

# Youth Partnership

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



## Policy paper<sup>1</sup> ACTIVITY AND OCCUPATION

Theme 5: Learning and training & Theme 6: Working and creating

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*This section briefly explores, from a policy perspective, issues related to (1) the relation between young people and the labour market and (2) learning and training (both formal and non-formal) as means for supporting young people's personal and professional development. The youth policy developments and debates around Occupation & Activity are very rich and diverse. This section will only focus, as in the analytical part, on the discussions held in the thematic spaces of the symposium, under Pillar 2: Learning & Training and Working & Creating.*

### Introduction

Activity and Occupation and its sub-themes (Learning & Training and Working & Creating) are strongly connected. To learn and to create are two key elements for a life with dignity and for young people to have the conditions to be active citizens. Youth policy should contribute to an enabling environment for young people in Europe to access their rights to

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this work, commissioned by the European Union–Council of Europe youth partnership, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of either of the partner institutions, their member states.

education and work, to enable them to fulfil their potential and contribute for the development of our societies.

The right to education is upheld in several human rights instruments and it is core to the access, respect and fulfilment of many other rights. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR - 1948), in its Article 26, proclaimed free and compulsory elementary education as a basic human right. More than a right, it is a tool to enable effective participation in society, as stated in the Article 13 of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESR-1976). The Article 14 of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) states the right to education and access to vocational training. Other instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, also refer to the right of education for all.

*“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”* (UDHR, Art. 23). The right to work is intrinsically connected with the realisation of other human rights and to a life with dignity. The ICESCR states, in its Article 6, that to achieve the full realisation of this right, a State Party needs to take steps that *“shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual”*. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, in its Article 15, establishes the freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work. In Article 32, it states: *“young people admitted to work must have working conditions appropriate to their age and be protected against economic exploitation and any work likely to harm their safety, health or physical, mental, moral or social development or to interfere with their education”*. The [European Social Charter](#) (revised 1996) establishes standards, among other work-related rights, for just conditions of work, safe and health, remuneration, bargaining and organisation. Its Articles 7 and 17 are focused on the right of children and young persons to protection.

## Youth work and youth policy challenges

The youth sector actors, particularly youth organisations, have been for many years claiming recognition of their role as educational providers. Depending on the national context, this recognition goes many times hand in hand with the **recognition of non-formal education**. The realities and practices are very different and even within the youth sector, namely the youth organisations, there is not necessarily a common understanding, on what non-formal education<sup>2</sup> is and on what is their role as educational providers. It is certainly a values-based education and this boundary has somehow been put into question when youth organisations are called to deliver solutions to issues that affect young people, that were not part of their traditional sphere of work. For example, from a focus on citizenship education, we have seen recently youth-related funding and partnerships including also educational activities related with employability and entrepreneurship.

That participation in non-formal educational activities are important for the development of key competences, valued and recognised by education and employment stakeholders, there are few doubts left. As an example, the YFJ [Study on the Impact of Non-Formal Education in Youth Organisations on Young People's Employability](#) achieved the following conclusions, among others: that there is a match between soft skills demanded by employers and skills developed in youth organisations; that higher skills levels are developed by young people with higher involvement in youth organisations; and that employers are positive toward young people's experience in youth organisations. In addition, the evaluation tool ([YouthPass](#)) of the youth activities implemented under the Erasmus+ programme also relates the non-formal learning experience with skills and professional development and employability, in some of the questions addressed to participants after their participation in activities funded by the programme.

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<sup>2</sup> "Non-formal learning is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways." – EU-CoE Youth Partnership – [Glossary of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy](#)

There is somehow a paradox that still needs to be addressed at youth policy level: life/soft skills are more acknowledged and valued nowadays but the main providers, youth organisations, still lack recognition as education stakeholders and they have been challenged to deliver other educational offers that do not necessarily relate with life skills. There is the need to create stronger links between non-formal and formal education paths and to continue supporting youth work to deliver educational activities focused on life skills, taking into consideration their values, expertise and added value. It is not clear yet how can youth work have a role in finding solutions in one of the challenges identified nowadays in learning-working relation: the skills mismatch. *“Skills mismatch is an encompassing term which refers to various types of imbalances between skills offered and skills needed in the world of work.”*<sup>3</sup>

The challenge of skills mismatch (of young people) has been targeted also through **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**, that has seen many changes in the last 15 years. Efforts have been made to change the way society, including employers and young people, look at VET, traditionally perceived as socially diminished when compared to higher education paths. The new education and labour realities in Europe, called for improved cooperation between stakeholders and rethinking of how VET is framed and delivered.

*“While it is acknowledged that tackling skill mismatch cannot, by itself, be a solution to the high rates of (youth) unemployment that Europe currently faces, it is nonetheless a critical part of the equation”.*<sup>4</sup> High expectations have been created around VET but other educational solution and path that has been receiving significant investment is (youth) **entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning**. It has become a trend, by option or by necessity, at universities, in the media, in the political and institutional speech – young entrepreneurs are an important element to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment and entrepreneurial and digital skills are considered some of the most valuable competences nowadays.

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<sup>3</sup> ILO (2014) [“Skills Mismatch in Europe”](#) (page 6)

<sup>4</sup> CEDEFOP (2015) “Tackling unemployment while addressing skill mismatch - Lessons from policy and practice in European Union countries”- research paper 46: [www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5546\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5546_en.pdf) (page 6)

Despite the existing efforts (legal frameworks and funding) at European and national level, youth entrepreneurship opportunities are still limited and difficult to reach for many young people, especially from disadvantaged background. In 2011, the European Youth Forum identified, in its [Policy Paper on Youth Entrepreneurship](#) as main obstacles to youth entrepreneurship: the insufficient knowledge, inspiration and skills; insufficient start-up support and help in maintaining and expanding; and the lack of stability and security. In the same paper, proposals for future policy development are identified and the role of formal and non-formal education is presented from a youth perspective.

The youth sector has been working on entrepreneurial learning and needs to be aware of its limitations and find its added value. It can be challenging to deliver up to expectations when these education providers are working from a perspective not necessarily related with development of competences to create and manage a business in a competitive market but rather fostering a social entrepreneurial attitude, sense of initiative, political awareness, creativity and innovation. Youth work has been finding a balance between existing needs of young people, frameworks of programmes and funding for youth activities and its core work as educational providers: a holistic approach towards the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes of young people in a challenging economic and financial context.

Entrepreneurship is seen as a way to access labour market, for the ones that are willing to and have the conditions to create their own initiative. Young entrepreneurs and freelance workers end up many times navigating in the so-called gig economy (discussed in the analytical paper) that can have perverse effects on lives of young people as they enter a precarious and vicious cycle with no perspective of financial stability, social protection and career development.

**Traineeships** are seen as another entry-point in the labour market, but nowadays are many times used to replace job positions without any perspective of personal and career development. Plus, the lack of regulation and protection of young peoples' working rights allow the offer of unpaid traineeships that don't include significant benefits for the trainee (work/health insurance, meals vouchers, cover of transportation expenses). Many young

people and their families need to invest to have a first professional experience (sometimes several traineeships) and in some contexts, they might not count as work experience while looking for a job. The pressure to be autonomous take them to accept contracts with very precarious conditions, forcing them to have more than one source of income and leading them to precarious and under-employment situations.

**Youth unemployment** rate has decreased – from more than 23% in 2013 to less than 19% in 2016 – but it is still very high in the EU (with peaks of more than 40% in several countries).<sup>5</sup> Youth (un)employment is also high in the national and European agendas but despite efforts, and some improvements in the statistics, the reality that young people are facing is still very challenging.

Low quality traineeships, precarious jobs, high youth unemployment co-exist with education-labour market mismatches, inadequate skills for existing jobs, weak links between formal and non-formal education and even limited geographic mobility. Discussions and consultations around the future EU Youth Strategy have started and in the upcoming months it will be possible to see how the new framework will tackle some of the challenges mentioned, although structural and sustainable solutions for these issues go also beyond youth policy.

### What has been done so far (at European level)?

For the European Youth Forum (YFJ), and as stated in their 2013 policy paper on [Quality Education](#): *“education is a human right and that all young people are entitled to a quality education (...) quality education reflects a humanist approach to education, that sees the education process in its entirety and acknowledges the unique value and the complementarity between formal education, non-formal education and informal learning and of the different providers involved. It reflects our understanding of education as a lifelong and life-wide learning process where the learner plays a fundamental role.”*

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<sup>5</sup> [EU-wide factsheet on the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative - three years on](#)

Learning goes beyond the formal system and non-formal learning also has a role in the development of competences of young people. At the institutional level, non-formal education has been recognised through the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States, such as the ones on “Promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people” ([CM/ Rec\(2003\)8](#)), “Ensuring quality education” [CM/Rec\(2012\)13](#) and “Youth work” [CM/Rec\(2017\)4](#). In addition, recognition and validation tools of non-formal education have been developed at national and European level, the most known being the [YouthPass](#), in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

The European Commission invites, in its Communication: [A New Skills Agenda for Europe](#), members States, social partners, the industry and other stakeholders to work together to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation, make skills more visible and comparable and to improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices. [Ten actions](#) have been identified to take forward this agenda between 2016-2018 including, among others: the review of the [European Qualifications Framework](#), a revision of the [Europass Framework](#), with the aim to offer better and easier tools to present skills and get useful real-time information on skills needs and trends which can help with career and learning choices, making [Vocational Education and Training](#) a first choice and a review of the [Recommendation on Key Competences](#) (with a special focus on promoting entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills).

More specifically, in what regards VET, the [Copenhagen Declaration](#) (2002) set out the priorities and principles for the Process on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training and it aimed to improve the overall performance, quality and attractiveness of VET in Europe. The [Bruges Communiqué](#) (2010), identified the current and future challenges in VET, and by taking into account the achievements, principles and values of the Copenhagen process, defined the strategic objectives for the period 2011-2020 and short-term deliverables for 2011-2014. As a reply to challenges such as the ones faced due to the labour market evaluation (and the demand for high and medium qualifications), the need to have the right skills (and consequently the capacity of VET to respond to changing requirements), an ageing society (and an increased need for lifelong learning), the Bruges

Communiqué shares a vision of VET that has a dual objective of contributing to employability and economic growth and also to respond to broader societal challenges, in particular the need to promote social cohesion. This VET 2020 global vision entails the following elements: an attractive and inclusive VET; high quality initial VET; easily accessible and career-oriented continuing VET; flexible systems of VET, based on a learning outcomes approach which cater for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; a European education and training area; increased opportunities for transnational mobility; and easily accessible and high-quality lifelong information, guidance and counselling services. The strategic objectives and related short-term deliverables for the period 2011-2014 focused on issues such as quality and accessibility of VET, strengthened coordination between different stakeholders and promotion of innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and use of ICT.

In 2015, the [Riga Conclusions](#) defined a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020, as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué, as part of the overall Copenhagen process launched in 2002. The new deliverables were related with: promotion of work-based learning, further development of quality assurance mechanisms, access to VET and qualifications for all, strengthen of key competences in VET curricula and more opportunities to develop them, and the introduction of systematic approaches and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings.

As to European efforts on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning, the [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan](#) is the European Commission's answer to challenges brought by the recent economic crisis. It aims to remove existing obstacles to entrepreneurial initiatives and to change the culture of entrepreneurship in the EU. The Action Plan identifies three areas for immediate intervention: [entrepreneurial education](#) and training; removing existing administrative barriers and supporting entrepreneurs in crucial phases of the business lifecycle; and reigniting the culture of entrepreneurship in Europe and nurturing the new generation of entrepreneurs.



The European Commission, together with the Joint Research Centre, has developed the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework — known as [EntreComp](#). It is a tool to support a common understanding of entrepreneurship competence and to enable people to develop entrepreneurial competences to support their life chances and employability. EntreComp is a common reference framework that identifies fifteen competences in three key areas that describe what it means to be entrepreneurial.

Another relevant framework, that contributes to overcome the challenge of skills mismatch is the [Digital Competence Framework](#) (DigComp 2.0) that identifies the key components of digital competence in 5 areas: information and data literacy; communication and collaboration; digital content creation; safety; and problem-solving. The initiative includes the publication [DigComp 2.0: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens Update Phase 1: the Conceptual Reference Model](#) that consists of a revision of the 21 descriptors and the vocabulary. The phase 2 of the update was launched in May 2017: [DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens](#), includes 8 proficiency levels of learning outcomes and examples of the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each competence. The initiative also encompasses a validation process. DigComp is a tool to improve citizens' digital competence for employability and work but it is also relevant for purposes related with leisure, consumption and participation in society.

As briefly shared above, there are significant efforts in rethinking education and learning in Europe to better deal with the education-labour discrepancies that includes situations of skills mismatch but over qualification as well. While education could not be driven by career development and job hunting motivations only, rethinking it has been mainly focused on those objectives. Closer links between formal and non-formal is a way to keep a holistic approach towards education.

As to traineeships and internships, at the institutional level, the Council of the European Union, based on the Commission's proposal, adopted its final [recommendation](#) on a Quality Framework for Internships (QFI) in March 2014. The QFI proposes guidelines for traineeships outside formal education to provide a high-quality learning content and fair working conditions so that traineeships support education-to-work transitions and increase

the employability of trainees. The framework is particularly relevant as a reference for quality offers of traineeships under the Youth Guarantee, since many national Youth Guarantee schemes foresee traineeships. The European Commission assessed how existing frameworks in member States comply with the requirements of the QFT. The [Staff Working Document on Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships](#) concluded that half of the EU member States have undertaken — or plan to undertake — legal changes to align their national framework with the QFT.

The European Youth Forum has developed a [European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships](#), [An Employers' Guide to Quality Internships](#) and has been strongly engaged in fighting unpaid internships. The [legal collective complaint](#) *European Youth Forum vs. Belgium* on the issue of unpaid internships, filed in May 2017, is an innovative step taken by the European youth platform and inspired in a rights-based approach to their advocacy work. This initiative brought additional political and media visibility to the issue of unpaid internships and *“If the complaint is accepted and validated by the European committee of social rights, then it has the potential to transform the working conditions for interns, not only in Belgium but also in all other member states of the Council of Europe”*<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, the YFJ publication [“Youth Perspective on the European Pillar of Social Rights”](#) presents proposals on how to promote equal opportunities and access to labour market, fair working conditions and adequate and sustainable social protection.

In the youth sector, the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field 2010-2018 identifies education & training and employment & entrepreneurship as two of the eight priorities. This [EU youth strategy](#) has also been linked with the [Europe 2020](#) strategy for growth and jobs, with the aim to improve education and training of young people and to equip them for the job market. In the framework of the Structured Dialogue

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<sup>6</sup> The Parliament Magazine (19/05/2017) “Unpaid internships: Complaint launched against Belgium” <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/unpaid-internships-complaint-launched-against-belgium>

process, support for entrepreneurship has been identified as one of the most repeated concerns and demands expressed by young people.<sup>7</sup>

In February 2013, the [conclusions](#) of the European Council, as regards the Multiannual Financial Framework, included the agreement on the creation of a Youth Employment Initiative, with the aim to increase the EU financial support available to the regions and individuals struggling most with youth unemployment and inactivity. In April 2013, the [Youth Guarantee Recommendation](#) was formally adopted to ensure young people's successful transition into work. This Council recommendation on the establishment of a Youth Guarantee was a milestone for the EU and for the advocacy efforts of the European youth movement. In addition, it was welcomed by member States, particularly the ones facing high youth unemployment rates (such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy). The aim was that the Youth Guarantee would contribute to three of the [Europe 2020](#) strategy targets, namely that 75 % of the age range 20-64 should be employed, that early school-leaving rates should be below 10%, and that at least 20 million people should be lifted out of poverty and social exclusion.

The [Youth Employment Initiative](#) (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the [Youth Guarantee](#) schemes. It was launched to provide support to young people living in the regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012. It exclusively supports young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), including long-term unemployed youngsters or those not registered as job-seekers.

The YEI supports the provision of apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education leading to a qualification. It is complementary to other national actions, such as the ones implemented with the [European Social Fund](#) support, with a view to setting up or implementing the youth guarantee schemes.

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<sup>7</sup> Report “[Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe’s education landscape: a quarter of a century of EU cooperation for youth policy and practice](#)”

In 2014, YFJ launched the publication [Youth Organisations and the Youth Guarantee in Europe](#), sharing a youth perspective on the initiative. A European Commission [Communication](#) from October 2016, shared the main achievements and challenges of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative. In several member-states the initiative allowed accelerated reform (for example, Belgium, France, Portugal and Italy) while in some that had already advanced youth employment schemes, the impact was more at the level of reinforcement of the policy frameworks (e.g. Germany, Finland, the Netherlands). In few, such as Cyprus, Spain and Romania, the reform was more limited due to a variety of factors including a lower prioritisation, delays or discontinuity in key measures, or a focus on pre-existing schemes. Overall, since January 2014 (and until October 2016), 14 million young people have entered Youth Guarantee schemes. Around nine million young people took up an offer, the majority of which were offers of employment.

In the framework of the symposium, as in general in Europe, there are different views and opinions about the success of the Youth Guarantee at national level, although everyone agrees with its principles and overall aims, several questions remain around its implementation and efficiency. Some of the main concerns are related with funding available for the national schemes, the lack of outreach capacity to young people from most disadvantageous background and the sustainability of the initiative, if it is being able to go beyond a working experience offer and foster indeed employability of young people.

### Future youth policy developments

How to look at and link formal and non-formal education from a personal and professional development perspective and what kind of education the youth sector wants to deliver remain some of the key issues to be addressed in future youth policy developments. In addition, how to better link learning and working and to assure quality traineeships and jobs for young people are urgent priorities that need solutions. However, and as pointed out also during the symposium (and this paper), solutions go beyond youth policy. The focus of youth work might remain on the sphere of personal development and to create the conditions to empower young people to have an active role in society and in shaping the necessary changes.

Below you can find some proposals of youth policy developments for consideration of youth workers, policy-makers and researchers that might inspire future youth policy making and youth work practices. The proposals listed are a result of the discussions and conclusions of the symposium, plus some additional suggestions identified by the author through research.

- **Youth perspective in policy-making** - local, national and international policy makers could ensure that all areas of public policy, such as education policy, labour-market policy, and economic policy reflect the needs and interests of young people.
- **Awareness raising on youth rights** - information campaigns and formal and non-formal educational programmes could be developed to increase young peoples' awareness of education and employment rights.
- **Advocacy and policy making** – spaces for the youth work sector and young people could be created to engage them in decision and policy making in education and working fields and initiatives and programmes.
- **Recognition of non-formal education and stronger links with formal education** - policy makers are invited to recognise the value of youth work, non-formal and informal education and recognise that formal and non-formal education are complementary in the development of competences of young people. The development of educational programmes that incorporate both formal and non-formal education, for example life skills, civic education and entrepreneurship are some of the options suggested.
- **Fostering participatory education** – policy makers, educators, schools and other educational providers could ensure that education is a participatory process, and that young people are able to actively participate in planning and decision-making processes related with curriculum and learning objectives. Life-long learning skills can be also promoted and enabled through a more participatory approach.

- **Equal access to learning opportunities** – policy makers and educational institutions could commit stronger to preventing all forms of discrimination and to promoting inclusive education and equal opportunity, for example through the establishment of equal opportunities policies. Training programmes for teachers and youth workers should include mandatory diversity and equality training.
- **Updating education programmes and curricula** – invitation to review them to respond to the contemporary challenges young people face, incorporating subjects such as global education, critical thinking, active citizenship, volunteering and media and digital literacy. In addition, educational institutions and practitioners should promote and incorporate peer-learning approaches within educational processes.
- **Promotion of digital learning** – measures could be developed, including in the field of education and training (in particular VET), to respond to the changing role of technology, including the increasing role of artificial intelligence and robotization in contemporary society.
- **Support to (social) entrepreneurship** - policy makers could promote and encourage social entrepreneurship to establish new forms of social business that connect employment and positive social impact. A European youth innovation fund could be established at European level to support business ideas of young people. In addition, opportunities and programmes should be established to enable young people to access business mentors.
- **European mobility of young people in the labour market** – additional support could be created for the young people that wish to access learning and employment opportunities in other EU member states. Special attention could be given to young people from disadvantageous background.