



Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe

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Working Paper of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, produced in collaboration with the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre, the European Youth Forum and the directorates responsible for youth in the European Commission and the Council of Europe

1. Introduction and aim of the Pathways paper

In February 2004, the youth directorates of the Council of Europe and the European Commission published a joint working paper “Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field”.¹ It highlighted a strong need for social and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning/education² in youth work activities. The paper argued that non-formal learning/education in the youth field is more than a subcategory of education and training since it contributes to the preparation of young people for both the knowledge-based and civil society. It stressed the need to raise awareness of the value of youth work among key persons, institutions and young people themselves and asked for the development of effective and flexible ways for validation and recognition. A number of concrete activities and commitments were proposed in the paper, addressed to the European institutions, the member states, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector, the education and training field and specifically the youth sector.

The Pathways paper encouraged a European-wide debate on the meaning and status of non-formal learning in the youth field. Since its publication developments in the field of non-formal learning/education (and its recognition) have been dynamic but also very diverse, at European as well as at national level. There have been major political achievements and a variety of tools and instruments have been developed. Co-operation and dialogue within the youth field and with other areas, in particular education and training, has also considerably increased.

Now, six years after publishing the first Pathways paper and more than 10 years after starting the development and implementation of respective strategies to better recognise non-formal learning/education, the partnership team of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth, in co-operation with the European Youth Forum and the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre, has realised the need to update and re-focus the strategy as outlined in the first paper, in order to give the strategy a new impetus for better recognition of non-formal learning in youth activities and of youth work in general. The initiative to re-dynamise the efforts on recognition also goes back to the European workshop “Continuing the pathway towards recognition” held in Prague in June 2008 under the Czech EU Presidency, where the participants invited and encouraged the EU-CoE youth partnership to take the lead in updating the strategy. Both institutions in the youth partnership – the European Commission and the Council of Europe – were closely associated with the redrafting of the paper.

Reflecting the participatory nature of youth policy, the current paper was developed together with youth organisations, the principal providers of non-formal education in the youth field, mainly represented by the European Youth Forum. A further number of stakeholders were involved in the reflection when starting to redraft this paper, and these included the National Agencies and SALTO Resource Centres of the Youth in Action programme, the communities of trainers and researchers, and also policy makers from various levels and backgrounds.

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1. “Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field”, working paper by the Youth Unit of the Directorate Youth, Civil Society, Communication in the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission and the Youth Department of the Directorate Youth and Sport in the Directorate General Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg and Brussels, February 2004.
 2. This paper – as the first Pathways paper did – uses both terms, non-formal learning and non-formal education when reflecting on the pedagogical dimension of youth work activities, their methods, tools and approaches and the environment in which they take place; thus it tries to respect diverse traditions, definitions and understanding that exist in European countries.

The aim of this revised Pathways paper is to provide a new vision and an outline of how to sustain and foster the progress made until today and, even more, to go beyond the achievements made so far. This aim is based on the political agendas of the two European institutions – the Council of Europe and the European Union – and the expectations of many providers of non-formal learning/education and youth work. The political agendas are documented on the one hand in “The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020” and on the other in “A renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018)”.³

The recognition of non-formal learning/education – and of youth work in general – is an important goal for the two institutions and its partners in the youth field. It is not an aim in itself; it is part of a coherent vision about how to improve the inclusion and well-being of young people in our society and empower them to be active citizens. In this respect, youth work plays a crucial role as outlined in the political documents and expressed at various occasions with the aim of granting youth work a better position and more political recognition in our societies. This is also reflected in the resolution of the Council of the European Union on youth work of November 2010 which stresses the importance of recognising the crucial role of youth work as a provider of non-formal learning opportunities to all young people.

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the situation of young people in Europe is complex and diverse. Non-formal learning and education – and youth work in general – have the potential to address many of the issues that concern young people. It helps young people in making better educational choices, gives them larger and better possibilities to learn and helps them demonstrate their skills. A better social recognition of non-formal learning outcomes helps to empower young people and can lead to increased participation in our societies and also increased democratic participation.

The Pathways paper is addressed to all those interested in further improving the status and relevance of youth work (and – as part of it – of non-formal learning) and involved in developing and implementing better strategies and instruments for recognition.

2. Non-formal education and learning in the youth field – characteristics and impact

Education and learning in the youth field encompasses various types, methods, settings and approaches of learning. Even if it is generally understood to be non-formal learning/education, it also includes elements of informal learning and is sometimes very close to formal education.

Non-formal learning and education, understood as learning outside institutional contexts (out of school) is the key activity, but also the key competence of youth work. Non-formal learning/education in youth work is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support, and it is intentional. It typically does not lead to certification but, in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered, leading to a better recognition of the individual learning outcome.

Some elements of youth work can be considered to be formal learning/education and training. In specific cases the youth sector/youth work acts as a substitute, alternative education and training provider (for example in second chance schools and similar projects, in special Vocational Education and Training (VET) projects) for school drop-outs, early school leavers, disaffected young people or other young

3. For further information see sections 3.1 (Council of Europe) and 3.2 (European Union) below.

people at risk. The learning process is structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and learning support and it is intentional. The participants get certificates and/or diplomas.

Youth work activities also provide many informal learning opportunities, as young people learn while simply being active, being a volunteer or just being with their peers. They learn informally in daily life and leisure time just as they learn informally in school, at work and in family life, just learning by doing. It is typically not structured and not intentional and does not lead to certification. It provides specific learning opportunities, in particular of a social, cultural and personal nature, often called “soft” skills.

All learning in the youth field enables young people to acquire essential skills and competences and contributes to their personal development, to social inclusion and to active citizenship, thereby improving their employment prospects. Learning activities within the youth field – and youth work in general – provide a significant added value for society, the economy and young people themselves. Youth work is situated between the social sector, pedagogy and civil society.

Participation in activities in the youth field contributes in various ways to the acquisition of the eight key competences as identified in the framework of lifelong learning:⁴ communication in the mother tongue as well as in a foreign language, mathematical and scientific competence, digital competence, social and civic competences, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

Education and learning activities within the youth field have a participative and learner-centred approach, are carried out on a voluntary basis and are therefore closely linked to young people’s needs, aspirations and interests. Important key elements are peer learning, learning environments and the diversity of approaches and target groups. Formal learning emphasises cognitive learning; non-formal settings often complement cognitive aspects by emphasising emotional, social and practical levels of learning.

Learning activities within the youth field are shaped by a specific character of learning which was developed over years and takes into account the specific situation of young people in societies. In particular within the European youth field, non-formal and informal learning/education activities provide an intercultural learning dimension which supports the intercultural dialogue between people.

Learning in the youth field at European level is also about guaranteeing and improving quality standards in and through training. In this respect the long-term training courses of the EU-CoE youth partnership “Advanced Training of Trainers in Europe” 2001-03 (ATTE) and “Trainers for Active Learning in Europe” 2008-10 (TALE) were flagship projects in the field, as was the Advanced Compass Training in Human Rights Education (ACT-HRE) course of the Council of Europe. Reference should also be made to the training manuals that were produced in this framework, especially the *Manual for Facilitators in Non-Formal Education*⁵ and *Compass – A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People*⁶ of the Council of Europe as well as the “Training-Kits” (T-kits) of the EU-CoE youth partnership.⁷

4. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning, Official Journal L 394 of 30 December 2006.

5. *Manual for Facilitators in Non-Formal Education* (2009), edited and co-written by Sabine Klocker, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.

6. See www.eycb.coe.int/compass/en/contents.html.

7. See http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/T_kits.

3. Stocktaking – the state of affairs at European and national level

3.1. Recognition of non-formal learning/education in the youth policy of the Council of Europe

A first reference to recognition of non-formal learning in youth activities can be found in the final declaration of the 5th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth, meeting in Bucharest in April 1998, inviting the member states to recognise training and skills acquired in non-formal education.⁸

A working group of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) provided a first definition of non-formal education:

*Non-formal education may be defined as a planned programme of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competencies, outside but supplementary to the formal educational curriculum. Participation is voluntary and the programmes are carried out by trained leaders in the voluntary and/or public sectors, and should be systematically monitored and evaluated. The experiences might also be certificated.*⁹

As a follow-up the Directorate of Youth and Sport in the Council of Europe organised a symposium on non-formal learning in autumn 2000,¹⁰ in order to define a strategy for the implementation of a work programme in the field of non-formal learning.

Shortly after the symposium, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on non-formal education,¹¹ highlighting the need for more investment in education and welfare as an efficient strategy for enhancing active citizenship and the prevention of social exclusion. Non-formal education provided by non-governmental youth organisations is considered to play a crucial role, complementing formal education in the concept of lifelong learning. The Assembly recommends the recognition of non-formal education as a *de facto* element in the process of lifelong learning and in youth policy and the creation of effective systems for evaluation.

The final declaration of the 6th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth, meeting in Thessaloniki in November 2002,¹² highlights the relevance of voluntary engagement of young people and recommends the development of appropriate strategies and tools for a better recognition of experiences and skills acquired in these activities at all levels.

In a recommendation to its member states on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education of young people,¹³ the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe reinforces the debate on non-formal learning by recommending the development of effective standards for the recognition of non-formal education, an important part of general education and training. Non-formal education should

8. 5th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth: Bucharest, 27-29 April 1998 – Final Declaration “Young people: active citizens in a future Europe – Human Rights – Participation – Solidarity”.

9. “Study on the links between formal and non-formal education”, prepared by Manuela du Bois-Reymond, Strasbourg, March 2003, p. 12.

10. “Report on the Symposium on Non-Formal Education”, Strasbourg, 13-15 October 2000, January 2001.

11. Recommendation 1437 (2000) on non-formal education.

12. 6th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth: “Youth constructing Europe”, Final Declaration, Thessaloniki, Greece, 7-9 November 2002.

13. Recommendation Rec(2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2003 at the 838th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies).

be a significant element of national youth policies, and co-operation at European level should be enhanced.

Accordingly, non-formal and informal learning plays a prominent role in the advisory missions and youth policy reviews of the Council of Europe, and these are aimed to promote and support the development of youth policies in the member states.

In a new proposal, the Committee of Ministers decided to develop a European portfolio for youth workers as a tool to describe experiences, skills and competences which are acquired in non-formal settings. The European Language Portfolio, developed by the Council of Europe as one of five instruments of the Europass,¹⁴ is seen as an example for such a youth work portfolio.

Consequently, the CDEJ decided to invite an Expert Group to work on the development of the portfolio. It was to focus on a description of experiences and competences of youth workers and youth leaders and should allow the identification and description of progress in non-formal learning. Demand for better recognition existed at two levels: the political and the individual. Competences should be demonstrated through a process of self-assessment. After a phase of development and testing in 2007 the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers was widely disseminated and translated into various languages. After an in-depth evaluation a revision is foreseen in 2010-11.

In a meeting of youth ministers in September 2005 in Budapest on the key priorities of the youth sector for the period 2006-08,¹⁵ the priority of recognition of non-formal education and youth work was confirmed.

Another milestone was set with Agenda 2020 – the future of the Council of Europe youth policy.¹⁶ In a final declaration of youth ministers meeting in October 2008 in Kiev it was stressed that access of young people to education, training and the labour market has to be improved, in particular by promoting and recognising non-formal learning.

In a background document, the secretariat of the Directorate of Youth and Sport¹⁷ underlines the need to reinforce the work done so far and especially to continue the activities of the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth by highlighting the particular role of non-formal learning for better access to the labour market.

A particular relevance was given to Agenda 2020 by the resolution of the Committee of Ministers in November 2008.¹⁸ It stated that recognition of non-formal learning plays a crucial role for social inclusion by “ensuring young people’s access to education, training and working life, particularly through the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning”.

14. Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

15. 7th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth, Budapest, Hungary, 23-24 September 2005: “Human dignity and social cohesion: youth policy responses to violence” – Resolution on the priorities of the Council of Europe’s youth sector for 2006-08.

16. Final Declaration of the 8th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, “The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020”, Kiev, Ukraine, 10-11 October 2008.

17. “The future of the Council of Europe’s youth sector: Agenda 2020” – background document prepared by the secretariat of the Directorate of Youth and Sport, October 2008.

18. Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 25 November 2008 at the 1042nd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

The contribution and potential of non-formal learning in promoting the core values and mission of the Council of Europe has been recognised in the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2010. The charter acknowledges the important role of non-formal education in providing every person with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. It also states that “non-governmental organisations and youth organisations have a valuable contribution to make ..., particularly through non-formal and informal education”.¹⁹

Youth work and non-formal learning also have an important role in promoting access to social rights and social inclusion of young people. The Enter! project of the Directorate of Youth and Sport²⁰ will result in a recommendation addressing this issue. By involving other policy sectors of the organisation, the project also supports the mainstreaming of non-formal education approaches.

3.2. Recognition of non-formal learning/education in the youth policy of the European Union

Policy strategies in the youth field in the European Union are built on the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth”, adopted by the Commission in November 2001.²¹ With regard to non-formal and informal learning, it emphasises the need for greater recognition of relevant activities and greater complementarities with formal education and training. Since the launch of the White Paper, recognition plays a prominent role, both with regard to policy development and in practical terms.

The Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 23 March 2005 agreed on the European Youth Pact as a fully integrated part of the Lisbon Strategy. One objective of the pact is to develop closer co-operation between the member states on transparency and comparability of occupational qualifications as well as to recognise non-formal and informal learning.²²

The Council resolution of May 2006 on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field invites the member states and the Commission to:

*encourage the development of a comparable and transparent youth-specific element within Europass for identifying and recognising the skills and competences acquired by young people through non-formal and informal learning ..., that could be attached to certificates or other recognition tools in order to make it easier ... to understand what the original certificate means in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by its holder.*²³

19. Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 (and explanatory memorandum) on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

20. See www.coe.int/enter.

21. European Commission White Paper: “A New Impetus for European Youth”. COM(2001) 681 final, 21 November 2001.

22. Communication to the Spring European Council: Working together for growth and jobs. Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-08). Document adopted by the European Council 17 June 2005.

23. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (2006/C 168/01).

With the new EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering,²⁴ non-formal learning becomes for the first time a priority for policy co-operation in the youth field at European level: “Complementary to formal education, non-formal education for young people should be supported to contribute to Lifelong Learning in Europe, by developing its quality, recognising its outcomes, and integrating it better with formal education”. This priority was confirmed in the EU Council resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-18). As a complement to formal education, non-formal learning for young people should be promoted and recognised, and better links between formal education and non-formal learning be developed.

Youth-related aims and possible initiatives in the field of education and training at the level of the member states and the European Commission could be, among others:

- development of youth work and other non-formal learning opportunities as a means to address early school leaving;
- use of tools established at EU level for the transparency and validation of skills and recognition of qualifications;
- promotion of learning mobility of all young people;
- use of formal education and non-formal learning to promote cohesion and understanding across different groups, to promote equal opportunities and to narrow the gaps in achievement;
- development of participative structures in education as well as co-operation between schools, families and local communities;
- increase public awareness of the value of non-formal learning outcomes.²⁵

The Commission commits itself to further develop Europass as a European instrument for the transparency of skills, including tools for self-assessment of skills and competences.

The new EU youth strategy also highlights the role of youth work as an important means to foster the personal and professional development of young people. Youth workers should be better equipped with professional skills and the validation of their competences be promoted through appropriate European instruments such as Europass, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) or the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

The European Council resolution on youth work of November 2010 confirms the important role that non-formal learning plays in youth work by complementing formal education settings. It invites the member states and the European Commission to support the development of tools and instruments for assessment and documentation of skills and competences of youth workers and youth leaders.²⁶

The European Union’s Youth in Action Programme makes an important contribution to the acquisition of competences and is therefore a key instrument in providing young people with opportunities for non-formal and informal learning in a European

24. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of co-ordination to address youth challenges and opportunities, Brussels, 27 April 2009, COM(2009) 200 final.

25. Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/OJ C 311/01).

26. Resolution of the Council of the European Union on youth work of 19 November 2010.

dimension.²⁷ It contributes to the involvement of young people in experiences characterised by a twofold dimension: the acquisition of skills through non-formal or informal learning and the development of their active citizenship.

To facilitate the validation and recognition of non-formal learning in the Youth in Action programme it was decided to develop a specific tool – Youthpass. Through the Youthpass certificate the European Commission aims at ensuring the recognition of learning experiences gained through participation in the various actions of the Youth in Action programme. After successful implementation, Youthpass is being extended to all relevant Youth in Action activities and potentially beyond the programme actions where appropriate.

In March 2010, the Commission launched the new Europe 2020 Strategy.²⁸ Youth on the Move is one of the flagship initiatives to support the overall strategy. Youth on the Move is expected to support the engagement of young people in society through all levels of education and youth policy, including learning opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. This includes strengthening the structures for volunteering and youth participation, and supporting the acquisition of key skills through non-formal educational activities as a supplement to formal learning or as an incentive to reintegrate back into the formal education system.

A key document in terms of learning mobility is the European Council recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union.²⁹ It asks member states to increase awareness of the importance of intercultural competences and language learning in order to reduce barriers to the cross-border mobility of young people and to promote appropriate recognition of learning outcomes of voluntary activities. It further encourages the use of instruments at EU level that can facilitate cross-border voluntary activities by ensuring the transparency of qualifications, such as Europass, Youthpass and the European Qualifications Framework.

3.3. Developments at national level in the member states

Also at national level in member states of both the European Union and the Council of Europe, recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the youth field has become a more important issue over the last few years. Initiatives either stem from organisations active in the non-formal learning field or from the different governments implementing relevant strategies. A wide range of recognition instruments for non-formal and informal learning already exist at local, regional and national level, as well as in different sectors of the youth field.

In the current framework it is impossible to mention all the diverse and manifold initiatives in the field. Information about validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the youth field, is made visible through the “European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning” (see section 3.5 on the links to lifelong learning).

27. Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the “Youth in Action” programme for the period 2007 to 2013.

28. Communication from the Commission. Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2010) 2020. Brussels, 3 March 2010.

29. Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union (2008/OJ C 319/03).

3.4. The European Youth Forum and the work of non-formal education providers

The European Youth Forum (EYF), as a key stakeholder in the European debate representing both young people and youth organisations as providers of non-formal education, has been working on recognition of non-formal education since 1996 and has declared education as one of its five strategic priorities for 2007-12. Within this strategic priority, the YFJ sees the further recognition of non-formal education as a precondition to develop a true lifelong learning reality in Europe.

The European Youth Forum works on different complementary types of recognition – social, individual and political. Through its policy papers of 2005³⁰ and 2008,³¹ the EYF has contributed to political recognition and advocated for recognition in various processes at European level. This has been complemented by work on social recognition and individual recognition. In practical terms, the EYF has organised a yearly dialogue on non-formal education with the aim of bringing providers of education together with institutions, social partners and stakeholders.

In 2008, the European Youth Forum published a sunshine report on non-formal education, presenting best practices from its member organisations with a focus on how non-formal learning contributes to personal development as well as to social inclusion, health and citizenship.

In 2009, the European Youth Forum started working on one of the big challenges for non-formal education – quality assurance of non-formal education/learning. It adopted a policy paper proposing a European scheme for quality assurance and a practical working method for youth organisations. This has been followed by a pilot project testing out the proposed methods.

3.5. Linking to the lifelong learning strategy

Non-formal learning and education as an integral part of lifelong learning received full recognition with the European Year on Lifelong Learning in 1996 and gained momentum with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000. The conclusions defined new strategic objectives to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as an integral part of a knowledge-based economy.

The Communication of the European Commission in 2001 on making a European area of lifelong learning a reality prepared the shift towards a stronger recognition of learning outcomes and underlined the need to recognise competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings.³²

During the following years, policy co-operation in education and training supported national reforms of education and qualification systems, as well as the development of European instruments promoting quality, transparency of qualifications and mobility in learning. With a number of relevant documents focusing

30. "Policy paper on recognition of non-formal education: Confirming the real competencies of young people in the knowledge society", 2005 (www.youthforum.org).

31. "Policy paper on non-formal education: A framework for indicating and assuring quality", 2008 (www.youthforum.org).

32. Communication from the Commission: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, COM(2001) 678 final, 21 November 2001.

on vocational education and training³³ and lifelong learning,³⁴ the member states were encouraged to increase co-operation and implement effective measures to validate learning outcomes, crucial for building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The 2009 Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (“ET 2020”)³⁵ reiterated the equal importance of all different kinds of learning – formal, non-formal and informal learning – to make lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality and to put in place coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies at member states level.

One of the main challenges and priorities is to ensure that all citizens can acquire transversal key competences according to the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning,³⁶ agreed upon in 2006.

As a consequence of changes in the labour market, the focus is put more and more on the development of skills and competences, including soft skills, social skills, ICT skills, emotional skills, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, etc. To this end, school and out-of-school education have become complementary. The recognition of learning outcomes is now considered a driver for employability, mobility and social inclusion.

This trend goes together with some crucial developments in the area of recognition and validation of skills and competences:

- The European Qualification Framework³⁷ shifts the focus from “learning inputs” (length of studies or type of institution) to “learning outcomes”. It encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Most member states are developing their own national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and linking them into the EQF.
- The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) facilitates validation, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes acquired during a stay in another country or in different learning contexts. It aims for better comparability between different VET and qualification systems.
- The European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations taxonomy (ESCO) is being developed to bring the worlds of work and education/training closer together. It will build a multilingual shared vocabulary of skills/competences and enable them to be related to occupations and qualifications. Such a vocabulary can be used in a number of ways including underpinning better matching between supply and demand in the labour market and making the relevance of learning outcomes to occupations and tasks clearer to employers and citizens.

As stressed above, information about validation of non-formal and informal learning is made visible through the “European inventory on validation of non-formal and

33. The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training, Communiqué of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, the European Social partners and the European Commission, convened in Helsinki on 5 December 2006 to review the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen Process.

34. Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning, OJ C 163/1, 9 July 2002.

35. See the 2941st Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting, Brussels, 12 May 2009 www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107590.pdf.

36. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, 2006/962/EC.

37. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01).

informal learning”,³⁸ an initiative of the European Commission and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). The 2007 update pointed to a multi-speed process where, broadly speaking, countries could be divided into three main groups.

- In some countries validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens and the number of candidates is significant. These countries have largely put in place national systems turning validation into an integrated part of their education and training and employment policies.
- In other countries validation is emerging as a practical reality for individuals. In these cases legal and institutional steps have been taken but the take-up is relatively limited.
- In others validation is low on the political agenda and concrete initiatives are relatively few and not part of an overall strategy.

The inventory is considered to be a “living” document, updated every few years. The next update is due at the end of 2010. It includes non-formal and informal learning in the youth field.

The common European principles on validation, adopted by the European Council in 2004, represent a political consensus on the fundamental aspects of a broad framework namely: individual entitlements, obligations of stakeholders, confidence and trust, credibility and legitimacy. The European guidelines³⁹ on validation published by the European Commission and CEDEFOP in 2009 complement these principles by providing more in-depth concrete advice to policy makers and practitioners. Updated regularly they need to be further developed for particular target groups, including young people.

The CEDEFOP Virtual Community on non-formal learning provides a communication platform for the development and implementation of methods and systems for identification and validation of non-formal learning. Established already in 2003, the Virtual Community is intended as a meeting place for everybody interested and involved in the field – policy makers, practitioners, researchers and others.⁴⁰

Whilst important steps have been taken at European and national level, the European Commission believes a stronger political basis is needed to pursue more systematic co-operation and tap the full potential of this field. This is in line with the Europe 2020 strategy and the May 2010 Council Conclusions on competences supporting lifelong learning and the “new skills for new jobs” initiative which explicitly call for “the promotion of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning”.

The Commission considers it is very timely to address the issue of validation as the implementation of transparency instruments such as the EQF – and the related development of national frameworks which describe qualifications in terms of what people know, understand and can do regardless of where or how the learning was acquired – provides the scope to develop an integrated approach to the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The 2011 European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship, which includes the recognition of skills and competences developed through volunteering in its objectives, will also help to build momentum, as will the actions to support digital literacy, skills and inclusion in the Digital Agenda for Europe.

38. See www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx.

39. See www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/files/4054_EN.pdf.

40. See <http://cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/extranets/non-formal-and-informal-learning/index.aspx>.

4. Pathways towards a better recognition of non-formal learning/education in the youth field – 10 elements for a renewed strategy

When re-defining a further strategy for a better formal, social and political recognition of non-formal and informal learning in youth work, it is important to highlight some principles and challenges that need to be considered when discussing strategic options.

It is obvious that one cannot speak of one single youth work sector. The diversity of the youth field with regard to disciplines, methods, approaches, tools and priorities must be respected and cultivated. It is not about harmonising or streamlining the sector to one monolithic system when aiming at better recognition of the work done.

With regard to recognition and certification, the concerns of many experts and stakeholders, notably youth NGOs, must be taken seriously: the risk of (over)formalising learning in youth work activities. Not everything in youth work is measurable and can or should be assessed, recognised and certified.

In this respect, any hierarchisation of youth work activities must be avoided, and a functionalisation of learning outcomes only for the purposes of the labour market, the education system or social system is also not acceptable, particularly when it comes to funding and allocation of financial resources. On the contrary, it must be made clear that youth work enriches other policies only if it maintains its particular identity and strength; only then can other sectors benefit from youth work. Youth work is valuable in its own right, it has its own self-worth and in many cases its own pertinacity, for example the right to have fun and to play.⁴¹

It is also important to make a distinction between different forms of recognition, depending on who recognises learning and for what purpose. The forms of recognition are as follows.

- Formal recognition means the “validation” of learning outcomes and the “certification” of a learning process and/or these outcomes by issuing certificates or diplomas which formally recognise the achievements of an individual.⁴²
- Political recognition means the recognition of non-formal education in legislation and/or the inclusion of non-formal learning/education in political strategies, and the involvement of non-formal learning providers in these strategies.
- Social recognition means that social players acknowledge the value of competences acquired in non-formal settings and the work done within these activities, including the value of the organisations providing this work.
- Self-recognition means the assessment by the individual of learning outcomes and the ability to use these learning outcomes in other fields.

Despite significant progress in some member states, communication and continuous dialogue between all stakeholders involved in the process is still lacking.

This means there is a need to improve the currently cumbersome communication within the youth field on practices, tools and political strategies, as well as a need for more exchange and co-operation between the education and training system, the labour market and the youth field.

41. Hanjo Schild, Loretta Senkute and Jan Vanhee (2010), “The right to play and to have fun in youth and community work”, in *Coyote magazine extra*, July 2010.

42. Communication from the Commission of 21 November 2001: Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, COM(2001) 678 final, p. 31.

Finally, it should be stressed that the most efficient learning concept is a holistic one, combining formal, informal and non-formal elements. While formal learning emphasises mainly cognitive learning, non-formal settings complement cognitive aspects with emotional, social and practical levels of learning. Youth work provides such holistic approaches in many ways. The concepts of holistic and blended learning approaches should be further developed and youth work can certainly contribute to such a development through its experiences and concepts. A pre-condition would be an open dialogue at an equal level with the formal education and training system.

When reflecting on a new and updated strategy to make further progress towards better formal, social and political recognition of non-formal learning/education and youth work, 10 elements have been identified:

4.1. Develop a common understanding and a joint strategy in the youth field and improve co-operation and communication

The youth sector must find common ground to further define and implement strategies for recognition of youth work. The whole sector of youth work is concerned – the diverse disciplines, methods and approaches, comprising all forms of learning, as well as all forms of recognition, be it formal, social or political. There must be a common understanding of what should be recognised, how and by whom, and this ranges from concepts of self-recognition to ways of making results of youth work visible. It must also be made clear who plays which role in this process and which responsibilities the various groups of actors have.⁴³ Since the youth sector consists of such a huge diversity of people active at various levels, in various positions, functions and roles, coming from diverse backgrounds, structures and disciplines, a better co-operation and communication culture is needed. In the follow-up, the setting of common objectives for the further development of the youth work sector could be envisaged, based on clear mandates, time schedules and planned outputs.

4.2. Make the role of youth organisations visible

Youth organisations and other providers of non-formal learning need to increase their efforts to make the learning taking place in their activities and programmes clearer and more visible. First of all, a challenge remains for youth organisations to attract young people as volunteers and participants. Volunteering is sometimes seen as an unnecessary waste of time. The level of awareness of the benefits that volunteering brings to both society and the individual is insufficient. Therefore, recognition of learning needs to start within the organisation. The role of youth organisations is to increase social and self-recognition and to adapt and provide tools for assessment and recognition. Youth organisations can also contribute to enhancing political recognition through active advocacy and participation in policy processes.

4.3. Assure quality and training in non-formal learning/education

There is still a lack of confidence regarding the effectiveness of non-formal learning and youth work activities, both within the youth field and in society in general. If non-formal learning/education aims at being positioned in the political debates at a similar level as the formal education and training sector, quality assurance might be the missing element. Quality and quality assurance can also be instrumental

43. The debates in the 1st European Youth Work Convention in July 2010 under the Belgian EU Presidency can be considered a milestone in this regard and must be continued.

for the further development of youth work providers who engage consciously in the design of their educational programmes. Another measure to assure high quality and to strengthen the conceptual idea is to provide and establish appropriate training opportunities at different levels. The quality standards in training activities of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, particularly in the programme of activities of the European Youth Centres, provide interesting starting points: these should be reviewed and complemented with new experiences, especially those integrating e-learning and blended learning approaches. The European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action programme also plays a key role in this respect. Furthermore, the process initiated by the European Youth Forum to develop a European framework for the quality assurance of non-formal education by 2015 should be supported.

4.4. Increase knowledge about non-formal learning/education in youth work

The continued conceptual, practical and theoretical development of non-formal learning in youth work is essential for strengthening the capacity and the recognition of non-formal learning; this refers to research and practice. A co-ordinated strategy should be set up and anchored between research, policy and practice to deliver scientific and experiential knowledge. The strategy should compile existing knowledge, ensure easy access to it for decision makers and youth organisations and identify gaps in knowledge and needs for further research. Experiences and approaches from other regions of the world and from other institutional actors (for example the United Nations (UN), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank) should be taken into account. An inventory of non-formal learning in the youth field could be updated and published regularly and the EU Youth Report could provide a regular chapter on non-formal education/learning. The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) already provides relevant information on the topic and is planning to introduce a new feature on youth work.

4.5. Develop existing tools further and make them accessible and transferable

Results of learning can be used in different settings and for various purposes, be it in education or employment, civil society or for personal development. While diplomas and qualifications received in formal education serve as transfer documents, certificates from the youth field are lacking credit. Even instruments for assessing and validating competences acquired in non-formal learning in youth work that have been developed in recent times at European level (for example the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers and the Youthpass) are rarely recognised by the formal education or employment sectors. After having successfully developed these tools it is time to evaluate them, to improve them where needed, to disseminate them and to identify needs for further instruments (for example for self-assessment) and other accompanying support measures.

4.6. Reinforce the political process at European level

If the youth field wants to create and follow a visible political agenda it needs stronger commitment and a reinforcement of the political processes, in particular at European level but also by individual member states. In education and training, respective policies are based on the lifelong learning strategy; the Bologna Process promotes higher education in the same way as the Copenhagen/Bruges processes do for vocational education and training. In the Czech EU Presidency event on recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field in Prague in 2008, the youth

sector proposed the launch of a Prague process for recognition of non-formal learning. This process never really took off. In the light of recent political developments in the field of youth work it is now time to fully start such a process involving the European institutions, member states, youth NGOs, trainers, youth workers/youth leaders and researchers.

4.7. Link youth to the lifelong learning strategy and vice versa

Communication and co-operation with the lifelong learning sectors, respectively formal education and the vocational education and training sector, has to be improved. At European Union level a link should be established between the “open methods of co-ordination – OMCs)” in education and training and the youth field. Also in the Council of Europe a dialogue with other educational policies, for example higher education and/or human rights and citizenship education, should be deepened. It must be ensured that the education sector recognises learning in youth work as a value in itself and communicates on an equal level as it does within the formal education sector. In the European Union, the Youth on the Move initiative can be the overarching policy framework that can bridge the two policy fields. The future European Skills Passport should, among others, record skills acquired in youth work and facilitate validation through appropriate procedures.

4.8. Involve stakeholders of the employment sector

The labour market needs a skilled work force with a set of key competences among which soft skills play an increasing role. Problem solving, intercultural skills, team spirit, creativity, etc., are exactly the competences that young people acquire in non-formal learning schemes in youth work. While in the political debates a lot of attention is dedicated to “validation” of non-formal learning outcomes at the work place (and in formal education and training), the impact of learning in youth work activities is constantly undervalued, particularly on the side of employers. A common understanding and language should be developed in order to provide the employment sector with appropriate information on the potential of non-formal and informal learning in youth work. Youth work needs to identify its potential of providing competences for the labour market; however, at the same time it must be made clear where the limits of this role are.

4.9. Involve the social sector

Youth work is positioned between education, civil society and the social sector. Even if the links of many youth work activities to the social sector seem to be quite strong, the relationship is in general often still weak. This is specifically true for the relationship of some disciplines of youth work, such as open youth/community work and leisure time activities, to youth social/welfare work and youth care. The different disciplines of youth work, even if part of the same sector, know very little about each other. Youth social work is often closer to the social sector than to the youth field. This is also demonstrated when looking at providers of youth social work which are mostly welfare organisations, though in rare cases they are youth organisations. A minimum requirement would be the building of strategic partnerships and much better information exchange systems between the various fields.

4.10. Co-operate with other policy fields and with stakeholders of civil society

In the last few years the youth sector has steadily grown to become a considerable part of the third sector, in terms of resources invested and size of the work force,

and it has thus strengthened its socio-economic scope. Today it is a strong pillar of civil society, together with other stakeholders and NGOs, and it has increased links to other policy fields which have an impact on youth work, such as education, sport, intercultural dialogue, urban and rural policies and intergenerational dialogue. The players in these sectors should be seen as natural strategic partners for the youth field. The volunteer sector, cultural and environmental organisations, human rights organisations, information and counselling services, sport organisations, etc., are all part of the third sector and share similar interests. The recognition of youth work (and of the work of neighbouring sectors) can be increased through closer co-operation between them.

5. Conclusions

Non-formal learning/education in the youth field provides unique learning opportunities to millions of young Europeans every day. This is done through a diversified youth work structure often based on a voluntary and participative approach and a special educational field which provides an added value for society and individuals. Learning in and from youth work forms the basis, for example, for active citizenship, cultural expression, self-development into confident adults, for a European civil society, political participation, health, well-being and social inclusion.

It is for this reason that the European institutions – the European Union and the Council of Europe – have decided to bring youth work and its formal, social and political recognition to a higher position on the political agenda, and this is welcomed by all relevant stakeholders in the field.

It is now time to continue the pathways towards better recognition by implementing concrete steps and developing concrete strategies and tools. Some ideas are mentioned in this paper, others need to be explored, defined and implemented. It should not only be the responsibility of those who worked on this paper to implement its proposed actions; recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field should be the responsibility of all players in youth work – a shared ownership.

The EU-CoE youth partnership is committed to continuing the efforts towards better recognition of youth work and has therefore made “support and recognition of youth work” one out of two key priorities for the years to come. A next step will be to organise another symposium on recognition of youth work, 11 years after the first one.

The European Youth Forum and the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre will also continue to implement its activities as outlined in this paper, particularly those relating to quality assurance and the further development of the Youthpass.

We invite all interested parties to provide feedback on this paper and to develop their own ideas and actions towards better recognition of youth work.

Appendix – additional sources of information

Further information on recognition of non-formal learning/education and on youth work can be found on the website of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) in the feature on “Youth Policy topics”:

<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/youthpolicy.html>

In the document library of EKCYP all relevant policy documents mentioned in this paper can be found:

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

The first Pathways paper can also be found on the following website:

http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Education_Training_Learning/Policy/2004_validation_and_recognition.pdf

Information on existing tools at European level are available on the following websites:

- the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers:
www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/resources/portfolio/portfolio_EN.asp
- the YouthPass: www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/
- validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the inventory of non-formal learning and European guidelines for validating non-formal learning in CEDEFOP:
www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/index.aspx
- the guidelines:
www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx
www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/12954.aspx
- the European Youth Forum: www.youthforum.org/
- the SALTO Training and Co-operation Resource Centre:
www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/
- the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education: www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/charter/charter_EN.asp
- quality criteria in education and training youth activities of the Council of Europe:
www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Training/Quality_NFE/Quality_NFE_training_en.asp