

Youth Partnership

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



Youth Work in South East Europe

Paper on the state of play of the development of youth work

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Abstract

This paper provides a general overview of the situation of young people and youth work in South-East Europe, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo¹, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia ahead of the regional peer learning seminar on youth work and youth policy in November 2018 in Slovenia, organised by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (hereinafter, EU–CoE youth partnership) in co-operation with RYCO, SALTO SEE, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport - Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth.

Firstly, we provide an overview of the situation of young people in the region, presenting social, economic and political context and their key priorities and issues. Then, we focus particularly on the state of youth work in South-East Europe, its way of delivery, existing structures and needs for its strengthening, by looking at the available research and the country sheets produced by EKCYC members, as well as contributions of the international actors and European structures, as well as National Agencies of the Erasmus + programme and their publications. The paper concludes by highlighting some of the main gaps when it comes to youth work in South-East Europe and future research and practice priorities in this area.

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

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Introduction

This research was conducted with an aim to offer a general overview of the situation of young people and youth work in the region and to map various initiatives and contributions of different actors in the youth field in South-East Europe. The study focuses on the South-East Europe, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. Despite the similarities in many of these countries, their shared history and a comparable situation of young people, the region has significant differences when it comes to the development of policies and practices.

The research strives to draw informed conclusions on the current state of youth work, its way of delivery, existing support structures and needs for strengthening youth work in the region. The findings will serve as a basis for the regional peer learning seminar on youth work and youth policy in November 2018 in Slovenia, organised by the EU – CoE youth partnership, in co-operation with RYCO, SALTO SEE, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport - Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth.

The regional focus on youth work is in line with the European momentum on youth work in the recent years.

The European youth work conventions organised in Ghent (2010) and Brussels (2015) also reaffirmed the value of youth work for “personal development, empowerment, citizenship, participation, social inclusion, cultural awareness, expression, friendship and fun” (Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe 2015).

An important development at the European level which will have an impact on the region has been the adoption of the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work.

SALTO SEE has also organised Youth Summits in Paris (2016) and Trieste (2017), in parallel to the Heads of States Summits which were part of the Berlin Process. The first Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting was organised in Ljubljana in 2016, resulting in the Action Plan for youth work and youth policy, followed by the second Europe- Western Balkans Youth Meeting in May 2018 in Podgorica, Montenegro. While some of the events have touched upon youth work, most of the activities have been focused on youth policy, and a comprehensive evidence-based research on the diverse state of youth work in the region is missing.

The EU – CoE youth partnership organised the peer-learning seminar “Getting Across” in October 2016 in Budva, Montenegro, and “Beyond Barriers: a youth policy seminar on social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situation in South East Europe” in 2015 in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. More recently, the EU - CoE youth partnership has conducted a study on educational pathways of youth workers, and has, through the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC), started to collect data on youth work on the national level.

This seminar is rather unique and forward-looking in terms of focusing specifically on youth work in a moment when, particularly in the European landscape, youth work is the spotlight.

This paper gives a brief overview of the general situation of young people in South-East Europe, presenting the social, economic and political context and key priorities and issues of young people in the region. Then, we focus particularly on the state of youth work in South-East Europe, looking at the available research and the country sheets produced by EKCYC members, the contributions of the international actors and European structures, as well as National Agencies of the Erasmus + programme and their programmes. We conclude by highlighting some of the main gaps when it comes to youth work in South-East Europe and future research and practice priorities in this area.

What is youth work?

Youth work is a tool for personal development, social integration and active citizenship of young people (Council of Europe 2018). It includes a range of social, cultural, educational, political and sports-related activities which are carried out with, by and for young people through non-formal and informal learning (Council of Europe 2017).

Youth work is conducted with the goal of motivating and supporting young people in their personal and social development and strengthening their critical thinking and resilience, and providing them with an opportunity to conduct own activities, pursue ideas and experiences, influence their own lives and facilitate their integration and inclusion in society. Youth work usually has the following characteristics: it is value-driven, youth-centric, voluntary, developmental, self-reflective and critical and relational (Council of Europe 2018).

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK FOR?



What is youth work for?²

Youth work in Europe is managed and organised by a large number of different institutions and organisations and by many different people, individually and in teams: youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups and youth services and public authorities. Some countries have long traditions of professional youth work, and, youth work is recognised and promoted by public authorities, while in others it is not recognised as a profession and is conducted by civil society organisations. Generally, the tradition of youth work and non-formal education have basis in social work and is also connected to broader youth policy issues, such as education, employment and criminal justice. Yet, youth work spans beyond any of these areas individually and includes a wide range of issues that are important for young people's personal and professional development. The way in which youth work has developed and its areas of focus vary among the countries, based on social and political contexts, although there are similarities in the traditions of the countries in the SEE, particularly in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Williamson 2017).

Youth work can be regulated by legal frameworks, but even in the absence of legislative provisions, it still exists as a practice. The legal frameworks may include youth policies, youth laws, youth strategies, or be linked with legislations which impact young people directly or indirectly such as policies related to education and training, employment or housing. The sections below give a brief overview of legal frameworks of the countries of South-East Europe, indicating that even in the countries which have no explicit youth policy or youth strategies, such as Greece, there is a substantial youth sector, while countries with elaborate legal frameworks may still lack the firm implementation of these policies in practice.

² Council of Europe (2018) Youth Work Essentials. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials>

Youth work can be conducted by paid youth workers or volunteers, and can cover a diverse range of themes (Council of Europe 2018) Across countries of the Council of Europe, youth work can be conducted by socio-cultural instructors, intercultural mediators, educators, social workers, community workers or youth leaders, which is determined by the realities, histories and context in these countries (Schild, Vanhee and Williamson 2017).

Youth workers are trained professionals, although there is likewise a diversity in level of preparation, education and training. In certain countries there are well-developed vocational and higher education schemes and curricula for youth workers, while in others, youth workers can be municipal officials, social workers or NGO staff who have completed a short courses or training for working specifically with youth. Regardless of the path, the quality of education and training of youth workers is crucial, because youth workers influence the development of value systems of young people (Schild, Vanhee and Williamson 2017). Being aware of importance of quality preparation of youth workers, Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe is currently working with an Expert Group on Mapping Educational Paths of Youth Workers and Gathering Knowledge on Youth Work in order to determine the necessary competences, formal and non-formal educational backgrounds and opportunities for youth workers (Sousa, Valcheva, Cairns and O'Donovan 2017).

However, despite its diversity, youth work can be considered a social practice, as it is defined by the Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, which aims to empower young people and develop their skills, personal, social and ethical values and attitudes (Council of Europe 2017). In this way, youth work facilitates young people to voice their concerns, influence society, politics and power relations (Council of Europe 2018).

Young people in SEE

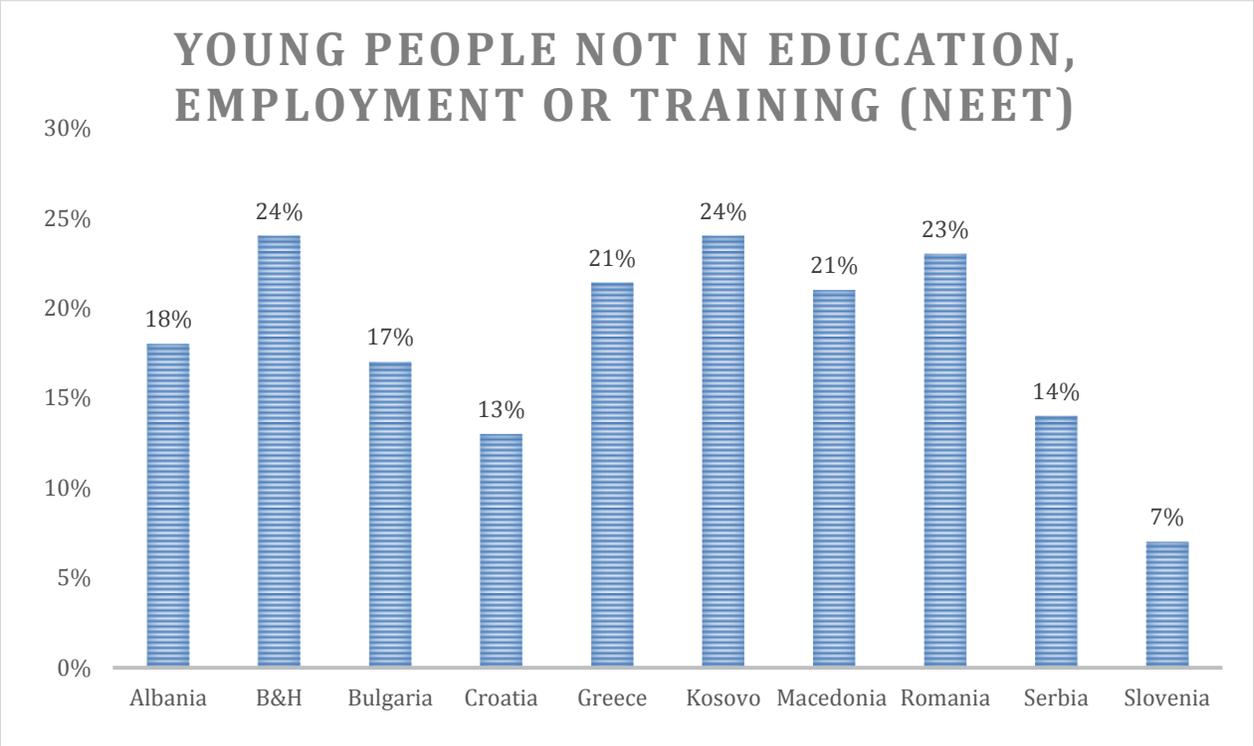
While the South-East Europe region has been going through various transitions, young people themselves have been experiencing their personal transitions through adolescence and adulthood, in a context in which youth are not valued as a resource but are rather considered a problem that states need to somehow resolve.

Young people have not been well integrated in the political, social and economic processes in the countries of the South-East Europe region. This has reflected on the situation of young people when it comes to education, employment, poverty and deprivation, disengagement and loss of trust in politics and institutions, and overall disillusionment with the life in the region, resulting in high levels of migration and brain drain. The context is similar in the countries of South-East Europe which are members of the European Union, and in those that are still working towards membership, which means that all states in the region have the same task of providing conditions for young people to be active members of society and have viable opportunities to work and prosper.

The main values in the region are related to one's personal dignity, fairness and tolerance (Taleski, Reibold and Hurrelmann 2015). According to the 2018 FES study on young people in the South-East Europe region, young people perceive unemployment (73.9%), poverty (68.3%) and job insecurity (56%) to be the greatest problems they are facing (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2018). In each of these countries, unemployment tops the list of priorities for young people - 94% of youth in Kosovo*, 79.4% in Croatia, and 71.5% in Slovenia indicate the prospects of finding a job to be their main concern (Taleski, Reibold and Hurrelmann 2015).

Various seminars on youth in SEE have also indicated that education and mobility, social inclusion, entrepreneurship, addressing radicalisation/polarisation, youth participation, civic education and European citizenship are important priority areas for young people (SALTO SEE 2017; SALTO SEE 2016).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 24% of young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET), 23% in Romania, 21% in Greece and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", 18% in Albania, 17% in Bulgaria, 14% in Serbia, 13% in Croatia and 7% in Slovenia. For comparison, the EU average of NEET youth is 14.3% (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2018, Eurostat 2018). The statistics according to other surveys show an even more pessimistic outlook, with unemployment rates for young people reaching 58 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 56% in Kosovo*, more than 45% in Croatia, 43% in Greece, and 30% in Albania (Eurostat 2015, Eurostat 2018a).



A related issue is underemployment (working in jobs below one’s qualifications), with 43% of youth working outside their profession, in temporary jobs and with low income, which affects young people’s professional development, autonomy and transition to adulthood (FES 2018). A high percentage of young people of legal age continue to live with their parents due to delayed transitions to autonomy - 85% in Albania, 81% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 69% in Bulgaria, 78% in Croatia, 93% in Kosovo, 91% in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, 76% in Romania and 84% in Slovenia (Flere 2015).

High unemployment and limited economic opportunities are also linked with the education system, corruption and nepotism. The education system does not help to develop the capacities and skills young people need to enter the labour market. 80% of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina indicate that they are dissatisfied with the education system (Ziga et al 2015). Coupled with that, 68.4% of youth in the region have not participated in internships or practical training, which indicates that they also do not work on developing their practical skills outside of formal education (FES 2018). Corruption, bribery and nepotism also make it difficult to compete in the job market, and 61.1% of youth believe that their educational and professional abilities are not the main factors in finding the job, but rather the political affiliation and personal connections. In addition to this, two thirds of young people prefer to find a job in the public sector, which is already overburdened in all the countries of the region

(FES 2018). Furthermore, 84% of young people in Albania, 36% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 29% in Bulgaria, 23% in Croatia, 45% in Greece, 68% in Kosovo*, 72% in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, and 38% in Romania believe that there is a widespread corruption in the education system (Lavric 2015, Pastra 2013).

Political participation and citizen engagement are overall low, due to high distrust in political institutions and democratic processes. 67.7% of young people in South-East Europe believe they have no influence on the government, with low levels of trust in political parties (85%), Parliament (80%), and central government (78%) (FES 2018). Political parties, Parliament and government are among the top three least trusted institutions in the region (Taleski, Reibold and Hurrelmann 2015).

Only 28.6% of young people across the region vote in the elections. This highlights their disillusionment with democratic processes and with the ability to influence the political and social context (FES 2018). Young people’s interest in engaging in politics ranges from only 14% in Romania and 25% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia to 39.89% in Bulgaria, 51% and 52.9% in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Kosovo* (Taleski, Reibold and Hurrelmann 2015).

Youth activism and engagement overall in society are also low - self-reported youth volunteerism shows that while 38.2% of young people volunteer in Slovenia and 23 % in Bulgaria and Romania, only 13% of youth in Croatia and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” take part in volunteering activities, with 16% in Albania, 19% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 21% in Kosovo*. Most of the volunteer work is focused on community work and social inclusion (Taleski, Reibold and Hurrelmann 2015).

The economic and political conditions in the region have resulted in a significant loss of human capital - “brain drain”, because of the migration of the young and educated towards the West. Young people in Albania (66.6%), Kosovo* (55.1%), “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (55.1%), Serbia (46.2%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (45.7%), Romania (40.3%), Bulgaria (32.6%), Slovenia (30.8%), Croatia (26.1%) and Greece (25.8%) have a desire to leave the country (FEST 2018, Tsekeris, Pinguli and Georga 2015). The migration flows in the region now are the highest since the 1990s, with 150.000 people leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina alone in the 2014-2018 time period.



Society is becoming more polarised, in terms of socio-economic differences, but also ideological values, with greater emphasis on traditional values, and low tolerance. The FES study in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015) indicates that young people have greater trust in religious leaders (40.2%) than in the Council of Ministers (10.5%). Moreover, over 90% of young people in all the countries in the region, except Slovenia, identify closely with one of the mainstream religions (Taleski, Reimbold and Hurrelmann 2015).

Youth from the non-European Union member states are generally hopeful regarding the European institutions and economic and mobility opportunities it offers. 89% of the youth in Albania, 82% in Kosovo* and 73% in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” support EU integration. On the other hand, 45% of youth in European Union member state, Bulgaria supports the EU enlargement (Taleski, Reimbold and Hurrelmann 2015). This also indicates the overdependence of the countries in the region which are not members of the European Union on European frameworks and standards regarding youth policies, youth work and priorities placed on young people, as well as reliance on EU resources.

The situation in the EU member states varies depending on the context. Although Greece and Bulgaria have the highest rates of social exclusion of young people, the trust in the European institutions differs (Tsekeris, Pinguli and Georga 2015). In Bulgaria, the European Court of Human Rights was the most trusted institution among young people, with government and political parties being among the least trusted (Taleski, Reimbold and Hurrelmann 2015). On

the other hand, 86% of young Greeks feel that their voices are listened to in Europe, and they feel underprivileged ((Tsekeris, Pinguli and Georga 2015).

The situation of youth in South-East Europe shows that there are significant similarities but also important differences when it comes to the historical development of youth engagement, attention and priorities given by states to young people and opportunities young people have to develop. On the other hand, the economic, political and social context, the high levels of unemployment, the low levels of trust in government institutions, poor political participation and the need for greater social inclusion make a strong case for comprehensive and structured youth work and greater attention being given to young people in many of the SEE countries.

Youth policy in the region

The situations of young people in South-East Europe show a clear need for comprehensive strategies towards young people and youth work. At the policy level, a lot of energy has been invested into the development of legal frameworks which would support young people's personal, social and professional development. All the countries in the region have at least in some ways defined and developed laws, policies, strategies or action plans regarding young people (Petkovic 2018). The exception is Greece which has no youth law, but it does have a range of legislations targeting young entrepreneurs, youth scientists, young farmers and youth in education (Moschou 2012).

However, despite these legal frameworks, their implementation continues to be a problem, largely because of various challenges, such as the lack of capacity and competences of government bodies and youth NGOs, the lack of co-operation and coordination of different sphere, the costs of financial and human resources associated with policy implementation and the political will and priority given to young people.

Table 1 - Legal frameworks in South-East Europe³

Country	Legal Framework
Albania	National Youth Action Plan 2015-2020
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Draft Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Youth Strategy, 2015 Youth Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2010 Youth Policy of the Republika Srpska, 2016-2020 The Laws on Volunteering and Youth Organisation of the Republika Srpska, 2008
Bulgaria	The Youth Law, 2012 The National Youth Strategy, 2010-2020
Croatia	Youth Advisory Boards Act, 2014 Act on Volunteering Act on Student Councils and other Students Associations Act on Civil Society Organisations, local and regional youth programmes Government's Decision on Youth Council
Greece	National Youth Strategy 2017-2027 National youth programmes influenced by EU Youth Strategy, 2010-2018 Law on Local Youth Councils, 2006 The Honorary Day for Greek Youth was established by a unanimous decision of the House of Representatives in March 1998 to commemorate the Greek Youth Struggle against the dictatorship of 21st April 1967. It is celebrated each year on 17th November
Kosovo*	Youth Strategy 2013-2017 and Action Plan 2013-2015 (KSYAP) The Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth (2009) Developing new National Youth Strategy 2018-2023 and "Youth Action Plan 2018-2021"
Montenegro	Law on Youth, 2016, and the Strategy on Youth, 2017 – 2021
"the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	National Youth Strategy, 2016-2025 Law on Volunteerism Law on Associations and Foundations
Slovenia	Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector, 2010
Serbia	National Youth Strategy, 2015-2025, and the Law on Youth
Romania	Youth Law, 2006 National Youth Strategy, 2014-2020 Law on setting up a National Youth Day, 2004 Law of state support for youngster in rural areas, 2002 Law on Volunteering, 2001

³ Petkovic, S. 2018. Recent achievements and current challenges in youth policies in the Western Balkans (WB6). Second Europe - Western Balkans Youth meeting: The Berlin Process - a new impetus for youth work, 23 – 25 May 2018 Podgorica, Montenegro; EKCYP country sheets Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.

Overview of youth work in South-East Europe

Youth work realities vary in South-East Europe. Despite the fact there is a general lack in research targeting youth work, it would be incorrect to claim there is no knowledge on youth work in the region. Youth work as a practice of empowering young people in a structured way dates back to the socialist times (in all countries apart from Greece which was not a socialist country, but youth work existed in the 20th century) where different initiatives or even organisations were providing a platform for young people to get together and engage in organised activities. Even though it is open for debate whether and to what extent activities of this kind have similarities with contemporary understandings of youth work, given the fact they were directed and developed within the communist party, it is important to recognise the tradition of, for example, youth work actions⁴, the scout movement or the Red Cross youth wing activities in former Yugoslavia. These traditions have influenced the development of youth work and youth participation in these countries. Without taking into account this historical heritage, it would be impossible to analyse contemporary youth work as such. Of course, after the dismantle of Yugoslavia, different countries have been developing differently - meaning youth work practices were shaped by specific political, social, economic and cultural contexts, thus today we are witnessing different levels of development of youth work depending on different country situations. Some countries have relied on civil society when it comes to youth work provision, while others decided that the state should be more involved. In some countries youth work is a national policy matter (such as Slovenia), while in others the local government play a major role (for instance in Serbia).

Although a comprehensive research on youth work does not exist neither on the regional nor on national levels, there are certain sources which could help clarify the situation regarding youth work in the region. Predominantly, we focus here on secondary sources of information, such as youth work sheets produced by the EKCYC correspondents, published papers and chapters with the topic of youth work and available policy analyses on this matter. We understand that this overview will not provide a detailed picture on youth work in the region, but the goal is to deliver a roadmap which will serve for discussion and as an incentive for further research in this area. Therefore, in the next paragraphs we are delivering findings on the youth work situation based on the available data in English and/or local languages.

ALBANIA

⁴ Youth work actions or in local languages: BSHM: *omladinske radne akcije*, SLO: *mladinske delavne akcije*; MK: *младинскиот работни акции*

Albanian authors writing on this topic in English (Prifti, 2015) confirm that there is scarcity of resources on youth work and youth policy by claiming “Albania has not any research about the number of youth-based NGOs or number of youth workers.” (37) This author continues her analysis by stating that “It is paradoxical that such a small country like Albania has so many young people; that with so many young people there is still no law dedicated to them; there are many youth organizations but yet the youth has not reached their 20 % in decision making.” (ibid) Despite the fact Albania is one of the youngest countries of all European states, Albania has not yet adopted a law on youth, thus there is no legal age definition of youth. The National Institute of Statistics, based on research and statistical demands, refers to youth as 15 to 29 years old. (Loka, 2017).

In the current National Youth Action Plan (NYAP) 2015-2020 there are six general objectives including all the main areas of youth issues: youth promotion and participation in democratic processes / decision making, youth employment promotion through effective labour market policy, health, sport and environment, youth education, social protection, and culture and voluntarism, however youth work is not explicitly mentioned. This is surprising due to the fact youth organisations “organise various activities and the youth workers use different methods in their work, but they also have a lot of problems and still need support in order to develop.” (Prifti, 2015: 40).

Despite the fact the analysis of youth work in Albania is lacking, authors writing on volunteering claim “especially in the last five to six years, there have been a considerable number of activities, campaigns and movements from different organisations, institutions and other stakeholders at national level contributing to the promotion of volunteering at national and international level. (Topali, 2018: 12). It is viable to assume this conclusion can be applied to the youth sector as such.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The situation of youth work in Bosnia and Herzegovina is heavily shaped by its complex political and societal context, thus two points of view should be taken into account due to country’s decentralisation into two entities- the one of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the other of the Republic of Srpska (RS).

According to Jasirevic (2011: 6) “In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are two definitions of who the young people are. Basically, both definitions are similar and they can be found in two laws that treat this area, the “Law on the Youth of the Federation of BiH” and the “RS Law on Youth

Organisation". It has been stated that in FBiH "young people" or "youth" means persons aged 15 to 30 years; and in RS youth are aged from 16 to 30.

As mentioned above, the most important providers of youth work in the region are youth organisations. It is estimated that there are between 250 and 300 youth organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These organisations, active in youth work, offer various opportunities for young people, including information services for young people, volunteering opportunities, international projects, initiatives aimed towards improving the quality of life or a space for self-discovery.

Youth work as such is recognized at the entity level and the main institutions, which should be responsible for youth work, are youth departments at all levels of governance.

In terms of defining youth work, FBiH Youth Law conceptualizes youth work as follows.

By definition, youth work is understood as planned, purposeful and conscious support to young people through their volunteer participation and it includes:

- extracurricular education, which can complement the formal education of young people, along with their general, social, natural and technical education;
- creative, artistic, sports and cultural youth activities;
- activities and programs related to the development of their abilities, skills and knowledge, and community work;
- activities related to matters like specializing, working environment, school, family;
- activities and programs related to their well-being, social and health protection;
- youth counselling;
- youth tourism, recuperation of young people and their spending time in nature; - programs designed for specific youth groups;
- international youth work, intercultural cooperation and exchange;
- other models of creative and planned leisure for young people. (FBiH Youth Law)

RS, on the other hand, defines youth work differently, thus in its "Law on Youth Organisation" it is stated that youth work or activity is understood as "a part of youth activities organised with and for young people within their leisure time, with the goal of improving conditions for personal and social development of young people together with the general benefit. Youth

work is voluntary and it is based on needs and opportunities of young people.” The aforementioned law obliges the RS Government and local communities to adopt periodical youth strategies that encompass youth work, mobility, information and counselling.

Topic-wise, apart from aforementioned topics, a focus on prevention of (violent) radicalization of young people has become prevalent in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Garcia Lopez, Pasic, 2017) Hence, youth workers focus their work on the development of young people’s life skills, critical thinking, and intercultural competences, active citizenship, promotion of diversity, and common values of freedom and tolerance through non-formal and informal learning.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina youth work is not officially recognised as a separate profession and there are no national mechanisms for ensuring the quality of youth work, i.e. the certification of those who implement such activities. In 2014, the Agency of Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina introduced for the first time the “associate expert on youth work” in the work position classification (KULT 2014). This is an important step towards recognising youth work, but there are still no educational opportunities for youth workers. More concretely, O’Donovan (2018) argues that “in Bosnia and Herzegovina the course in leadership and development youth work operated from 1998 to 2008, again in co-operation with Jonkoping University. A project to initiate degree-level courses in community youth work at the University of Zenica was also conducted between 2009 and 2012 as part of enhancing inter-regional co-operation in the countries of the Western Balkans.”

Youth work in general in Bosnia and Herzegovina is financially supported by the local and regional governments, but mostly via international donors. At the local level, there have been interesting attempts to involve municipalities and civil society to work together on youth policies. Most of these attempts have been driven and financed by international agencies. There are various municipal budgets for youth (KULT 2018). Yet, only 10% of municipalities across Bosnia and Herzegovina have a municipal officer in charge of youth. Likewise, only 47% of municipalities have adopted any kind of strategy on youth, of which are very few implemented (Ziga et al 2015).

BULGARIA

Youth work and youth workers are officially recognised in Bulgaria. According to the Law on youth, youth work is defined as “an organised activity or initiative which aims to present, protect and develop the interests and needs of the young people.” Moreover, the National Youth Strategy 2010-2020 makes a reference to the European Youth Work portfolio of the Council of Europe and to the following aspects:

- the analysis the economic and social impact of youth work,

- in order to promote the mobility of youth workers in the country and Europe,
- in order to introduce European instruments (Europass, EQF, ECVET) to validate the knowledge and skills acquired by youth workers in the various forms of formal and informal learning.

In addition to this, youth workers are defined, according to the law as “an adult person who has passed special training for work with young people and/or who has acquired professional experience to work with young people and to implement youth activities.” They support the youth organisations’ work such as analysing, planning, organising, monitoring and evaluating the youth policy based on individual approach and assessment of specific needs of the young people.”, as stated in the Law on Youth. What is particularly interesting is that the Law makes specialised trainings for youth workers an obligation of national and municipal youth programmes. In the youth strategy, the provision of funds for national and municipal activities for development of youth work and youth work education is described in details.

Moreover, youth workers are described as “professional advisors of young people responding to the needs and interests and are available in youth and counselling centres, schools and others, helping, advising and directing youth in solving various problems.” (National Youth Strategy 2010-2020).

The Strategy also stipulates that it is especially significant the role of youth workers for the provision of special support for personal, social and economic development and empowerment of young people to participate fully in society, consistent with the characteristics of adolescence.

In conclusion, youth workers are seen as a resource for the implementation of the Strategy.

In terms of formal education, the Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" is among the first educational institutions in Bulgaria to offer a qualification programme for a profession of youth worker. In the 2014/2015 academic year, in partnership with the Civil Institute, the university launched a post-graduate university training for acquiring the following professional qualification degrees in the youth work area: consultant in youth activities, youth events and initiatives organisers, volunteer programmes organiser. The programme was a result of scientific research projects aiming to study and assist the development of youth work. In the academic year 2016/2017, the Faculty in Pedagogy of the VTU "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" opened a Master's Programme in Youth Work.

CROATIA⁵

Despite relatively well-developed youth policy in Croatia, interestingly, the weakest link is youth work itself.

For the first time, in 2014, youth work found its place within a national youth strategy. This National Youth Programme stipulates that an analysis and definition of youth work in Croatia was supposed to be completed by the end of 2017, as a starting point for its professionalization. Yet, this process has not been finished. So far, there has been no empirical research on youth work in Croatia which would portray the scope, dynamics and perspectives of youth work. Nevertheless, from the literature, interviews with relevant stakeholders and ministerial and civil society organisations' reports, and the (recent) survey on the youth work profession conducted by the Croatian Employment Service in 2016, four major features of contemporary youth work in Croatia can be observed.

First, youth work as a term is still not recognised in the Croatian discourse. A literal translation of youth work in Croatian is “working with young people” (*rad s mladima*). However, this is not a coherent concept but rather a descriptive category without specific and concrete meaning. In other words, youth work as such is accepted and understood only among a limited number of youth experts and some civil society professionals. Due to the lack of standardisation in understanding what youth work actually is, it is difficult to offer an unambiguous definition of this practice. Furthermore, this is compounded by the lack of academic texts, empirical research and policy measures about youth work. As a result, there are various interpretations and understandings of youth work, even among people working with young people. The survey on the youth work profession (Croatian Employment Bureau 2016) discovered that youth professionals understand youth work as project management, running workshops for young people, designing education intended for young people, providing youth information and counselling, and organising activities for young people. From this list it is obvious that youth work suffers from considerable vagueness and can be understood as a “stretched concept” (Sartori 1970). Besides, it seems that the “youth for youth by youth” principle, one that nurtures youth engagement and empowerment, has been used interchangeably and sometimes even replaced more by a “servicing youth” principle.

Second, youth work is not recognised as a profession, meaning that neither in the national registry of professions nor within the Croatian Qualification Framework is there any reference

⁵ The whole subchapter on Croatia has been summarised from the text Kovacic, M. and Culum, B. 2018. A New Kid on the Block: youth work meets youth policy in Croatia. 2018. *The history of youth work in Europe. Connections, disconnections and reconnections – The social dimension of youth work in history and today*. Vol6. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

to “youth worker” as a profession. Furthermore, in Croatia there are no formal educational programmes that offer a degree in youth work, and so those working with young people are often not qualified sufficiently as “youth workers” (there are, for example, many sociologists, IT experts and primary school teachers who call themselves youth workers, but their formal education has not provided them with an adequate set of competences in the field of youth work). Moreover, Croatia still does not offer recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning; as a result, youth workers cannot get official documents where their competences acquired through practice or non-formal education would be officially acknowledged.

The third relevant feature of youth work in Croatia is its approach to projects and funding. Relevant sources (Bužinkić et al. 2015; Croatian Employment Bureau, 2016) reveal that youth organisations are forced to deliver a number of projects in order to secure basic (and usually only one-year) funding for offering activities for young people. Due to such inadequately developed institutional support for youth organisations, youth work activities are mostly (short-term) project activities and heavily influenced by the criteria of different donors and calls for proposals. Such project dynamics make activities less sustainable and it becomes more difficult to focus on the process of engagement with young people, which is one of the key principles of youth work (Young 2006). On the other hand, there are some (Spence 2004; Zeldin 2004) arguing that while process is important, it is outcomes that actually count. Moreover, the project dynamics of youth work do not allow youth workers to focus on developing their competences due to extensive administrative tasks that the management of projects requires (Croatian Employment Bureau, 2016).

In terms of places where youth work actually happens, youth clubs and youth centres are the two most important. Youth clubs in Croatia are understood as entities at local level, where young people co-create their activities. Youth club programmes are based on the needs of a specific community, and activities should be free of charge and open to all young people. Youth workers supervise these activities. In addition, youth clubs should have their own space exclusively intended for the club’s activities and should promote healthy lifestyles for young people (Kovačić and Ćulum 2015). In other words, youth clubs are the embodiment of youth work – autonomous spaces and incubators of ideas and initiatives, seen as seeds of (youth) active citizenship (Williamson 1995, 2007). Youth centres, on the other hand, encompass many more services, and do not necessarily include only youth work activities but can offer various cultural, media, sports, social, voluntary, socio-political and other programmes, under a more diverse “umbrella” of “working with young people”.

GREECE

There are three main phases in the development of youth work in Greece. The first is focused on youth welfare. In the 19th century, “there were some stuttering steps towards state funding and involvement in youth work, as well as a variety of youth work activities mainly emanating from civil society for the social welfare of the orphan children of war, such as charities for needy young people, orphanages and vocational training schools”. Youth work was mainly organised around religious organisations and private charities. In the beginning of the 20th century, organisations such as the scouts, YMCA, and faith-based youth organisations played a pivotal role in Greek youth work, while in the mid of the century the National Youth Organisation and the United Panhellenic Organisation of Youth were established. The second phase 1947-2000 was marked by further institutionalisation and integration of youth work. At that time, young people found their place in the constitution, and the General Secretariat for Youth by the new socialist government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) was founded. “For PASOK, in its first period in government, leisure time and its management acquired paramount importance as a crucial factor in the socialisation, identity construction and skill acquisition of young people”, claims Giannaki, (2014: 99) in her text on history of youth work in Greece.

Nowadays, youth work does exist as a social practice; it constitutes an integral part of educational and welfare endeavours and plays a significant role in supporting young people’s safe and healthy transition to adult life. Nevertheless, there is to date no official definition or comprehensive legal framework concerning youth work in Greece. Youth workers in Greece work primarily with young people aged between 15 and 25, but may in some cases extend this to those aged 13 to 15 or 25 to 30. Most youth services provide a mixture of “open” youth work, intended for all young people in the area, and youth work targeting particular groups of young people, usually those who are disadvantaged or socially excluded (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:24). During the last years due to the financial and refugee crisis, youth work priorities have changed a lot and focus mainly on the reduction of the negative impact of the crisis with initiatives targeting and implementing topics like youth participation, youth radicalisation, civil rights and solidarity.

In terms of structures and institutions, youth work in Greece today involves a complex network of providers (community groups, NGOs and local authorities) supported by a large number of adults, working as full-time or part-time paid staff or as unpaid volunteers (Bohn and Stallmann 2007:24). On the level of formal education in Greece there is no official youth work training. Yet higher education degrees in social work, social sciences such as sociology, psychology, social policy, social administration, social anthropology or educational sciences and pedagogy (primary education, early childhood education, special education, social pedagogy, etc.) are the most popular choices for youth workers in Greece. The only formal course offered in Greece is a master’s degree course in European youth policies and culture at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki (O’Donovan, 2018). Within civil society and various private vocational training institutes, there are courses and seminars related to youth work but none of these training courses leads to an officially recognised qualification.

Youth work in Greece is one of the main priorities in the last years' period with positive developments on that topic. The creation of the **Hellenic Youth Workers Association** (www.youthwork.gr) is the starting point for gathering all youth workers on a national level, thus creating an official partner of the State for the issues of youth working. One of the first results is the agreement on the translation of the term "youth worker" into the Greek language and the acceptance of that term "σύμβουλος νέων" as official. The Association in cooperation with the General Secretariat for Youth has started the official process for the recognition of youth work in Greece and the creation of its legal framework.

After an initiative from the General Secretariat for Youth and an extended debate with the participation of young people, youth NGOs and youth stakeholders all over the country on May 2018 the new **National Youth Strategy** was approved by the Social Policy Government Council and is in force for the period 2017 – 2027. The new National Youth Strategy has 7 targets – priorities and is linked to the European Youth Strategy and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

KOSOVO*

Due to the limited number of texts and research on this topic, we could not find information on the situation of youth work in Kosovo, but we rather bring some snapshots.

In the last few years, the situation regarding youth work in Kosovo has been significantly improving, particularly in terms of its social recognition. Despite the fact there is still no formal recognition of youth work as a separate profession, nor formal education programmes for youth workers, youth workers are being recognised as professionals able to facilitate youth development. The only law within the framework of youth policy is the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth that defines the age group of young people. Young people are defined as persons aged between 15 and 24 years. Even though there is "still no agreement or single definition of what youth work is in Kosovo" (Hoxa, 2011: 21) within the aforementioned law there is a definition of youth voluntary work, which is any "youth activity organised by respective Institution, where young people voluntarily provide their time, labour, knowledge, skills without any remuneration or reward, serving the community for the benefit of society." (Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth, 2009) Voluntary youth work shall be acknowledged as work experience by the Municipality Directorate for Culture, Youth and Sports respectively by the Ministry. There are two organisations relevant for understanding youth work in Kosovo, namely the Central Youth Action Council (CYAC) and the Local Youth Action Council (LYAC). According to Zeqiri and Krasniqi (2018: 5) "CYAC is a voluntary organisation of youth organisations operating in Kosovo. It represents the interests of youth organisations at the central institutions and towards international mechanisms related to

youth. LYAC has the same role as CYAC, but the only difference is that it represents the interests of youth organisations at municipal and local level. Youth centres provide space for programmes and activities of young people. They are responsible for providing resources and opportunities for informal education or other activities that youngsters may undertake.”

According to various youth organisations’ projects, the most popular topics in Kosovar youth work are related to reconciliation, intercultural dialogue and developing skills for tackling youth unemployment.

MONTENEGRO

In July 2016 the Parliament of Montenegro adopted the Law on Youth while in September 2016 the National Youth Strategy 2017-2021 was adopted. Both the Law on Youth and the Youth Strategy for the first time in Montenegro define youth work. Namely,

“Youth work represents the activities that are organised with youth and for youth, and are based on non-formal education, in accordance with their needs and possibilities”.

Even though the definition of youth worker is not given in the Law, its explanation is covered by the National Youth Strategy. However, youth worker is not a recognised profession in Montenegro i.e. there is no occupational standard. (Koprivica, Kontic, 2017). Yet, Forum MNE in cooperation with the Centre for Vocational Education (Ministry of Education) has completed the process of recognition of the vocation of youth activist (on European level, this equals the concept of youth leader) which will significantly contribute to the professionalization of youth work and enhance youth services at both national and local level. Additionally, it will provide an opportunity for young people who have no university education to be engaged in youth work in a responsible and professional manner. The vocation of youth activist was accredited by the Ministry of Education in March 2017, while the programme for the first generation of youth activists (15 participants) started in September 2017 and it is financed by the Ministry of Sports/Directorate for Youth. The programme consists of three trainings and three months of practice together with 3 exams, after which all the participants shall gain the youth activist occupation certificate.

Moreover, on the education of youth workers in Montenegro, the Faculty of Philosophy (University of Montenegro) and the NGO Forum MNE have worked on establishing a Master programme in Community Youth Work, within the framework of the TEMPUS IV Project ‘Introduction and Implementation of Academic Programme in Community Youth Work (CYW) through Enhancing Inter-regional Cooperation in the Countries of Western Balkans’. The Memorandum of understanding on TEMPUS IV Project was signed with the former Directorate

for Youth and Sports (now Ministry of Sports) and the project implemented by Forum MNE as well as the Faculty of Philosophy. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the whole documentation for MA studies was developed and sent to the University, the programme was not accredited. Due to lack of interest from the University, the project was finalized without the expected result. Apart from that, 250 youth workers gained university degrees between 2002 and 2007 under the Jonkoping University initiative, state O'Donovan (2018) in his analysis of education pathways of youth workers.

Since 2014 the Directorate for Youth and Sports (now Ministry of Sports) started with the policy of opening youth clubs/centres which are the incubators of youth work in Montenegro.

Upon adopting the Law on Youth in July 2016, and a Bylaw "Rule book on the manner, procedure and criteria for the allocation of funds to youth organizations and control over the implementation of programs and projects" (adopted in April 2017), the Ministry of Sports/Directorate for Youth started to financially support the activities for youth which are being implemented by the NGOs in Montenegro. This funding scheme, together with the National Lottery Fund (which is a centralized model of financing), are the main source of youth work funding.

The only research on youth work in Montenegro (Forum Syd, 2007) undoubtedly demonstrates the need for youth work professionalization, developing of occupational standards for a youth work as a profession and the investment in additional research in the area of youth work.

ROMANIA

Even though there is a long history of initiatives supporting young people and children in Romania, there is no much of a tradition in what is today called "youth work" (Mitulescu, 2014).

Mitulescu (ibid) argues that the understanding of contemporary youth work in Romania is impossible without understanding its historical context, thus he claims that one of focal points for studying youth organisation can be done by having a look at their self-organisation in Romanian villages. This author illustrates this by saying:

"During the winter holidays, groups of carol singers (children but also teenagers and unmarried young people) would frequent in the streets of their village, collecting small sums of money or sweets which they shared amongst themselves. In some periods groups of young boys engaged in a military-type form of organisation, and practiced initiation rituals." (ibid: 82)

In addition to this, another moment in history was the 1848 revolutionary generation which established the first youth clubs in Romania, beginning in Bucharest in 1870. Their aim was to

facilitate cultural development and social contacts. With the education reform at the end of the 19th century the “extra-curricular education” was introduced. This was not a completely out-of-school education, as Mitulescu points out, “but he did create a series of institutions parallel to school – like courses for adults, cultural clubs, and public libraries” (Mitulescu, 2014: 83).

The beginning of the 20th century was marked by the youth movements such as scouting and YMCA, and during the World War II the so-called social service encompassed 3 200 youngsters, working in 128 villages. This ambitious programme included the improvement of the roads, the prevention of diseases, the optimisation of agricultural techniques, the reduction of illiteracy and the establishment of foyers, dispensaries and baths. (ibid: 85).

In the communist era, youth were engaged in big working actions in order to restore the country after the war, and they were attracted with the promise of a better life. Furthermore, “the communist youth organisation managed a youth club in nearly every major city. But despite the relatively large investments to build such institutions, not many young people were interested in participating in the proposed activities.” (Mitulescu, 2014: 87).

Since the fall of the communist regime in Romania in 1989, youth clubs started up by the communist regime, instead of being reorganised, were simply excluded from public funding and most of them closed down.

The situation regarding youth work in Romania today is similar to other SEE countries. As the responsibility for youth policy is divided between the central level authorities and the local authorities, there are different levels of development and provision of youth work across the country (youth wiki, 2017). Furthermore, according to youth wiki data “in terms of institutional arrangements, no institution - neither public, nor non- governmental - is exclusively in charge of youth work implementation and advancement (in terms of policies, programmes, working tools and methodologies).” (youth wiki, 2017)

Moreover, the main youth work providers in the field of social inclusion for young people are NGOs and for them there is a grant programme intended to fund small projects (maximum 5 500 Euro) for youth NGOs and NGOs working with young people. Priority or extra points are given to projects targeting vulnerable young people.

Education-wise, in 2016 the West University in Timisoara has launched an MA programme for youth workers, including youth workers in the field of social inclusion. The programme started in the 2017/18 academic year.

SERBIA

Upon the adoption of the first National Youth Strategy (2008), the Law on Youth (2011), and the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, the role and importance of youth work started to become clearer and was systemically supported both at the national and local levels.

The Law on Youth defines as youth work “such youth activities organised by and for young people, based on non-formal education, carried out in young people’s free time and undertaken with the aim of improving the conditions for personal and social development of young people, in accordance with their needs and abilities, in which young people voluntarily participate in.”

In the current National Youth Strategy (2015-2025) youth work is recognised in the context of non-formal education, where the recognition of competences acquired through youth work is underlined as essential for young people. Especially, the strategy recognises that the competences acquired in non-formal education through youth work are important for the employability of young people, because these competences are precisely those that are appreciated by employers. As one of the specific problems in the youth field, the strategy defines that youth work is not systemically identified, recognised and supported. Based on that, one of the specific goals is the “improved quality and availability of youth work and ensured recognition of youth work”. This goal has been further developed within the Action Plan for the national youth strategy implementation (2015-2017). Since this action plan has expired, a new one is currently being prepared.

The National Association of Youth Workers (hereinafter referred to as NAPOR) is a union of Civil Society Organisations that embraces 68 member organisations delivering youth work in Serbia that lobby, advocate, and influence existing and initiate new policies. All the processes related to the recognition of youth work at national level are done by and within NAPOR. The main areas relating to recognition are:

- the development of three vocational standards in the area of professional non-formal education (1. Youth activist, 2. Youth work co-ordinator; 3. Specialist for youth work and policies) that are included in the National Vocational Qualification system (still to be officially published by the government);
- the development of standards for non-formal education programmes in the youth field and a mechanism for its implementation (the (re)accreditation process of youth work programmes based on eight standards) that ensures building necessary skills and life values of young people to actively participate in community development along with the promotion of democratic principles;

- the development of non-formal education curricula for two vocational standards in the area of professional youth work (1. Youth activist; and 2. Youth work co-ordinator) through which non-formal education providers gain standardised professional competences to be able to make a greater impact on youth empowerment;
- the development of a mechanism for validation of previously attained competences for two vocational standards for non-formal education in the youth field;
- the establishment of a pool of organisation and trainers for the delivery of multi-modular trainings for non-formal education vocational standards;
- the establishment of a pool of mentors for the validation of previously attained competences;

the creation of a tool for recognition of competences of young people gained through youth work programmes and non-formal education (Passport of Competences). The Ministry of Youth and Sports and other relevant actors from the public, private and civil society sectors co-operate in this process, developing the Passport and aiming to improve youth employability.

The National quality assurance framework was developed by NAPOR and consists of:

1. the accreditation of organisations delivering youth work;
2. the professionalization of human resources (through multi-modular training and validation);
3. ethics in youth work;
4. the passport of competences/recognition of competences gained by young people through youth work programmes.

At the moment, there is a process of revision of the Law on Youth in Serbia. NAPOR has a representative in the working group that lobbies to include the definitions of youth worker and youth leader within the Law. The main obstacle lies in the fact that the National Qualification Framework has not yet been adopted (it is expected to be adopted in 2018), and the occupation of youth worker will be officially recognised in the document. Since 2011, the documents have been submitted several times by NAPOR to the working group appointed by the government, aiming to define the occupation of youth worker at three levels: three vocational standards in the area of professional youth work (youth leader, youth worker and specialist for youth work and policy development).

The formal recognition of the occupation is a crucial foundation and precondition for initiating further steps in the recognition of youth work by relevant stakeholders, developing education for youth workers within the formal education system, opening doors for youth worker

employment within relevant institutions (schools, social services centres, police, cultural centres, etc.). NAPOR will, with the support of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, initiate all the above-mentioned processes once the National Qualification Framework document is approved by the Serbian National Assembly.

SLOVENIA

Since June 2010, Slovenia has an Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector where youth work is defined as “an organised and target-oriented form of youth action and is for the youth, within which the youth, based on their own efforts, contribute to their own inclusion in society, strengthen their competences and contribute to the development of the community. The implementation of various forms of youth work is based on the volunteer participation of the youth regardless of their interest, cultural, principle or political orientation.”

The most important legal framework establishing youth and youth work organisations is the Act on the Public Interest in Youth Sector. It defines a youth organisation as an “autonomous, democratic, volunteer and independent association of youth, which with its operation enables young people to gain planned learning experiences, form and express their viewpoints and implement their activities in accordance with their interests, cultural background, principles or political orientation, and is organised as an independent legal entity, namely as a society or an association of societies or as an integral part of another legal entity, namely a society, an association of societies, a trade union or a political party providing that the autonomy of operation in the youth sector has been ensured by the basic act of this legal entity.” (Act on the Public Interest in Youth Sector)

When an organisation receives the status of public interest in the youth sector, it get access to different instruments (including financial) in the youth sector. There were 102 organisations with the status registered in April 2018.

The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, as the public authority responsible for the youth field, has been co-funding youth work programmes since its beginnings. The amount of money available for youth work programmes in 2015 was €1.2 million. The same amount was allocated in 2016 and 2017; in 2018 the amount has slightly increased to €1.45 million.

At the local level, most youth work is delivered through publicly funded youth centres or youth councils and some other youth organisations and institutions. In the recent years, there has been a growth in the funding and support of publicly funded local government-led youth centres mostly as an: “answer of local governments to the needs of young people (specially the non-organised youth) in the local community.” (Zupan, 2018) They are focused on all fields of

youth work, with larger organisations focusing more on education, and smaller ones on leisure and cultural activities. Youth councils in particular serve to unite youth organisations in a given locality with the requirement that at least 90 per cent of members are aged up to 29 years and that 70 per cent of members of the management are aged between 15 and 29 years.

The development of a professional occupation status for youth workers in Slovenia is still underway. The first important momentum was in 2008, when four occupation categories for the youth worker role were specified, but these were only for those working in publicly funded youth centres:

- youth worker I (IV level education)
- youth worker II (V level education)
- co-ordinator of youth programmes (VI level education)
- head of youth programmes (VII level education).

Later on, the Office for Youth introduced an initiative to prepare the vocational standard and a catalogue of professional knowledge and skill standards for youth workers, based on the Resolution on the National Programme for Youth. In 2017 this has become a national vocational qualification certificate for youth workers.

In 2017, youth work as a vocation was recognised as part of the National Vocational Qualification System and with it, part of the Vocational Education and training system in Slovenia. The National Vocational Qualification is a Public Certificate based on the National Vocational Qualifications Act. It is an occupational or professional qualification required for different professions. Within this system, one cannot obtain the same title as in the educational system, but it provides individuals an opportunity to assess and validate knowledge and skills obtained through non-formal learning. National Vocational Qualifications attest to one's competence to perform a certain occupation. The certificate is not valid only at a company level, but is also recognised at national and European levels.

Currently, the working groups preparing a competence model for youth workers defined a series of youth work activities that are mostly happening in the youth and youth work organisations, namely: workshops, work camps, youth campaigns, successive (continuous) meetings of young people, street work, (international) youth exchanges, youth information and counselling, training of young people, leadership of youth organisations, youth cultural or youth sport events, youth initiatives, team animation, organisation of voluntary work, advocacy, long-term partnership co-operation.

“THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”

The current situation regarding youth work in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” does not diverge from the situation in most countries of the region. Some youth organisations that date from the socialist period are still active today and provide youth work for young people across the country. Nevertheless, without formal recognition, accreditation of youth workers in the Nomenclature of professions and systemic approach to youth work development at the national level, youth work is being left to youth organisations. Youth organisations operating at the local level are thus the main providers of youth work in the country. Furthermore, as stated by the National youth strategy, youth work is defined as: “an organised and systematic process of education and support of authentic development of young people with the aim of fulfilling their overall personal, social and civic potential. It is directly associated with the development of the local community, whereby young people not only become active participants in the process of their own development but also active participants in the life of the community”. This definition, according to O’Donovan (2018) implies a systematic understanding of how youth work is to be practiced

There are two relevant organisations when it comes to youth work in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

In 2013 the Union of Youth Work was formed, a network of approximately 15 organisations with the goal to be a professional body working on supporting the development of youth work. The general idea of the Union of Youth Work is that youth work should be acknowledged as a profession and there should be a system for supporting young people and youth workers. In 2018 the process of developing an ethical code for youth workers started.

Apart from the Union of Youth Work, the Centre for Intercultural Dialogue’ (CID), Kumanovo should be mentioned. As explained by Manevski:

"It has developed today as one of the moving engines of youth work development in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. It promotes access to quality youth work, volunteering, and youth participation opportunities. Nowadays, CID offers youth work not only on national and international level training and learning activities, but also on a very grassroots level. Within our youth centres that are community based, hundreds of young people annually are offered the opportunity to experience this world out of school, and especially enhance their personal and social development to become active citizens who are open to the world." (Manevski, 2018)

The Macedonian government and local governments have financial schemes supporting the development and the work of youth organisations, together with international donors, being the greatest source of youth work financing in a country.

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is one of the rare countries in the region which had a formal youth work education. The NGO Triagolnik⁶ was working to adapt and upgrade the 2-year university level education of youth workers done through the Leadership and developmental community youth work course. For this purpose, they established a partnership with the South-East European University, so starting from the academic year 2010/2011 a Bachelor Programme on youth work and non-formal education was implemented at the SEE University. This programme ran for two academic years. Apart from the aforementioned programme, Triagolnik created and adapted a version of a University course intended for primary and secondary school teachers – Basis of Community Youth Work (BCYW). BCYW was a six-module course that includes over 100 hours of direct teaching and 100 hours of practice in a period of 6 months.

The topics mostly covered in youth work “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” include youth unemployment, conflict resolution, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

⁶ The next paragraph has been taken from the following reference: Anger, J., van't Rood, R. A., & Gestakovska, Z. (2010). Learning study on the achievements and experiences of projects on inter-ethnic education and youth work in Macedonia. *Sida Review*, 10, 2014.

International and European contributions to youth work development in SEE

Many policy and youth work developments and programmes have been driven by donors and international actors, or have been centralised at the national levels. For example, UN agencies in the SEE, particularly in the Western Balkans 6 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Serbia) have supported the development of youth policy and also the implementation of youth work, integrating international and European values and principles into work with young people (Petkovic 2018).

Through specific projects and initiatives, European institutions have supported youth work in the SEE region. Youth Summits have been organised in Paris (2016) and Trieste (2017) by the SALTO SEE, as well as the Europe- Western Balkans Youth Meetings in Ljubljana, Slovenia (2016), resulting in the Action Plan for youth work and youth policy and Podgorica, Montenegro (2018). When it comes to Western Balkans 6, at the most recent EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, the Sofia Declaration specifically highlighted that special focus will be placed on youth, including intra-regional mobility schemes and doubling Erasmus + funding (European Union 2018).

The EU – CoE youth partnership has also organised various seminars, including the peer-learning seminar “Getting Across” in October 2016 in Budva, Montenegro and “Beyond Barriers: a youth policy seminar on social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situation in South East Europe” held in 2015 in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Council of Europe has had several specific support activities for youth work in SEE. These includes the training programmes specifically focused on the region or at national level in the region, as well as funding through the European Youth Foundation. Today, the Council of Europe’s Recommendation (2017) 4 on youth work has the potential of reinforcing the quality of youth work in the region.

Civil society organisations are the main actor when it comes to conducting youth work in these countries, in their work with young people. The European Union has also devised specific programmes to support their work. The most important initiative in this regard is the Erasmus+ Programme’s Key Action 2, which fosters cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices and capacity building in the field of youth, through the Western Balkans Youth Window since 2015. For example, in 2017, EU supported 29 youth projects in Serbia with over 1.3 million euros (Petkovic 2018). The Erasmus Plus Key Action 2 programme focuses on sustained development of youth organisations, cooperation and networking between various stakeholders, strengthening capacities of organisations and institutions and youth work through the use of non-formal learning. (Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth 2016).

The establishment of Regional Youth Cooperation Office in the Western Balkans (RYCO) has also helped to put young people at the centre of political, social and economic developments in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Serbia, and to support young people and youth organisations in these countries.

The SALTO SEE Resource Centre also contributes to the development of youth work and youth policy in South-East Europe by giving a significant support to young people and youth organisations in the region, by carrying out European Voluntary Service accreditations of organisations based in the Western Balkans Partner Countries and organising the EVS training sessions for volunteers hosted in or coming from the region (Jasarevic 2017).

Conclusion

Youth people in South-East Europe face important similar challenges and issues. While there may be similar historical, social, political and economic contexts in which youth work is implemented, there are also clear differences, particularly when it comes to the countries which are members of the European Union and those that are not.

Young people in both, the member states and aspiring member states of the EU, are facing high unemployment rates, have low trust in political institutions and are considering migration as a potential next step in their lives. The contexts in these countries require strong focus on young people, supportive legal framework and a structured youth work, supported by state institutions at all levels. While all the countries have some kind of legal framework regarding youth, the implementation of the laws, policies and strategies remains problematic. On the other hand, youth work also requires further professionalization, certification and quality control.

International and European stakeholders, through various initiatives and programmes, have actively supported development of youth policy and youth work in all the countries, and civil society has played an important role in conducting youth work, particularly in the contexts where structured institutional and state approach to working with young people was lacking.

Although there have been some important developments in the area of youth work, there are still some crucial gaps which need to be highlighted, and addressed during the SEE youth work seminar:

- There is a lack of comprehensive, evidence-based study on the state of play of youth work in the region, and further investments in youth research in the SEE are needed.
- The meetings, conferences and seminars on the topic of youth organised in the region have focused on the policy rather than on youth work.
- The recognition and understanding of youth work as a profession in the region continues to be an important area of concern.
- The need for cross-sectoral approach to youth policy and youth participation in the region remains a priority, as the youth sector remains side-lined to the traditional “youth issues” and there is a gap between youth, the youth sector and government institutions.

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