

Youth Partnership

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



MOOC – ESSENTIALS OF YOUTH WORK

Advocacy for youth work

TRANSCRIPT

Katya [00:00:02] Hello and welcome back to our podcast series within the MOOC Youth work essentials, the topic of today is "How to advocate for youth work"

Katya [00:00:13] And here we have Anna Yeghoyan from Armenia, and she is a trainer and consultant in the youth field, in the Eastern Partnership region. And Federica Demicheli who is also youth trainer and youth worker since 2004 in the youth field, also she's a vice president of NINFEA. Hello.

Federica [00:00:36] Hello.

Anna [00:00:37] Hello.

Katya [00:00:37] So, how are you?

Federica [00:00:40] I'm fine, thank you.

Anna [00:00:42] Very good. I'm very happy to be here on this podcast.

Katya [00:00:47] Today we are going to talk about the advocacy and maybe it will be logical to start from the question or from the explanation what advocacy is, as you understand it in your work and especially in connection to youth work. Federica, maybe you can start.

[00:01:09] Yes, I think it's really very connected. For me, this question about what we are doing as a NINFEA, because we are working on advocacy and for as advocacy means to ensure that everybody, in this case, you workers, has been heard and take seriously and their rights also to be respected. But also, sometimes advocacy for me is something that allows people to raise a question about specific issues and topics. And also, is a way to make visible and understood certain issues and topics and to take in consideration. For me and also the work that we are doing now it's really an advocacy process. Very important to make and to put on the table topics that are important but are not recognise as important in certain moments. And these became very, very visible in this days during the pandemic and all the crisis, which there were topics that there was the emergence in the court, they were hiring to send a political and the social top list of their government, other things that were important for the civic society but nobody was advocate for them. So, they were not higher on the priority. So, for me, also, advocacy means to make higher things in the priority list and then to ensure that everybody got rights respected.

Katya [00:02:45] Thank you, Federica. And Anna, I know that you're also doing advocacy for many, many years.

Anna [00:02:52] For me, advocacy is assuring that the voices of those that are affected by the decisions, policies or certain programmes are being taken into account while creating the smallest or biggest changes. It can be changes at the level of programmes and projects, It can be changes at the level of policies or even international development. For me, advocacy is empowerment, and for me, advocacy is a process rather than an end result. And very often and advocacy is also about bringing to light those issues of more underrepresented groups. If we speak about advocacy in the context of youth work in the youth field, for me it is a priori advocacy on behalf of not only the field but with the very active participation of the field, meaning young people and youth workers advocating for their rights and interests rather than policymakers and decision makers using an opportunity to speak on behalf.

Katya [00:04:04] So it's really important the voice of the youth workers and young people. Yes? And I think it's what both of you have talked. Also, when we talk about the youth and field of youth, we are talking about the right based approach to advocacy. So, can you explain what does it mean, this right based approach to advocacy? I think Anna you already started to talk about it. So maybe you can continue.

[00:04:35] Yes. To me, in general, more global understanding of rights-based approach is to demand or to advocate from the position of power rather than from a position of weakness and ask on behalf of your rights and on behalf of the obligations of those you ask from. So, it's very important for me that the rights holders, in this case, young people directly and youth workers are treated with respect, and that their demands are not considered as something that they ask for and something that could be given or not. But rather than something that they are entitled to. So for me, very often what I see in my practice of advocating in the field of youth and youth work is that sometimes the duty barriers, the decision makers consider youth work as a field where they have a position where they could refuse young people, something that they are entitled to, and I think when we speak about the rights based approach to advocacy, especially in the field of youth, this is about regaining the balance between those in the position of power and those in the position of request, let's say.

[00:06:06] Thank you Anna, Federica, do you want to add something? Because you also, as I understand, in NINFEA, when you created it also was about the rights of youth workers and the recognition of youth workers in Italy. So, if you can add something about rights-based approach?

[00:06:23] I think I am joining what Anna was saying because for us it was very important to integrating rights, but also human rights, norms and principles in the design and implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the advocacy for policy, because what for us was important was not only to do advocacy, but also to define a methodology to follow and to be sure that in this process of advocacy, as I said, we weren't just to advocate for something, but we wanted to create a process in which youth workers were not only represented but were part of the process because we really believe that this is very important also based on recognition of rights and position in the society. And for us in this sense was important to work on participatory approach when we do advocacy sometimes is a bit more frustrating because it's taking longer time and sometimes you need to combine different positions. But these allow us really to be focused on which kind of rights we want to advocate for and not to assume or to in a way mirroring our understanding to other people, to the other people needs. So, this process for us is super important. And we want also to

bring this approach also to stakeholders, to a political world in a way that is also the approach that we have - to include everybody in the process to define topics, issues and priorities that we are going to advocate and not to assume them, from our understanding.

Katya [00:08:19] Thank you! It's a big effort and really time consuming and a lot of efforts usually put into it. But what benefits of advocacy youth work can have? What do we gain through this long process?

Anna [00:08:37] I think it's maybe to take a step back and to understand that the general concept or notion of youth work throughout Europe is in very different places and in different regions and different countries or even within the countries. There is a different need to advocate for youth work because the places where we start from are very different. In Armenia, for example, where I am based. We still advocate for the opportunity to have youth work recognised as a profession, to recognise the youth worker as an individual and as a professional that should be paid for the work that they do to advocate for youth worker education. And these agendas, they will be very different from across the countries, the regions and globally for wider Europe. I think what is the benefit of advocacy in the field of youth is that the youth work itself is feeding into different agendas of countries or regions. And youth work is an undivisible part of the general policies within the countries. So, while advocating for youth work and advocating through youth work, we also advocate for different, very essential services and different very essential processes of democratisation, of equality, human rights within the countries. I think it is very important to continue advocating for youth work within the countries to assure that there are a certain standard and certain recognition. But I also personally have a lot of experience and see a lot of value in advocating for youth work at the European level, when we are in a position to shape the policies of the European level, to give a kind of equal standardised support also to different countries and to support the countries in their efforts to develop youth work as a field within their countries.

Katya [00:10:45] Thank you, Anna. Federica, if there is a difference between Italy and Armenia. And also maybe you can mention European youth work as you see it.

Federica [00:10:55] Yes. I think it's quite similar to my reflection what Anna was saying in the sense that for us, doing advocacy at this moment at the national level is really related to the recognition of the youth worker as a such - as professionals, not as a volunteer or worker without a contract. So, it's really related, also, to define the professional profile and also to advocate for a national law that valorises also non-formal education and youth work as the part of the growth of young people. Because there was a big discussion about the fact that if we just advocate for the recognition of youth worker as a profession without a framework, these will not have a sense. So, for us advocate at this moment is the recognition and also to the power of the act. Because the fact that your worker is recognised as an actor in social life for young people, we give them more power for intervention and also for shape local and national policies, but also advocate youth work for us, was also linked to advocating for the role and the value of young people. There are no so many policies in Italy, for example, that are for young people as such. So the fact that we advocate for youth work indirectly has importance to say that young people are super important and that they are at the centre of development of the civic society in our country, but also to advocate for quality because we want to be sure that the service we providing to young people in the local community has set of standards and this is a big open discussion about youth work and quality standards. I think that advocate for youth work, as Anna said already, is also opening a big discussion as to what to advocate, what are the policies that we are inspiring from. And at this moment, for example, in Italy, we are just looking to European policy - European charter about youth work, and this is also

where we are getting inspiration. And also, we advocate at the national level to implement the European recommendation about youth work. And this gives us power. And I think this work to advocate at the national level connected to the European level is something that provides us power and, in a way, recognition. Because what we can say that maybe we are not recognised by national laws, but we are recognised at the European level. So, we try to connect as much as possible these two levels and to develop a strategy that supports us in our advocacy.

Katya [00:13:56] Thank you very much. I know that both of you have a large experience and also Federica an association of the youth workers that you have now in Italy is also full of people with a lot of experience. But do you think that any youth organisation musician or youth worker can get involved in advocacy? For example, who don't have a lot of experience, can they get there? How they can do it? What is the starting point for it?

Federica [00:14:34] I think that doing advocacy is not something just for people with experience, but is really linked to identify what is important for me and what I want to fight for, in a way. So, we have in our circle of organisations smaller organisations that are doing really powerful advocacy campaigns or awareness campaigns about specific topics and sometimes much more powerful than us. Because having experience doesn't mean to have competencies to do advocacy. So, for us, having a new organisation that is doing advocacy and are really powerful, mobilise young people around them is very, very important. If you ask me about the first steps I just refer to our first step, that was to recognise a group of people. with the same need, and then as a group of people we started to define what were our needs and what we wanted to start to advocate for. Identify two things that for us were very important and trying to aggregate other people around this idea and to formalise then, you know, organisation. But before the organisation, we had a kind of 12 months or 18 months of work among the group of friends, a group of professionals that recognised as having the same needs. And they had the same wish to bring up on the table of discussion some specific topics because they were linked to frustration, to what we were observing in the reality around us. And we wanted to be more heard. And individually, we cannot be heard. So we really strongly believe in the power of the group to be heard and to also take responsibility, because, of course, when you raise certain topics, you get also the responsibility to bring up the discussion, but also to stay in the discussion and some time to bring on the political level where sometimes you do not really feel comfortable, but you learn a bit how to to get in this discussion and at least to try to put some topic higher on the agenda.

Anna [00:17:03] I wanted to say that I think it's not that every organisation or use workers could, but they should get involved because the groups that we work with, groups of young people, their needs, their interests and aspirations are different, which means that we each as an organisation or a youth worker, individually represent a unique source of knowledge that could be contributing to the advocacy process. I think sometimes youth workers and smaller youth organisations are a little bit afraid of this word advocacy because we tend to be seeing this as something super formal. It requires you getting into a suit and sitting with decision makers at the same table, which is not, I mean, simply raising awareness about different issues, mobilising resources. This is also types of advocacy. Bringing awareness and shaping agendas, demanding changes in very different informal ways is also advocacy. And to start with, I think what is now making our experience in Armenia better in terms of advocating for work is mobilising ourselves around different groups of youth workers, creating an informal association of youth workers, talking to each other, giving each other support, sharing the knowledge. I think the more actors are involved in a process of advocacy, the better. Of course, there should be also a very democratic process of decision making, democratic process of consolidation and making sure that our efforts are not going vain but have a certain

vision in front of us. But I think advocacy should be inclusive. It shouldn't be exclusive to only those organisations and individuals that have certain expertise, but to everybody, because each youth worker has unique expertise that should be utilised in the process of democratic participation.

Katya [00:19:11] Thank you very much. So then any youth work organisation can do it. And do you think that some special competence needed to start to do it and where youth workers can develop these competencies that are needed for advocacy?

Federica [00:19:33] One thing that I was thinking while I was listening, for me is very important to be able to create a network, stable network amongst youth workers that could really contribute to creating a wider impact on advocacy. For me was really very inspiring during the COVID when we, really by chance, open a possibility to meet on Zoom for youth workers that wanted to share a bit how they feel during the pandemic. We were just a group of three youth workers so that we know each other quite well. And we said, OK, we do this chat amongst us, why don't we open this possibility to share our feelings, our frustration with other youth workers? And we just open a kind of event on Facebook where we were thinking to collect ten people. And we ended up with more than a hundred youth workers all around Italy that shared the same need to connect to each other. We didn't know a majority of them, most of them were young and with not so much experience. And for us, this was really inspiring process of connecting youth workers together, even if we do not know each other, even we have different experiences and different needs. But really invest time in creating a network that allows us to be more aware of how do we work, what are our needs at the national level and how we can advocate for them. This is a network and network competence for me, that I was taking for granted, in new realities is super important and also need a lot of work and care, a lot of care to make network to grow and to stay together and to communicate and to share information.

Katya [00:21:43] Thank you very much for sharing this. Yes. And for me, it also was a very exciting example of what has happened in Italy during the pandemic. Are you still existing as a network after the period when we had to stay at home is over?

Federica [00:22:04] We now for the summertime, we suspended and now we will start again in September. Of course, the number decreasing because of course people are starting to go out to work and so on. But we also started to change the format. So, we are proposing a kind of talk with some experts and a set a topic. And now we are open kind of the first survey. The idea of the survey is that we collect needs for learning future meetings more based on needs and some of the people that are also now members of NINFEA. So, I thought this was a good connection about different projects and plans that they were growing at the same time that was connecting together. And these, I think, was a big discussion that we had that we need to really low learn how much is possible to work together and do create connection about existing things that other than creating others to be stronger in this process, to be less competitive and more cooperative. That is something that we say by sometime is very difficult to apply. This was a good discussion that we had.

Katya [00:23:21] Thank you, Anna, and what about you? What are the competencies you think that is needed for their advocacy?

Anna [00:23:28] I couldn't agree more with Federica that's networking and using the potential existing potential is probably rule number one. And another thing I think that is very important is collecting and very wisely using the evidence. I think it is extremely important that we as a field put

a lot of value in what we do. We collect its results and we are ready to showcase it or we have evidence on our hands. So, and I would say that kind of some basic research, data collection skills are really essential because sometimes I see in Armenia, in Eastern Partnership countries, generally throughout Europe, how much of great work grassroots organisations are doing. But when it comes to showcasing, when it comes to advocating, their messages seem to be like speaking about a single case rather than trends rather than traits of behaviour or systemic errors, I think is extremely important that we look into our work at the meta level sometimes and try to compile in the process some lessons learnt to try to compile some useful evidence and data that we could use to speak when it comes to the turn to do advocacy work because this is something that is extremely time-consuming. It is difficult to do on the spot. And this is something that you should somehow have to do as a parallel to your normal general practice in youth work. So I would suggest youth workers, especially, beginner youth workers, to look into this aspect of their work and take pride in what you are doing and collect all these cases and evidence which can be later on in different creative ways used to make your point while you are doing a certain advocacy campaign.

Katya [00:25:31] Thank you very much Federica and Anna, thank you very much for being with us today. And thank you very much for sharing your own experience, and I think it was a lot of practical tips. Thank you and good luck with all the advocacy work and huge work that you are doing both on the national and local and on the international field. That was the podcast about advocacy in youth work and how to advocate for youth work and see you online.

Katya [00:26:06] Thank you. Bye.