, but still insufficient understanding of the importance of quality standards at national levels. This is true both at the policy level and regarding the practitioners. Quality standards are not often demanded by donors either, so they do not play a major role in funding decisions. Consequently, in most countries there are no quality standards or ethical frameworks in place. Equally important, there is a lack of tools and methodologies for implementing such standards, even where they do exist. Serbia, Ukraine and Moldova have adopted documents setting national standards for youth clubs, youth centres and youth resource centres. Among other things, these documents state that youth workers should be employed in all these spaces.

## Assuring quality standards for youth centres in North Macedonia



The Agency for Youth and Sport in North Macedonia adopted a regulation that defines the quality standards and indicators for youth centres. To support the process of establishing youth centres according to the Law for Youth Policy and Youth Participation, the Union for Youth Work, as the national association of youth work providers, organised a wide campaign aimed at youth officers from municipalities, representatives of youth groups and organisations, youth workers, and other relevant stakeholders. The main activities included: presentations of the standards, information sessions with municipal actors, an online campaign, a press conference, individual meetings with local governments and national donor meetings. The activities reached more than 100 participants from 44 municipalities and resulted in five youth centres fulfilling the requirements of the rulebook for minimum quality standards of youth centres.

In all the countries, the quality assurance documents have been prepared through wide consultative processes, involving national professional associations of youth workers and youth work providers. To secure stronger future prospects for youth work practice, quality standards should be a concern for all parts of the community of practice, starting with the practice, the practitioners, the organisations offering youth work, educational standards, programme and policy aspects.



Are there documents that set the minimum quality standards for youth work spaces and programmes? What do you see as the role of the youth work community of practice in the country in terms of quality assurance? Have a look at the Youth Partnership website to learn about quality standards and ethical codes developed in Europe.

## *Evolution in dynamics*

It is certain that youth work is getting higher on the political agenda in the countries of eastern and South-East Europe. Increased awareness of the importance of youth work recognition, heightened interest and political will among policy makers, and supportive European developments and policy documents have all contributed to important developments in most countries. There is growing pressure on all countries to formally define and recognise youth work in policy frameworks. Meanwhile, positive examples of developing occupational standards, competence frameworks and certified education for youth workers in some countries inspires similar initiatives elsewhere. There is a spillover effect in many areas, and more can be expected in the near future. The instruments and activities under the European Youth Work Agenda and the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work can serve an important purpose in this, as they provide space for peer learning and exchanging good practices between stakeholders. National working groups for the EYWA implementation make a critical contribution, where they function.

Given recent developments across the regions, it is reasonable to expect that there will be more initiatives for greater formal and political recognition of youth work in all countries. National focus will differ based on the context in each country. However, current experiences show that recognition starts with defining youth work in policy documents and moves onto formal recognition as a profession. Once enough is achieved in these areas, the focus shifts to other priorities related to quality, ethics and strong mechanisms for their implementation. Eventually, it is expected that new questions will emerge, ones that are not yet on the political agenda. An example of such a question is funding for youth work, especially from national and local governments. There are few good practices on this, but there is an agreement that current levels of funding for quality youth work at local level are insufficient and will need to increase.

Another question is related to the job prospects for youth workers. With youth work formally recognised as a profession, and more youth workers earning certified qualifications, questions on working spaces and conditions will arise. New employment opportunities will need to be created, not only in civil society, but also in public institutions and in spaces that traditionally belong to other fields (education, healthcare, social services and so forth). Working conditions and salaries for paid youth workers, and the benefits and protections for volunteers will need to be addressed. Validation of prior knowledge and experience will probably also grow in importance, especially in relation to professional development of individuals from countries where youth work has not been recognised for a long time.

This is not to say that all countries will necessarily follow all these steps, in the same order. There are different paths to recognition, depending on national circumstances. Yet significant progress in one dimension of recognition influences the other dimensions. Hence, with greater formal and political recognition, the self-recognition and social recognition of youth work will also increase. When youth workers can be trained or study youth work formally, and then secure paid employment for the work they are doing, they will identify more strongly as youth workers and will recognise others who are doing the same type of job. A critical number of youth workers will mobilise around objectives when there is wider recognition of youth work in society.

Involving other sectors will play an increasingly important role. There is already awareness of the importance of cross-sectoral work, and this co-operation of youth work with actors from other fields will only grow.

Growing expectations from youth work also calls for strengthening the youth work community of practice. This will multiply initiatives for creating spaces and mechanisms for exchanging ideas, methods, and good practices between youth workers nationally, but also across borders and regionally. Stronger national networking in the youth work sector can be expected, following positive examples of countries that already have national associations of youth workers.

Finally, there are growing demands for and more investment in evidence-based arguments for the value of youth work. This means more investment in data-gathering and analysis, more research in the youth work field, and more empowered organisations and youth workers demonstrating the impact and value of their work.





# What's coming up in European youth work development?

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## Recommendation on youth work of the Council of Europe – The review process

When the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on youth work was adopted in 2017, it included a review of “the implementation five years after adoption”. The review process has kicked off. It aims to identify how the efforts of the member states, the Council of Europe youth sector and youth organisations are contributing to the development of youth work policy and practices in the member states and at European level and to identify how the recommendation acted as a driver for change in the member states and at European level. The review will include desk research, surveys, interviews, measurements, expert impressions and observations. It will try to take stock of what has been done and come up with analyses of drivers, practices, measures, hindering factors and recommendations.

## EU Youth Strategy mid-term evaluation

The European Union will carry out, in 2023, the mid-term evaluation of the Youth Strategy 2019-2027. This will be an important opportunity to assess whether the initiatives on youth work development are going in the right direction, whether they are properly resourced, and whether there are objectives that are not being tackled enough. In short, it is an opportunity to reassess and put more energy into the implementation process.

## The process of implementing the EYWA<sup>12</sup>

To support the implementation of the EYWA, the JUGEND für Europa, the German National Agency for the EU youth programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, set up a small team within its structure called the European Service Centre for the Bonn Process. The main tasks for the service are to provide information and networking opportunities, support the national processes and contribute to thematic impulses and knowledge-building. The community of practice can stay informed through the website and social media channels, get inspired through the newsletter, publications, joint events, conferences, or thematic open working

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12. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.415.01.0001.01.ENG).

groups, use the space for networking and discussion especially through the yearly Bonn Process meet-ups, national contact persons exchange forum and virtual Bonn Process coffee talks. The service centre provides information and updates about national processes on its website.

## Youth Partnership initiatives

With the establishment of a Steering Group for the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership has gathered representatives of the whole community of practice in Europe to give strategic guidance on the implementation process. This group will steer the work of the partnership but also give valuable contributions to the European and national structures involved in youth work development, eliminate overlaps in initiatives and help all parts of the community of practice to work in the same direction to achieve better youth work development across Europe.

A pool of experts on youth work development will be set up to use their expertise to support the implementation process in different countries. The EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership will continue to invest in research, monitoring and analysis of the situation of youth work across Europe so that European decisions continue to stay rooted in the reality on the ground. Two large research projects were launched in 2022: mapping the European-level youth work ecosystem and cross-border recognition of youth workers' competencies. These, along with the new "Insights into developing the youth work environment", will provide examples and tools for developing youth work at national and local levels.

Co-operation projects such as peer learning on education and training of youth workers will take forward the EYWA objectives of increasing and strengthening formal and non-formal education offers to youth workers. Support to the two regions will continue, and the studies on youth work in eastern and South-East Europe are important indicators of how far investment in youth work continues to move forward.

The MOOC on Essentials of Youth Work will be a permanent capacity-building offer for self-paced learning. In 2023, the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership will start editorial work on a Manual for Youth Work Strategies.

Finally, an important meeting – the European Community of Practice meeting – was held at the end of spring 2023 and the community of practice gathered to evaluate where we are in the implementation process of the EYWA, mid-way between the European Youth Work Convention's cycles, and what should be explored as the next convention's focus.

These initiatives are not the only ones on youth work development. The Erasmus+ National Agencies and SALTO network support national and transnational co-operation on youth work. None of them stop at the end of the year. They contribute ideas to planning the 4th European Youth Work Convention, to shaping the policy initiatives of the partner institutions and their co-operation through the Youth Partnership in the next programming period.





## Support measures for youth work in Europe

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**T**he EYWA and youth work recommendation implementation are high priorities of the European institutions. This means that there are resources and support measures in place for their implementation. The following is a non-exhaustive list of these resources and support measures:

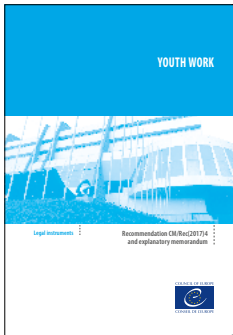
- ▶ funding opportunities from the EU youth programmes, such as Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps;
- ▶ capacity-building and policy support measures of the Council of Europe Youth Department;
- ▶ funding opportunities with the European Youth Foundation;
- ▶ capacity building and experience exchanges supported by the SALTO regional and thematic resource centres;
- ▶ Strategic National Agencies Projects (SNACs) on co-operation related to youth work, implemented by Erasmus+ national agencies (for example, Europe Goes Local, Strengthening youth work in Europe by supporting the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda!, SNAC on education and training of youth workers, SNAC European Academy on Youth Work);
- ▶ Moving Forward workshop series organised by the SALTO South-East Europe Resource Centre;
- ▶ European Platform for Youth Centres in the Quality Label network of the Council of Europe;
- ▶ European Service Centre for the Bonn Process of the German National Agency for Erasmus+;
- ▶ SALTO training and co-operation initiatives on ETS Competence Models.

## Useful resources for youth work development



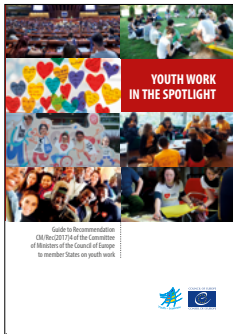
### Visible value online library on the recognition of youth work

The library brings a greater focus to the subject of the recognition of youth work. The library offers six areas linked to the recognition of youth work that include concepts, good practices, policy developments, national contexts, European policy documents and stories from the community of practice.



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

This recommendation applies to youth work in all its diversity. It aims to encourage member states to develop their youth work policy and practice within their sphere of competence and invites them to adopt a range of measures that will strengthen the necessary support for youth work at local, regional, national and European levels.



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

A user-friendly guide to the recommendation that will inspire and motivate many to put youth work in the spotlight and to advocate for its quality and development, from the local to the European level.

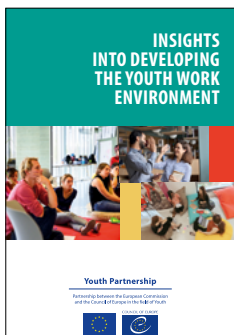
### Youth work in South-East Europe

This study builds on previous research of the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership in the South-East Europe region, namely the contributions to the Youth Wiki from non-programme countries, expert seminars and research papers. Therefore, this study is to a lesser extent directed at desk analysis of the institutional and policy frameworks of youth work in South-East Europe, while it focuses on the interviews with the youth workers and youth experts who have profound insights into the youth work policy framework and youth work implementation in 12 observed countries.

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## Insights into developing the youth work environment – A thinking and action kit

This thinking and action kit was designed with change makers of youth work in mind. It draws on an extensive body of research on education and career pathways of youth workers carried out between 2018 and 2020, mapping realities and delving into specific aspects of youth work in Europe.



## Youth work in eastern Europe: Realities, perspectives and inspiring initiatives

This publication explores the reality of youth work in the six countries of eastern Europe involved in the Eastern Partnership initiative, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The study aims to provide an evidence base for the youth sector to develop policies and interventions in the period after the pandemic and for scoping the support that the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership can offer.



## Towards a better understanding of COVID-19 impact on young people and on the youth sector in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus

This study focuses on the six countries in eastern Europe and South Caucasus (EECA), all until recently part of the Eastern Partnership co-operation: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It aims to gather a closer understanding of the situation of the young people and the youth sector during Covid-19; the policy and youth sector responses for reducing the impact of the pandemic; and the needs to be addressed towards post-Covid recovery.



## The impact of Covid-19 on young people and the youth sector in South-East Europe

This study examines Covid-19's impact since early 2020 on young people and the youth sector in the South-East Europe region, with a special focus on non-EU countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. The review focuses on the pandemic's impact on youth employment and young people's economic situation, (formal and non-formal) education and mental health and well-being.

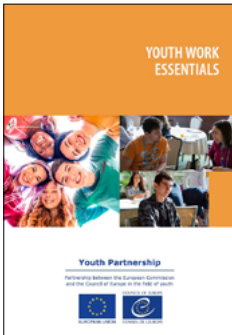


## Youth services during the Covid-19 pandemic – A patchy net in need of investment

This study aims to fill in the gaps in the body of knowledge on the impact of the pandemic on young people's access to youth services. Desk research and expert interviews with the representatives of the European organisations at national, local and European levels highlight practices of the civil and public sector that can be shared to facilitate recovery in the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, including platforms, instruments and guidelines that target improving both the universal service offers and targeted services for disadvantaged and marginalised young people.

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### Youth work essentials

This publication looks at some of the essential features of youth work that need to be in place for development to happen. It does so by giving a general illustration of the main features of youth work in Europe and by offering tips for further reading.



### Coyote Magazine

Issue 31

Boosting opportunities! 3rd European Youth Work Convention.

### Youth Partnership

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### Quality development of youth work in South-East Europe

The paper analyses the strengths of youth work in South-East Europe, reaching the conclusion that the field is currently under-developed or unrecognised by the official youth policy. It also analyses the importance of quality assurance, committed practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

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## Perspective on youth work developments

The goal of these country fact sheets is to provide basic information about the perspective on youth work developments in a specific country. All information has been gathered from national contact points, reports or country sheets, and profiles are available online. The purpose of these fact sheets was to stimulate discussion before, at, and after the 3rd EYWC among the members of the national delegations.

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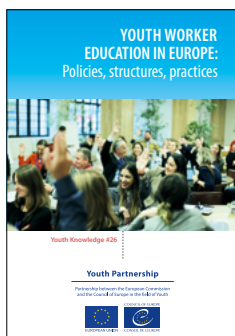


## Youth work communities in Europe: practitioners, arenas and cross-sectoral partnerships

This study, based on national realities in nine European countries, helps to further understand the nature of the youth work community. This paper investigates three different perspectives: youth practitioners, youth work spaces and arenas, and the relations of youth workers to other professions.

## Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices

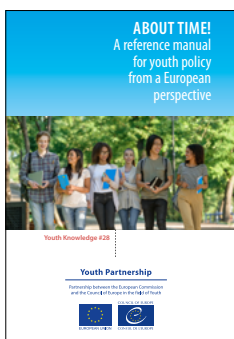
This book looks at how youth work practitioners learn their trade, what formal and non-formal education offers exist and how education is contextualised in the broader picture of youth work recognition, starting with the premise that formal education entails a series of steps from which youth work practitioners would benefit. Detailed information organised thematically can be found on the Youth Partnership webpage dedicated to this project. A series of illustrations based on the youth knowledge book is available in the illustrations/infographics section.





## The history of youth work in Europe – Knowledge book series

This series of seven books collects, records and analyses over 100 country and thematic (hi)stories of youth work roots, its definition and connection to neighbouring fields (education, social work and social pedagogy) and delves into approaches, methods, challenges and solutions in over two centuries of youth work practice. Some volumes focus on country or organisational histories, and others delve into cross-sectoral and thematic development. The project that spanned over 10 years has been foundational for many youth work initiatives in Europe today.



## ABOUT TIME! A reference manual for youth policy from a European perspective

The manual is a reference tool for initiating youth policy and learning about the diversity of national and international governance and about the infrastructure available for youth policy, its implementation, review and evaluation. Thematically, it focuses very specifically on those areas of youth policy that have been formulated and developed through European consensus-building – participation, information, volunteering, social inclusion, access to rights, youth work, mobility and digitalisation.



## MOOC on Essentials of Youth Work

The MOOC on Essentials of Youth Work is a self-directed online course developed by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership aiming to make youth work known to a wide audience and draw attention to its social value, provide an overview of youth work practices and policies across Europe and present current developments in this field, including at European level. The course is for youth workers, youth work managers, state and municipal workers, researchers, youth work education providers, youth NGO members, and so on.

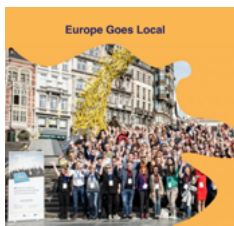
## Youth Partnership

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### Technology and the new power dynamics: limitations of digital youth work

This study offers some analytical perspectives on the limits of digital youth work and reflects on the practical implementation of digital youth work and its underpinning philosophy and values, looking at existing digital youth work mechanisms, tools and developments put in place both by state and by non-state actors. The article examines some of the gaps in digital youth work programme design and delivery and provides some guidance on how these might be addressed. The discussion is grounded in research on digital youth work and testimonies of youth workers in Europe based on their experience of delivering youth work services and activities online.



### European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Changemakers Kit

The kit supports and provokes quality development. It helps improve all aspects of local youth work, from the aims of the organisation to their practices and outcomes. It opens new possibilities and widens perspectives on what youth work can do and achieve.



### Under 30' Podcast episode on youth work in eastern and South-East Europe

Under 30' podcast episode on youth work in eastern and South-East Europe.



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## About the authors

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**Zara Lavchyan** is an educator, consultant, author, programme developer and expert in the field of non-formal education, youth policy and youth work. She is a member of the Council of Europe Youth Department Trainers Pool. For the past 20 years Zara has been involved in youth work development at local, national, international levels and has vast experience in terms of putting policy into practice, supporting policy responses and action for the field development and promotion, institutionalisation and capacity building. She has been actively involved in supporting the development of the youth sector in Armenia, post-Soviet countries and wider Europe. She has authored educational manuals and guidelines for practitioners and policy actors, trainers and young people.

**Dragan Atanasov** is a trainer, researcher, evaluator and author, specialised in youth work recognition, youth policy, cultural diversity and community development. Dragan has over 10 years of experience in conducting research and assessments in the field of youth work, designing and delivering non-formal education activities, drafting policy documents, and monitoring and evaluating programmes. He is a founder of a youth association, and currently he is Secretary General of the Union for Youth Work – the national association of youth workers and youth work providers in North Macedonia. Dragan is member of the SALTO-YOUTH SEE pool of trainers, the Council of Europe pool of external experts supporting the work of the Quality Label programme, the pool of researchers of the European Platform on Learning Mobility in the Youth Field (EPLM) and the pool of experts of the Youth Partnership for research related to the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda.

**Tanya Basarab** is research and youth policy officer in the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, where she works on the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCP), and co-ordinates research and policy analysis related to youth policy, youth work, transitions and social inclusion of young people and artificial intelligence. Having studied international relations with a focus on development, she has been engaged with civil society organisations in the youth, community development, active citizenship, social and anti-poverty fields. Her contributions have focused on governance, civic dialogue, participatory democracy, social inclusion and rights-based policy processes. She has co-ordinated and been involved in editorial work on books published by the Youth Partnership, in particular Nos. 23–26 and 28 in the Youth Knowledge series, insights, thematic studies and educational material.

How is youth work developing in your country? What are the realities of youth work in eastern and South-East Europe? How is youth work functioning under the pressure of multiple crises? What are the priorities now? Drawing on the expertise of over 70 participants in the regional seminar “Visible value – Strengthening the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda in eastern and South-East Europe”, the handbook starts with an introduction to European youth work concepts, history, milestone events and legal frameworks, and the priorities and commitments to their implementation by the Council of Europe and the European Union. It then presents the realities of youth work in the two regions, based on studies by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership and identifies the global and European contexts, the common objectives and challenges, as well as the role of different members of the community of practice. The handbook aims to give practical guidance, including reflection questions, ideas for action and good practices to inspire those actions.

We invite policy makers, youth work practitioners and those planning or implementing strategies for youth work development at organisational, local or national level, to use it. We encourage trainers and educators to include the handbook in reading lists, curricula and activities. Managers and leaders in youth centres, organisations or public bodies can explore within their own structures any topic reflected in this handbook and find inspiration for further action. Youth workers and youth work organisations can use it to sharpen the focus of their advocacy and volunteering activities.

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