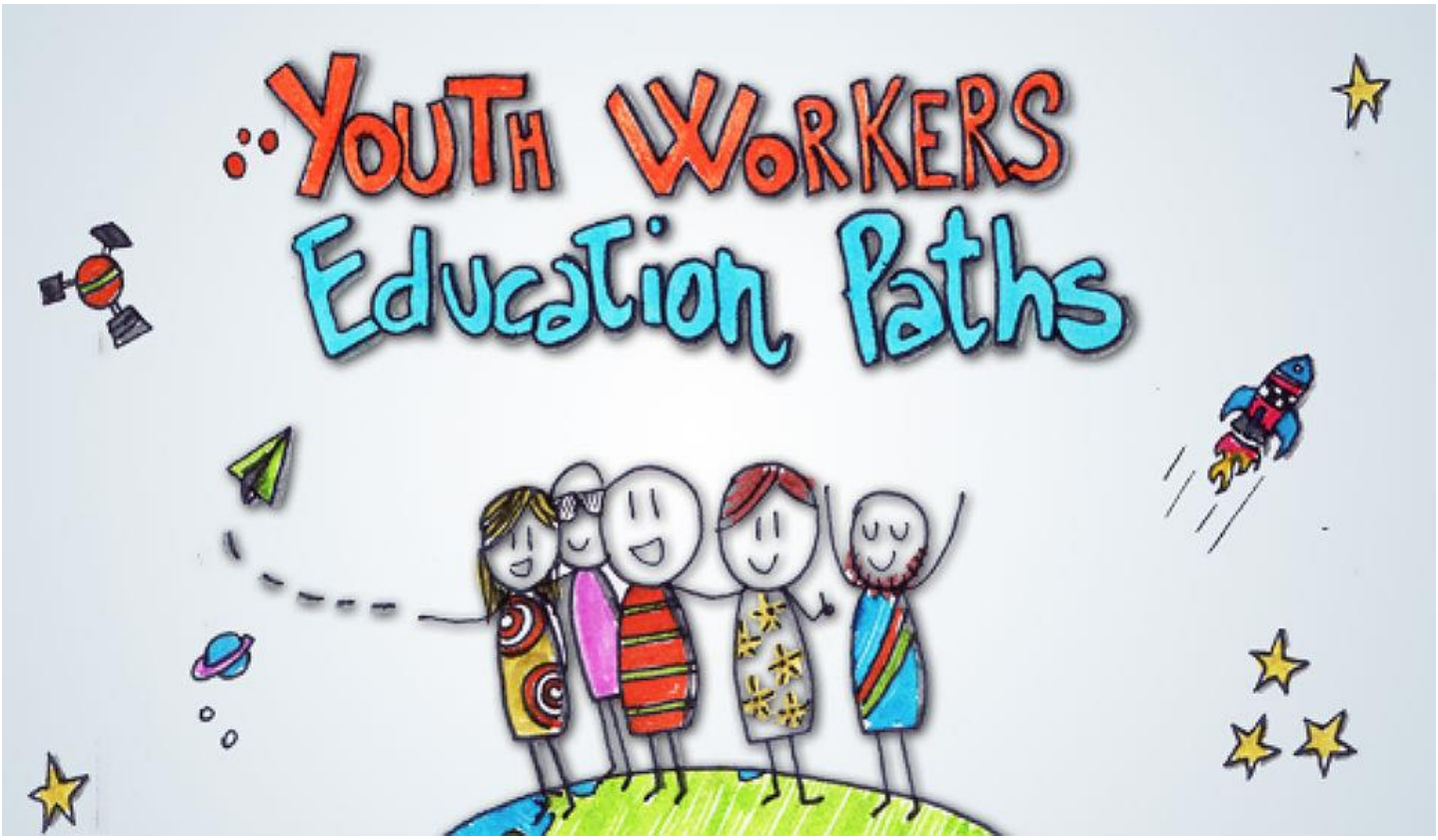

Youth workers learning in non-formal contexts

Working paper

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Youth Partnership

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

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Contents

1. Introduction

This analysis presents part of the research project on mapping the educational paths of youth workers, implemented within the youth partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe Work Plan 2018. It builds on the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio and on the first mapping exercise (O'Donovan 2018), which have been further analysed by focusing on diversity of practice architectures (Kiilakoski 2018). More specifically, this paper covers a review of the existing policies and practices in the field of non-formal learning, coupled with identification of the major obstacles to non-formal learning of youth workers and its validation and possible pathways for overcoming those issues. These insights are supplemented by the results of the original surveys conducted between June and November 2018, which aim to present a mosaic of the experiences, insights and attitudes of youth workers' non-formal learning. There are three components of the survey:

1. two focus groups – a national one held in September 2018 in Zagreb and an international one (conducted during the SEE Youth Work Seminar in November 2018 in Ljubljana);
2. ten interviews with youth worker educators and youth work managers supporting the Erasmus+ project Europe Goes Local, organised in June 2018;
3. an online survey of youth work managers and educators from across the member states of the Council of Europe.

This paper attempts to address the topic of youth workers and learning in non-formal contexts, which was set up as an important agenda with endorsement from the White Paper A new impetus for European youth (European Commission 2002), the adoption of the Youth in Action Programme, followed by the Erasmus+ programme, and the study Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union. Policy foundations were also framed by the Declaration of the 1st European Youth Work Convention, Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention and by the Council of Europe (2017) Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, which recognises that "youth work makes an important contribution to active citizenship by providing opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes for civic engagement and social action".

Non-formal learning is at the heart of youth work and, as defined in Bridges for Recognition (Salto 2005: 49), 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 the sole or main activity. One of definitions that can also be employed when analysing non-formal learning in the youth civic sector is the following: "non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present" (Quality Youth Work: A common framework for the further development of youth work; European Commission 2015). Bechmann Jensen (2005: 64) accurately states that:

> the complexity and mixture of formal, non-formal and informal agencies, competences and qualifications and learning processes make it difficult to draw an explicit line of whether a given example or category should be regarded as formal, non-formal or informal. In other words, non-formal and informal learning also takes place in formal educational agencies, whereas non-formal educational agencies may well employ formal learning processes and may produce learning outcomes that could be subject to formal evaluation or which are formally recorded and recognised.

The organisational level of educational provision (agencies) providing non-formal learning to young people[1] and youth workers is sometimes blurred as it can include civil society organisations, youth clubs, cultural clubs and sport and leisure organisations, as well as more formal structures like local government facilities. Sometimes the problem is partially resolved by drawing the line between "hard" and "soft" skills: hard skills are typically obtained through structured curricula, while soft skills acquisition happens in less structured contexts. Additionally, division between the two may be done by identification of the methods of facilitation of the learning, where we can refer to a list of key features of non-formal learning provided by Chisholm (2001): 1) balanced co-existing and interaction between cognitive, affective and practical dimensions of learning; 2) linking individual and social learning, partnership-oriented solidarity and symmetrical teaching/learning relations; 3) participatory and learner-centred; 4) holistic and process-oriented; 5) close to real-life concerns, experiential and oriented to learning by doing, using intercultural exchanges and encounters as learning devices; 6) voluntary and (ideally) open-access; and 7) aims above all to convey and practise the values and skills of democratic life.

Fennes and Otten, in their 2008 study Quality in non-formal education and training in the field of European youth work, emphasise that:

> a major objective of European-level training in the youth field is to develop competences of youth workers, youth leaders and multipliers in the youth field which enable and empower them for non-formal education activities with young people in view of the values and aims of youth work in a European context. (p. 13)

Demands in the civil sector underline a profile of youth workers who are equipped with skills, knowledge and attitudes that help them to provide support and social activities to young people, especially young people from poor backgrounds. These aims were endorsed by the Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (Council of the European Union 2009b). Specifically, the goals stated by this resolution that resonate with fostering and facilitating non-formal learning are addressed by the following recommendations to member states:

1. support the development of youth work and other non-formal learning opportunities as one of a range of actions to address early school leaving;
2. fully use the range of tools established at the European level for the transparency and validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications;
3. promote learning mobility of all young people;

[1] A focus of this paper is on the non-formal learning of the youth workers, though where appropriate, non-formal learning of the young people will be mentioned as well.

4. use formal education and non-formal learning to promote cohesion and understanding across different groups, promote equal opportunities and narrow the gaps in achievement;
5. encourage formal education and non-formal learning in support of young people' innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship;
6. make a broader public aware of the value of non-formal learning outcomes.

Member states of the Council of Europe demonstrate very different results in accomplishing these six goals. Therefore, the sections in the next chapter will try to identify the recent developments in non-formal learning for youth workers, based on desk research and original surveys conducted to obtain insights into non-formal learning directly from youth workers, youth worker educators and youth work managers. The final part of the paper will offer an analysis of the challenges faced by the stakeholders and youth workers who carry out youth work.

2. Frameworks and content of youth workers' non-formal learning

2.1 Previous results of the Expert Group for Mapping Educational Paths of Youth Workers[2]

Generally speaking, non-formal learning is usually being facilitated by youth trainers, experts from national associations, youth workers who have training experience, experts from the national institutions in the field of youth, researchers, university staff and professionals from other areas. The "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers" (O'Donovan 2018) identified that in 18 out of 20 surveyed countries there was some kind of non-formal training provided to youth workers (pp. 22-23). The authors emphasise that "in almost half of the countries surveyed, the voluntary youth sector plays a defining role, and all these countries, with the exception of Iceland, are in either Eastern or Southern Europe" (p. 23). Furthermore, an analysis of non-formal learning opportunities (Kiilakoski 2018) identified 29 countries where the public authorities provide non-formal learning opportunities to youth workers: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium (both Flemish and German-speaking communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the UK (England and Wales).

On the other hand:

> in those countries where voluntary youth organisations play the primary role in providing training, the nomenclature tends to vary. In most instances, NGOs are referred to; in some countries, such as the Republic of Moldova and Montenegro, CSOs [civil society

[2] I cordially express my gratitude to the colleagues in the Expert Group for critical thinking and advice given during the survey and writing of the paper.

> organisations] are indicated, while in Portugal reference is made to youth associations. In Italy, third sector organisations, including faith-based and political ones, are indicated. In some instances, particular youth organisations are identified as playing a central role. In Azerbaijan, the National Assembly of the Youth Organisations (National Youth Council) is indicated as playing such a role. In Croatia the Youth Network (National Youth Council) provides a youth studies programme. Training courses are organised in Serbia by NAPOR – the national association of youth workers, which comprises 68 member organisations delivering youth work and services for young people. In Bulgaria, the National Youth Academy provides training for youth leaders and youth workers organised by the National Youth Forum. (O'Donovan 2018: 24)

The experts who authored "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers" further elaborate that:

> most of these countries are heavily reliant on European funding programmes and in some (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia and Romania) the National Agencies for Erasmus+ are the main funders of training. In other countries (Belarus, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia), the state does provide some funding at either central or local level. In Belarus, some funding is provided by the Union State of the Russian Federation and Belarus, the Commonwealth of Independent States and private donations, in addition to that provided by the state and European support programmes. Montenegro and Slovakia also receive funding from other international donors including the United Nations and the East Europe Foundation, as well as from individual countries such as Norway and private sector donors. (pp. 24-25)

As identified by this mapping, the education and training provided can be identified and defined in three contexts: 1) that provided by state-supported bodies or institutions; 2) that provided by the voluntary youth sector; and 3) that provided by European support programmes (p. 22). Differences in the sources of financial means for delivering training to youth workers and for accreditation of the obtained credentials are reflected in the final "product" of accreditation.

> Where European funds are provided, Youthpass and Europass are commonly in use, particularly where no state accreditation is available. In some instances, courses are integrated into the national qualifications framework, as in Belarus, Estonia and Poland; but relatively few referred to employing the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio. Some NGOs provide certificates of participation as in Romania, while NAPOR in Serbia issues its own certificates, which are both recognised by its member organisations and the relevant ministry. NGOs in Iceland have their own systems of recognition. (p. 25)

The state, either centrally, regionally or locally, and through public bodies or institutions, plays a significant role in a number of countries, for instance, in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Germany. "Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers" has also reported on the themes and topics addressed by the training: "human rights, social inclusion, intercultural awareness, communication, information, counselling, participation

and advocacy, as well as conflict management, migration, radicalisation, safety and protection, drug prevention and unemployment" (p. 25). A survey by Kiilakoski (2018) on the content of the training received by youth workers in the member states of the Council of Europe has identified several types of methods:

1. national and international conferences, workshops and seminars;
2. national and international mobility experiences/volunteering;
3. peer learning;
4. issue-based training;
5. hands-on work;
6. job-shadowing;
7. cognitive behavioural therapy;
8. online courses.

The methods employed in a course of non-formal training range from courses, to seminars, projects, exchanges, peer learning, group work, networks, exchange of good practices and conferences (O'Donovan 2018: 25). This mapping has also identified topics addressed by non-formal training, as well as competences they are trying to develop, which include: human rights, social inclusion, intercultural awareness, communication, information, counselling, participation and advocacy, as well as conflict management, migration, radicalisation, safety and protection, drug prevention and unemployment. At the same time, massive open online courses (MOOCs) are becoming more prominent in providing young people and the youth workers with the opportunities to broaden their knowledge and enhance their professional networks. Recently, the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth has organised two editions of its MOOC Youth policy essentials.

These results are based on the open questionnaires distributed to youth workers and other experts in the youth field. The analyses of the results that will be presented in the next chapter aim at gathering insights into the non-formal learning of youth workers, based on three surveys described in the introductory part of this paper. A basis for these surveys is found in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio. The mapping project was done in collaboration with the Europe Goes Local Erasmus+ project, which focuses on youth work at the local level and a reference to the Council of Europe framework, as a self-assessment tool, is used.

2.2 Results of the online survey

An online survey of youth worker educators and youth work managers was conducted in November 2018. The respondents were asked a set of questions about their professional experience, participation in non-formal learning and their assessment of the skills,

knowledge and values that are taught to and acquired by youth workers. It has to be mentioned that the results are not completely conclusive, as the survey sample is small and the majority of respondents only took part in the section of the survey that asks for information on their private and professional profile.

Of the experts who answered the online questionnaire, 52% (43 respondents) were female, 44% (36 respondents) were male and three of them (4%) selected the answer "Other". Some 89% were between ages 18-24, 40% aged 25-34, 20% 35-44, 18% 45-54 and 13% 55-64 years of age.[3] The respondents came from Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Hungary, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo*[4], Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and the UK. However, the majority of the questions were answered only by the respondents from Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Hungary, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo*, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway and the UK.[5]

We can say that a majority of the respondents belong to a group of highly experienced youth work experts, as 13% have worked in the field of youth for 10 to 14 years, 21% of them have 15 to 24 years of experience in the field, a further 21% have worked in the field for more than 25 years, while 45% have less than 10 years' experience in the youth field.[6] As regards the status of the respondents, 23% are youth workers trainers/educators, 38% are youth work managers, while 39% hold a status that is a combination of both.[7] A high majority of the respondents had finished higher education (91%), only one (1%) had a vocational school qualification and 8% had completed general higher education.[8]

Figure 1 presents the data on self-reported training delivered to youth workers, with scores given as between 1 (the lowest) and 5 (the highest) for each of the competence functions related to youth work, as defined by the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio.

It is interesting to see that the competences under Function 4. Support young people in actively and constructively addressing intercultural relation, followed by Function 3. Support and empower young people in making sense of the society they live in and in engaging with it and Function 6. Support collective learning in teams received most of the "5" scores. However, when looking at the top position by combining the number of "5" and "4" scores, there is Function 2. Provide learning opportunities for young people, while s Function 5. Actively practise evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted represents

3. N=82.

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

5. N=80.

6. N=82.

7. N=82.

8. N=81.

an area where youth worker educators and youth work managers are the least experienced in training. Function 5. Actively practise evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted. Function 7. Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies / programmes work better for young people was also less exercised in youth worker training. We may conclude that the youth worker educators and youth work managers have mostly acquired experience in training in the areas that can be subsumed under the title of "generic" competences that are required by youth workers on an everyday level. On the other hand, specialist competences, like evaluation and intercultural learning, require more knowledge and skills from the educators and are probably less interesting to those youth workers aiming to become involved in direct work with young people.

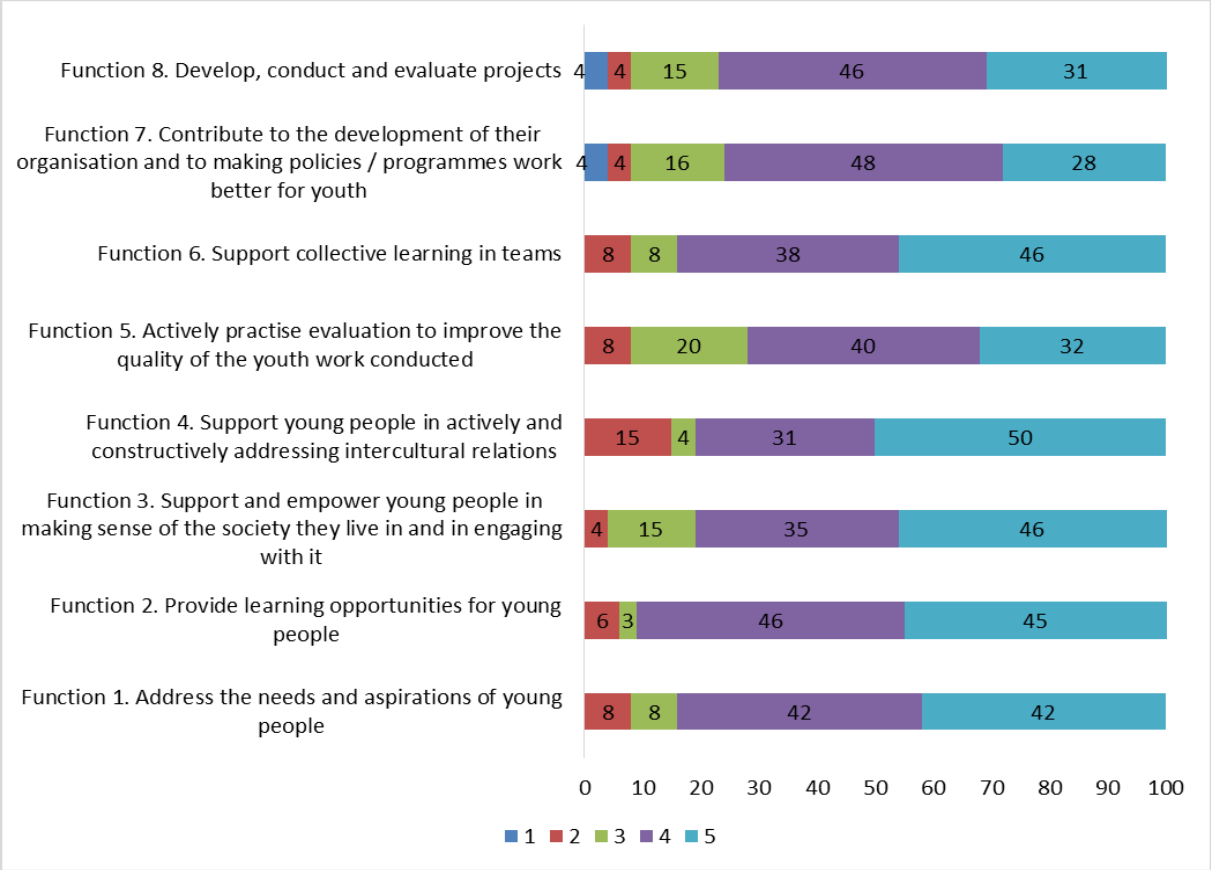

Figure 1: Self-reporting on the training delivered by youth worker educators and managers (%)[9] [10]

The following figure (Figure 2) outlines the competences taught during the training organised by the organisations currently working with the respondents of our survey. The data presented show us a somewhat different picture from Figure 1, which implies that the overall interests of civil society organisations differ to some extent from the experiences and activities of youth worker educators and youth work managers. In other words, there is a single function that gained more than half of "5" answers from the on behalf of the

9. "In this question we would like to ask you to assess to what extent have you have personally covered the listed skills, knowledge and attitudes when delivering training to youth workers. Before answering, please check the list of competences in the Council of Europe Youth Work Competence Portfolio. In case you have not delivered any training, please skip to the next question."
10. N=34.

organisations providing youth worker training – Function 3. Support and empower young people in making sense of the society they live in and in engaging with it , which was slightly less present in the training provided directly by the youth worker educators who answered the questionnaire.

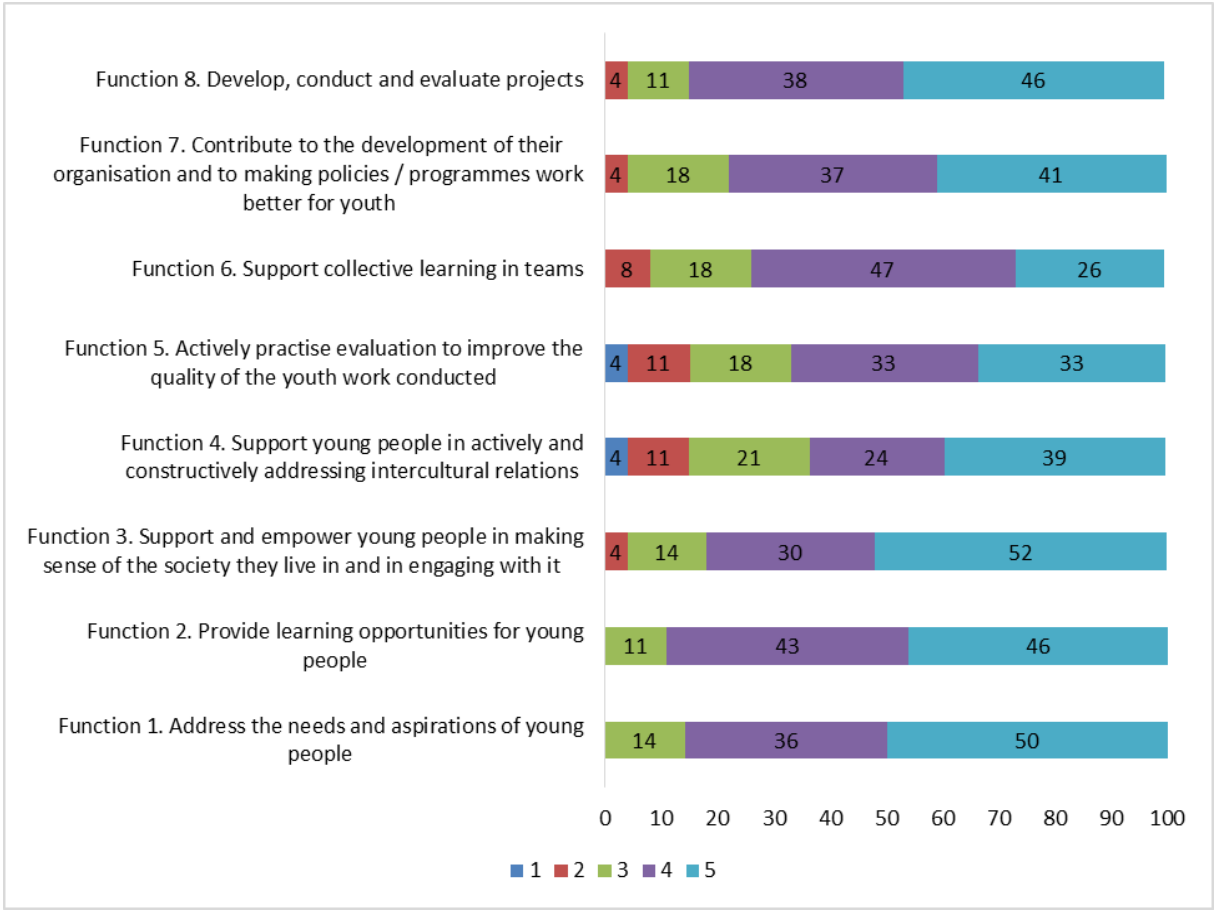

Figure 2: Training organised by the organisations the youth worker educators and managers currently work with (%)[11] [12]

When combining the number of "4" and "5" answers, the leading positions are held by Function 2. Provide learning opportunities for young people and Function 1. Address the needs and aspirations of young people, which is more in line with the training experiences of the youth worker educators and youth work managers who took part in the online survey. We also have to note that the organisations providing training to youth workers most probably organise courses in the areas of their own high proficiency, and the same can be applied to the self-reported training delivered by the youth worker educators. Nonetheless, as has already been highlighted, the results of this survey cannot be completely conclusive because of the relatively small sample, though these insights can serve as a basis for

11. "In this question we would like to ask you to assess to what extent the organisation you are currently working with has organised youth worker training covering the listed skills, knowledge and attitudes. Before answering, please check the list of competences in the Council of Europe Youth Work Competence Portfolio. In case the organisation has not organised any training, please move on to the next question.
12. N=25-26, depending on a listed function.

remodelling training courses offered by the agencies in non-formal learning and delivered by the youth work trainers.

3. Recognition and validation of youth workers' non-formal learning

"Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers" reveals one of the crucial issues of non-formal training for youth workers – the diversity of the non-formal training accreditation across Europe, with more reliable processes of accreditation in those countries that have well-established structures providing non-formal training to youth workers. The Non-formal education highlights an action plan that underpins the seven recommendations recognised by the Strasbourg Process, one of which is "making recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education a priority of European cooperation in the youth sector, in both the European Union and the Council of Europe" (p. 15). Such aims are also supported by the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which states that:

> the validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.

These aspects are of utmost importance when the European Union is confronted with a serious economic crisis that causes a surge in unemployment, especially among young people, when acquiring skills and their recognition should be facilitated as much as possible.

The Resolution on youth work calls for enhancing the quality of youth work, the capacity building and competence development of youth workers and youth leaders and the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work, by providing learning mobility experiences for youth workers and youth leaders. It also stresses the need to develop and support the development of user-friendly European tools (such as Youthpass). The commitment of the Council of Europe to the above-mentioned aims is also reflected by the facilitation of intergovernmental and international co-operation in relation to the development of youth policy and by offering member states support measures for youth policy development based on internationally recognised principles and standards. As listed in the Youth Policy Essentials, these measures include seminars and capacity building through non-formal educational activities, international reviews of national youth policies, secondments, peer-learning, independent expertise or assessment, study visits and advisory missions. Other measures can include funding for youth projects through the European Youth Foundation and capacity building programmes at the European Youth Centres.

The Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012) urges the implementation of the goals underpinned by the

Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth that calls for the development of knowledge, skills and competences for achieving economic growth and employment. The accompanying flagship initiatives, Youth on the Move and the Agenda for new skills and jobs, emphasise the need for more flexible learning pathways that can improve entry into and progression in the labour market, facilitate transitions between the phases of work and learning and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Moreover, a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) established Europass, a European portfolio which citizens can use to better communicate, record and present their competences and qualifications throughout Europe. Following this, the Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field invited member states to enable the identification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, with a view to their recognition in the labour market. This is also embraced by the Statement by participants of the Symposium on "Recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth field", which stipulates that "non-formal learning/education should be recognised for all the competences gained and its benefit for the well-being of the society and individuals, and not only for its contribution to employability and the labour market". Furthermore, the EU Strategy for Youth — Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination addresses youth challenges and opportunities and calls for better recognition of skills acquired through non-formal education. A renewed EU Youth Strategy proposed by the European Commission for 2019-2027 asks for a commitment to youth work in order to further improve its quality, innovation and recognition and to allow other sectors to capitalise on the potential of non-formal learning.

In the Council of Europe, the promotion of non-formal learning/education is a priority within its Agenda 2020 on youth policy, notably as a means of ensuring young people's access to education, training and working life. Besides one of the pillars of the development of quality standards in education and training, the Youth Work Portfolio, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe has organised an event, Bridges for recognition, and published a corresponding publication. It has also published the first edition of the Council of the European Union working paper Pathways towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training & Learning in the Youth Field, backed by the working paper Pathways 2.0 towards Recognition of Non-Formal Learning/Education and of Youth Work in Europe, updated by the youth partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum.

According to Pathways 2.0, the recognition of non-formal learning/education tackles four different aspects or dimensions: self, social, formal and political recognition, which are usually combined, meaning that one course of training may result in several forms of recognition. At the time of conducting their analysis, Markovic and Paddison (2014) identified and counted the types of recognitions addressed by the tools and practices:

- 19 tools for self-recognition;
- 19 instruments for social recognition;
- 6 models of formal recognition;
- 11 tools for political recognition.

The following instruments, some of which have already been elaborated on in this paper, are not necessarily recognised in a formal manner; their value lies in the fact that they are being implemented and recognised internationally.

1. The Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio developed by the Council of Europe in co-operation with experts and partners such as the European Commission and the European Youth Forum.
2. Competence-based recognition, like the Salto-Youth ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally.
3. Youthpass developed by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre at JUGEND für Europa (German National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth in Action), commissioned by the European Commission.
4. UNIQUE Learning Badges developed by a European partnership of organisations: the Association of Non-formal Education in Lithuania, Tipovej! (Slovenia), GOEUROPE! (at.lkj), Sachen-Anhalt (Germany), Cazalla Intercultural (Spain), Inducar (Portugal) and Think Forward (United Kingdom).
5. I'VE - I HAVE EXPERIENCED. A tested System for the Recognition of Competences developed in Workcamps and Voluntary Service Projects developed by Lunaria and I'VE Strategic Partnership.

Examples of formal and/or accreditation on a formal and/or political level applied at the national level (in alphabetical order by corresponding state) list the frameworks for accreditation and the bodies responsible for its implementation:[13]

1. Austria and Italy: aufZAQ – Certified Quality of Non-Formal Education in Youth Work – developed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, the Youth Departments of the Federal States of Austria and the Youth Work Department of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, South Tyrol (Italy).
2. Czech Republic: Keys for Life – Personal Portfolio of Competences – National Institute of Children and Youth, National Institute of Further Education and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.
3. "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia": Quality Label for Youth Work Providers: Centre for Intercultural Dialogue in co-operation with Union for Youth Work in Macedonia and the Agency for Youth and Sports.

13. A complete list of the good practice examples of tools and practices in better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education at the national and international levels (compiled and written by Darko Marković and Nicholas Paddison) is available on the site of the youth partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

4. Luxembourg: Attestation et Portfolio de L'Engagement – Luxembourgish National Youth Service.
5. Slovakia: Accreditation Commission in the Field of Youth Work IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute.
6. Slovenia: My Experience (Moje Izkusnje) – Studentski Servis (ŠS d.o.o.).
7. UK: This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice – In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW).

We can supplement this list with the Final proposal on the Classification of Youth Worker Competences by YEU International, which has resulted from the project Certification of the qualifications of youth workers – road to greater recognition of youth work. This project was devised with the aim of providing a formal method of accrediting the qualifications of youth workers in NGOs. This proposal has developed qualification frameworks with the list of competences for 1) the Junior Youth Worker (EQF 4-5) and 2) Senior Youth Worker (EQF minimum 6), which would contribute to fine-tuning the competences required in the youth field with the European Qualifications Framework.

A valuable resource for analysis of the validation of non-formal learning lies with the CEDEFOP Validation of non-formal and informal learning Inventory, which was endorsed by the Council Recommendation of 2012 on validation of non-formal and informal learning and works together with the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning as a tool to support countries to develop and implement validation arrangements. The 2016 update of the inventory provides a unique record of how validation is being used at national, regional and local level in Europe. Table 1 offers an overview of the existence of the uniform national system for validation and accreditation of non-formal learning, coupled by some examples of good practice in the field. The name of each country in the table leads to a web page detailing the full national report.

Table 1: An overview of the existence of the uniform national system for validation and accreditation of non-formal learning

COUNTRY	UNIFORM NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING	GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES
Austria	No	What I can do through informal learning – WIK:I
Belgium-French	No	
Belgium-Flanders	Yes	Oscar
Bulgaria	No	
Croatia	No	
Cyprus	No	
Czech Republic	Yes	
Denmark	Yes	
Estonia	No	
Finland	Yes	Open badges
France	Yes	Bafa certificate
Germany	Yes	JuLeiCa (Jugendleiterkarte, Youth Leader Card)

Greece	No	
Hungary	No	
Iceland	No	
Ireland	Yes	
Italy	Yes	National Programme of Competence Validation for volunteers in the civil service under the Youth Guarantee
Latvia	No	
Liechtenstein	No	
Luxembourg	Yes	
Malta	No	
the Netherlands	Yes	
Norway	Yes	
Poland	No	
Portugal	Yes	
Romania	Yes	
Slovakia	Yes	
Slovenia	Yes	Nefiks
Spain	No	
Sweden	Yes	
Switzerland	Yes	
UK, England and Northern Ireland	Yes	The Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record
UK – Scotland	No	
UK – Wales	No	
Turkey	No	

In light of the myriad of tools available for self-assessment, validation and recognition, it is very interesting to check the data of the Eurobarometer: European Youth (2017), presented in Figure 3.

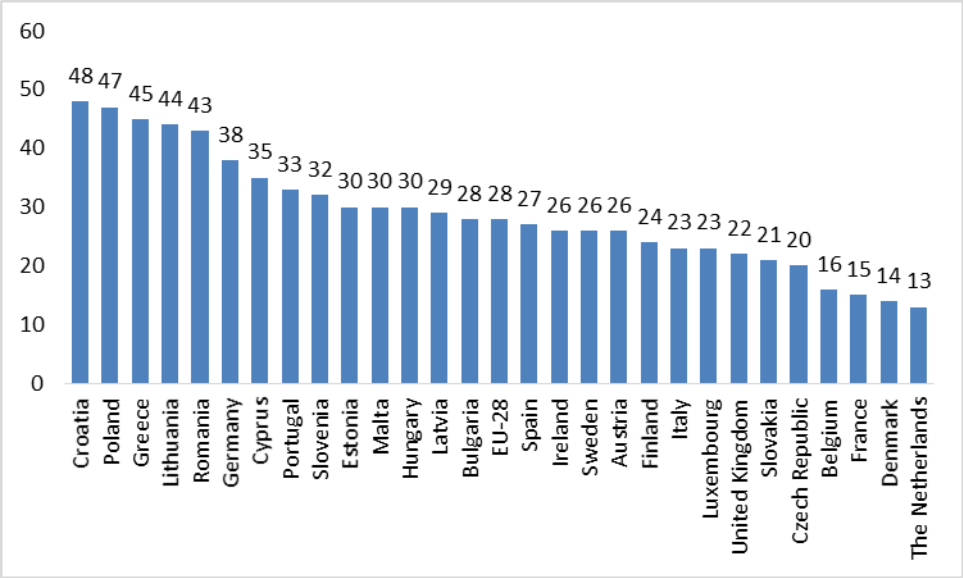

Figure 3: The share of young people (aged 15-30) who have received a certificate, diploma or other formal qualification for their participation in voluntary activities in the past 12 months prior to the survey (%) (European Commission 2017)

This report shows that among the young people who volunteered, the youth trainers and the youth leaders, respondents from Croatia (48%), Poland (47%) and Greece (45%) are the most likely to have received some kind of formal recognition for their activities, compared to 13% in the Netherlands, 14% in Denmark and 15% in France. These results contradict to a certain extent the insights gathered from the respondents, as some of the countries placed at the top of the Eurobarometer list do not have a coherent and nationally accepted system of youth work recognition and validation. This represents one of the major challenges to efficient and satisfactory provision and acquisition of non-formal learning in the youth field. The next chapter will present some of the challenges recognised by youth worker educators and youth work managers, revealed during the individual interviews held in June 2018 and the focus groups held in Zagreb in September 2018 and in Ljubljana in November 2018.

4. Challenges and ways forward for improving non-formal learning and its validation – Contributions from youth worker educators and youth work managers

4.1 Composition of the experts taking part in the qualitative surveys

Interviewees

The interviewees consisted of 10 experts supporting the Europe Goes Local Erasmus+ project, from Austria (two interviewees), Belgium, Croatia (two interviewees), Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden. In this group eight experts held a higher education degree, while two were still in formal education. By their status, two interviewees were trainers and eight were youth work managers.

Zagreb focus group – experts based in Croatia

Six participants took part in this focus group, five held a higher education degree and one was still studying. Half of the group were trainers and half were youth work managers and trainers. Three participants had less than five and three had more than 15 years of experience in youth work.

Ljubljana focus group – an international group of experts

By the country of their primary youth work engagement, eight countries were represented by one participant – Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Kosovo* and Serbia – two participants came from each of Albania, Croatia and Slovenia, while “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Romania were represented by three participants. There were nine policy officers, six youth work managers, four researchers and three representatives from national youth councils. Seven participants had less than five

years of experience, six had 5-10 years, seven had between 11 and 24 and two had 25 or more years of experience in the youth field.

4.2 Challenges and potential gateways recognised by the experts

There were clearly expressed challenges with regard to provision and recognition of non-formal learning and the inadequacy of the long-term vision and strategy for development at the national, regional and local level. These challenges included a lack of systemic education for youth workers, of the recognition of the learning outcomes of youth workers, of good will and of a long-term strategy:

> There is no systemic education of youth workers. The only existing programme is of very limited capacities.
>
> The youth work profession is not recognised in national classifications of occupations.
>
> We have a system that lacks good will, the desire to make a change and capacities to work with the young people.
>
> There is no long-term strategy, only one-time grants without long-term vision.
>
> There are no clear expectations from the formal and non-formal sectors and education.
>
> Accreditation at the supervision level is superficial – training that lasts for just a couple of days.

The experts were also very clear when addressing potential solutions to the identified challenges, which span from remodelling the system of recognition and accreditation and embracing lifelong learning:

> We need to evaluate and reshape the system of accreditation and the process of gaining this recognition; it should not be only on the basis of one two day-long training [event].
>
> Lifelong learning is important, plus checking whether the competences [youth workers] have acquired a couple of years ago are still in line with the needs of young people.
>
> Youthpass could be revised and be widened and connected to the Erasmus+ and similar programme and the countries could follow and in this way youth workers training could be harmonised.

When asked how youth workers could be better prepared and supported in order to deliver quality youth work, the experts agreed, among other things, that:

> Youth workers should be given the choice to engage in quality opportunities for their further development, including training at local, regional, national and European level, as well as online support such as webinars and MOOCs. At the moment, there's a multitude of great training opportunities for youth workers out there, many of which the majority of youth workers are unfortunately unaware of. The way training offers are communicated to youth workers needs to be improved, including why they should develop certain competences or increase their knowledge on a certain topic. Moreover, as most international seminars, training and events are in English, many youth workers who do not feel confident with their English skills and automatically reject the idea of going abroad for a training opportunity. Developing regional training courses (in northern and southern European countries) might be helpful, but only by providing on-the-spot translation will you solve the issue.

To conclude the presentation of these results, some very valuable insights came from an expert who spoke about youth workers who are over-burdened by their everyday work and their need to stay updated and knowledgeable:

> What I noticed during my years as a youth worker is that youth workers rarely have the opportunity to take several days off to attend international training or even a national meeting. They are busy organising activities, taking care of problems, managing a youth club, etc. So, to better support youth workers in delivering quality youth work, it is necessary to set the right conditions for them to focus on their development. For youth workers who are unable or not willing to travel, MOOCs and webinars are becoming increasingly attractive, as they allow you to increase your knowledge and competences in your own time and at your own pace. The negative side to online training is that the learning-from-peers component, the intercultural dialogue, the human experience is lost. Lastly, it is important that training opportunities are offered to youth workers for free or with little costs, that should be covered by their employer or co-ordinating organisation.

The inputs from the participants of the qualitative part of the survey were very harmonised in terms of expressing the main shortcomings of the organisational aspects and support provided for training and learning in non-formal contexts. The main concerns can be categorised on the several levels: 1) on the level of a limited vision and strategy with regard to non-formal learning; 2) with regard to the provision of training; 3) in relation to the lack of recognition of learning outcomes; 4) on the level of support for youth workers who take part in non-formal training, either as the trainers or trainees; and 5) with regard to a lack of cross-sectoral, and even inter-sectoral, communication.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Providers of youth work training and youth workers who are eager to learn more and acquire new skills, knowledge and attitudes, often on an everyday level, face multiple challenges that diminish their intention to engage in quality non-formal training and learning. The first challenge that can be recognised in this respect is the lack of a long-term strategy in the development of youth work standards and standards for non-formal learning of youth workers, which is reflected in inadequate learning processes and learning results that do not support the needs of the young people asking for help from or engaged with the civil society organisations.

The second challenge is a scarcity of mapping in terms of occupational profiles or data on structures and working conditions of the experts engaged in youth worker training. As a consequence, it has been difficult to establish statistical data on the labour market value of the non-formal youth learning sector.

The third challenge is a lack of public recognition of the value of non-formal learning in the youth sector, especially of its contribution to promoting active citizenship and preventing discrimination, violence and social exclusion. Although it has to be recognised that significant changes have been made by the Decision on a single Community framework for recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (Europass) and the Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field. One of the major contributions by experts in the field, as part of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, comes from Markovic and Paddison (2014), who authored Visible Value: Mapping of tools and good practices for better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education at European and national levels. Moreover, recent efforts have come from the European Platform on Learning Mobility supported by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.

The fourth challenge is closely related to third, as it underlines the constant fight for validation of the skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal training. In addition to this, youth workers are often considered as “low-status” professionals who are merely making a transition to some “serious job”, which often undermines their efforts to provide quality non-formal training. However, it has to be noted that there is a growing number of well-established and functioning national and international frameworks for validation of the skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal learning, which are presented in the previous sections of this paper.

The fifth challenge lies in a lack of know-how about how to monitor and document activities, processes and those involved in non-formal learning in the youth sector, which requires more close co-operation between researchers and other stakeholders in the youth field. A body of knowledge and mapping are produced in these areas, though not in a systematic

continuous manner. Therefore, it is essential to set a clear set of indicators and a database that will serve as a focal point for gathering and updating information on non-formal training and learning and their outcomes and impact.

We can add some more challenges, such as the scarcity of horizontal co-operation in the provision of non-formal learning to youth workers, especially between the civil society organisations who work in the same field or on similar projects. This shortcoming reflects the sub-optimal allocation of resources required for quality non-formal training and in the relatively weak documenting of good practice examples in the field. Speaking about co-operation, there is a continuous shortage of co-operation between stakeholders in the youth field who could facilitate non-formal learning provision and recognition. This deficit is most evident when it comes to, on the one hand, the co-operation between the public administration and bodies responsible for providing the prerequisites for quality deliverance of non-formal training to youth workers and the recognition of it, and the organisations delivering non-formal training, mostly the education institutions and civil society organisations, on the other hand. Related to this are structural, more concretely, the financial and infrastructural struggles for stakeholders providing non-formal training to youth workers. A great number of civil society organisations are still project-funded, which means they have to plan for training well in advance and are often short of the financial means required for its implementation. This leads to a voluntary character of provision of non-formal training to youth workers, which causes a depletion of resources and a decrease in motivation among the civil society organisations and trainers. The last challenge to be mentioned here is insufficient outreach, meaning that there is much non-formal training offered to youth workers that is sometimes not followed up by adequate outreach and public visibility.

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