

# Mapping the educational and career paths of youth workers

## Part I. Report

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### **Youth Partnership**

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# Executive summary

## Background, context and methodology

This report presents the initial results of a data collection process launched through the European Union-Council of Europe youth partnership research initiative on mapping the educational paths of youth workers and strengthening knowledge on youth work. Its main objective is to contribute to a better understanding of the nature and status of youth work in Europe and to gather and share information on the educational and career paths available to youth workers, as well as on quality assurance and the competences youth workers are expected to have.

A team of four researchers was selected to conduct the research and compile the report. An expert group in the youth field was also convened to provide guidance and support. A questionnaire was compiled and circulated in June 2017 to the national correspondents of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCY) and relevant ministries, institutions and bodies. The questionnaire sought data and information on:

- youth policy and legislation;
- educational and training for youth workers (including opportunities offered in the fields of both formal and non-formal education and training);
- quality assurance and competence frameworks and systems;
- associations of youth workers;
- employment opportunities and career paths for youth workers and professionalisation.

The team of researchers also conducted a literature review, as well as desk research on the current youth policy context in Europe.

Completed questionnaires were received from 41 countries in all. The resulting information and data was collated and analysed and the draft report was finalised having being considered, discussed and amended by the expert group and following on further amendments and observations from EKCY correspondents and representatives of the member states to the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) in the Council of

Europe statutory bodies on youth, as well as from other stakeholders concerned with youth worker education, training, learning and career development.

## **Key findings**

The report finds that:

access to relevant, reliable and regular data and information is a prerequisite if education/training and employment/career paths for youth workers are not only to be identified but also actively promoted and supported;

in all 41 countries surveyed, there is a governmental structure responsible for youth policy and its implementation;

34 countries have some form of legislative or strategic policy provision for youth, at either national or regional level;

21 countries are undertaking policy initiatives and developments in youth work;

17 countries offer degree-level courses in youth work or related fields;

39 countries state that they provide some level of non-formal education and training for youth workers;

the main providers of non-formal education and training are the state, the voluntary sector and European support programmes;

a central/northern/western Europe and southern/eastern Europe divide is apparent in terms of education and training provision;

18 countries have some form of quality assurance framework or system in place;

20 countries also have systems or tools in place for the recognition of competences needed by youth workers;

15 countries have associations of youth workers and most provide training for youth workers;

13 countries have statistics on the number of youth workers employed by the state/public sector/non-governmental organisations (NGOs);

22 countries have standard occupational profiles for youth workers;

possible career opportunities for youth workers include: youth centres, advice provision and counselling, health services, NGOs, the voluntary sector, leisure and out-of-school activities;

in general, there is a lack of recognition of the profession "youth worker".

## Conclusions

The report concludes that:

- most of the 41 countries surveyed have a legal or strategic structure or framework in place with responsibility for youth policy and its implementation;
- almost all the countries surveyed provide some level of non-formal education and training;
- less than half of the countries surveyed have some level of capacity in terms of formal education, the existence of some form of quality and/or competency framework or system, and identifiable employment and career paths;
- a minority of the countries surveyed appear relatively proactive and strong in most categories, while a minority of others appear much less proactive and weak;
- what emerges from the survey is a variegated and complex picture of youth work across Europe;
- in a minority of countries with a history of youth work, where it is embedded, education/training and employment pathways appear reasonably clear. In other countries surveyed, where youth work is not embedded, education/training and employment paths often appear both limited and sparse.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This report is part of the research initiative Mapping Educational Paths of Youth Workers and Gathering Knowledge on Youth Work. Its main objective is to contribute to a better understanding and sharing of information about the education and training of youth workers across Europe and what employment/career paths this prepares them for, as well as the implications for the quality of youth work. Under its 2017 work programme, the European Union-Council of Europe youth partnership proposed to develop better knowledge on youth work, enlarge the youth work section in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) and continue to upload relevant research to its virtual library.

An expert group was established to outline in more detail the scope of the mapping in accordance with the expectations of the partner institutions. Some elements of the proposed mapping included the:

- competences youth workers are expected to have;
- educational offers to youth workers in the framework of vocational or tertiary education;
- non-formal educational paths available to youth leaders and youth workers and their status;
- career paths/work opportunities open to youth workers, depending on their educational achievements.

At their 2016 annual meeting, EKCYP's correspondents agreed to focus on gathering knowledge on youth work in Europe and to contribute to both of the above-mentioned objectives by responding to a detailed questionnaire.

Through an open call, the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership selected four researchers with relevant background and experience and tasked them to:

- carry out a literature review on the educational paths available to youth workers;
- draft a questionnaire for EKCYP correspondents;
- draft a report, including an executive summary and key findings.



The work of the researchers was guided and supported by the expert group, which included representatives of the partner institutions, the Europe Goes Local project, the Salto Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, Council of Europe youth sector statutory bodies and experts involved in the drafting of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work. The youth partnership also communicated with representatives of other initiatives (mapping on regional and local youth work by the Europe Goes Local project and the European Training Strategy co-ordinated by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource centre) to ensure complementarity and benefit the youth sector across Europe.

A meeting of the expert group, including the selected researchers, was convened in late May 2017 to initiate the process and agree on the framework and scope of the research as well as draft the questionnaire. Following this meeting and the completion of the questionnaire, it was issued to EKCYP correspondents in early June 2017. The questionnaire was also circulated at the same time to government representatives with responsibility for youth policy, education and training institutions, members of the Advisory Council on Youth and members of the European Youth Forum, as well as to representatives of other organisations delivering youth work.

Responses to the questionnaire were received during summer 2017 and by the end of August completed questionnaires had been received from over 30 countries. Collation and analysis of the information and data received continued over the summer and early autumn.

During the annual meeting of EKCYP correspondents in Budapest in September 2017, the researchers made a presentation on the progress of the project. A benchmarking exercise, carried out by the researchers, was also circulated to participants in advance of the meeting. The benchmarking exercise, which was based on completed questionnaires from 16 countries, was a preliminary examination of the information and data received from these countries with a view to landscaping emerging trends and issues.

Following this meeting, the report was drafted and a first version of it was presented at a second meeting of the expert group in mid-November 2017, at which additional approaches and amendments to the structure and text of the draft report were tabled. This draft report was based on the responses to questionnaires from 39 countries.

The draft final report, which included amendments suggested at the meeting of the expert group, was completed and submitted in mid-December 2017, following which it was circulated to EKCYC correspondents to determine whether the country situation was well reflected and was also circulated to the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) for its confirmation. As a result, two more countries submitted a completed questionnaire and other suggested amendments were made to the report.

While the understanding and practice of “youth work” varies widely across Europe, as demonstrated in the report, to ensure a common understanding of the main terms of reference used in the questionnaire, the following definition was provided in the questionnaire, taken from the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership glossary on youth<sup>1</sup> and Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4:

Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people’s active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (Council of Europe 2017)<sup>2</sup>

Definitions set out in the questionnaire also included “youth worker”, “formal learning”, “non-formal learning” and “accreditation of an education programme”, and are all taken from the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership glossary on youth and related sources. These definitions and others from the glossary also underpin the data analysis in the report. The questionnaire and the nomenclature for “youth worker” used in the countries surveyed are included in the annexes.

Data from the questionnaires collected has also been collated in appendices which can be found on the EU-CoE youth partnership website dedicated to the research findings.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the tables in the Appendices, countries are not included in a table where they do not meet, or do not provide any information or data on, any of the criteria in the table.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/-/glossary/All>, accessed 23 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> See [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78), accessed 23 May 2018.

<sup>3</sup> For details please visit <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

Where a country does not meet, or does not provide any information or data on, specific criteria in a table, “N/A” (non applicable or not available) is used. The maps used in the report have been configured using the Council of Europe maps.

Other terms and terminology employed in the report, particularly those relating to qualifications, derive from the responses to the questionnaire. For the most part they are in English and, on occasion, French. However, in some instances a translation has been provided where the meaning may be less clear, as for instance *Fritidsledarutbildning* (recreation leader) in Sweden and *Barne- og ungdomsarbeiderfag* (child and youth work subjects) in Norway. The term “country” (European Cultural Convention) rather than “member state” is used in the report.

While a literature review was conducted as planned, the information and data resulting from the review were deemed not substantive enough for inclusion in the final report. Accordingly, a new chapter on “Current European policy on promotion and development of youth work” has been included in its stead.

All information and data included in the data analysis and tables derive solely from the responses to the questionnaire, except where other information or data are employed for illustrative or comparative purposes. Where responses to the questionnaire categorise information and data under specific headings, such as formal or non-formal education and training, quality assurance or competency-based frameworks, or occupational standards or job descriptions, these have been reported and treated as such for data analysis purposes, unless otherwise indicated. Accordingly, the report is based and reliant on the extent and quality of the responses to the questionnaire.

While the report has sought to adhere in all instances to the content and classification of the information and data supplied in the responses to the questionnaire, in some instances – particularly with regard to formal and non-formal education and training, quality assurance, competences and professional regulation – a certain amount of interpretation and judgement has been required to assess the content and classification of the information and data provided.

## Chapter 2

### **Current European policy on promotion and development of youth work**

In looking at current European policy on the promotion and development of youth work, we are able to identify some common themes underpinning the approach of the European institutions to this field. Such work helps clarify what these institutions define as youth work, providing us with a starting point for the subsequent mapping exercise as well as an important point of orientation for this report.

The policy background at European level in relation to youth work includes a number of significant developments. This includes attempting to explain what constitutes youth work. In 2009, the Council of the European Union's Resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field defined youth work as "a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people ... based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation".<sup>4</sup> This is very much a starting point of a definition rather than a comprehensive statement of everything that takes place within the youth sector, or indeed, encompassing all the areas in which youth workers are employed, extending beyond areas such as education and training and into other fields, including leisure. Key to this definition is, however, the fact that participation in youth work should be voluntary among young people, involve some aspect of non-formal or informal learning, and support personal social development.

We can also look at the declarations of the European youth work conventions. The Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, one of the flagship initiatives of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2014 to May 2015), attempts to balance, on the one hand, the idea of youth work as an "instrument" for labour market preparation, and on the other, a tool for

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4. This definition is attributed to the late Peter Lauritzen, former head of the Youth Department and Deputy Director at the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport. See <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-work1>, accessed 23 May 2018.

supporting personal development, empowerment, citizenship, participation, social inclusion, cultural awareness, expression, friendship and having fun.

What the convention provides is a statement of renewed commitment to supporting youth work in Europe and the triggering of an institutional process towards agreement on the value and significance of youth work among the European institutions, as well as an endorsement of the work of policy makers and practitioners in the youth sector. This document essentially sets parameters in regard to what youth workers should be doing and, as it notes in its concluding summary, youth work is a central component of a social Europe.<sup>5</sup>

As the convention notes, the responsibility for youth work rests lies with member states, meaning that we need to establish what is happening in the youth sector in countries throughout Europe. In this report, we will therefore try to look at the extent to which the aspirations of the European institutions are being realised. One document that is key to guiding this process is the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work. This includes the provision of a basic definition (quoted in the Introduction and abridged from the resolution cited above). The aim of this recommendation is to encourage countries to develop their youth work policy and forms of practice, in order to support youth work at local, regional, national and European levels. Significantly, this definition also acknowledges the importance of paid and volunteer youth workers, and the emphasis on non-formal and informal learning processes. Hence, this document provides an important indication of the means through which youth work should be practiced. Definitions of these terms, and many others, can be found in the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership glossary on youth.

In explaining what it is youth workers actually do, dedicated research on youth work in practice is limited, although a significant number of studies have emerged, bringing together insights on the work of those within the youth sector across Europe. One example is the recent Council of Europe youth knowledge publication: *Thinking seriously about youth work* (Schild et al. 2017). This book takes a transversal perspective, examining country case

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5. Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, Brussels, 27 to 30 April 2015. Also worth citing is the Belgian Presidency's Council Resolution on youth work (2010).

studies from various EU member states and Council of Europe countries. From this work, we can in some ways fill out a contemporary definition of youth work in terms of occupational categories, looking at people termed socio-cultural instructors, intercultural mediators, educators or *animateurs*, social workers, community workers, youth leaders, educators and trainers, cultural workers, volunteers and activists in youth organisations or youth movements. From this point of view, what we can expect to map in this report are some of the regulatory frameworks, educational frameworks and career pathways open to these individuals.

# Chapter 3

## Research questions, methodology and responses

### Research questions

This mapping is an attempt to answer some key questions regarding the educational paths of youth workers, the professional reality in each European country, the different forms of recognition, and the main challenges faced by practitioners of youth work. For this purpose, the following research questions guided the methodology and the work done by the research team and the expert group:

what policy and legislation exists at national level to regulate youth work as a profession?

what educational and training opportunities are available to support the professional development of youth workers?

what are the quality frameworks and what are the core competences of youth workers?

what kinds of representative and support structures exist for youth workers?

what is the employment status of youth workers and what career opportunities are available to them?

### Methodology

The following methods were employed:

- a questionnaire sent to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) correspondents, relevant ministries, the Advisory Council on Youth, the European Youth Forum, and other organisations delivering youth work;
- a literature review and desk research regarding key terms, definitions of youth work and related contexts such as EU and Council of Europe youth policy and country perspectives in the field of youth work;
- consultation with the expert group and EKCYP correspondents: three meetings were held during the mapping exercise to discuss findings, rethink the structure of the report and consider approaches to strengthen the analysis and links to the data provided;
- collation and analysis of data: this was conducted in line with the sequence of the questionnaire and resulted in the main findings, emerging trends and conclusions.

## Reponses

Completed responses to the questionnaire were received from 41 countries. In all, 49 completed questionnaires were received as some countries returned more than one and miscellaneous material was also provided by individual countries. Almost half of the responses to the questionnaire were submitted by EKCYP correspondents, and ministries, universities, government agencies and civil society organisations across Europe also submitted responses.

From the data analysis it was clear that there is a significant lack of data on youth work in many of the countries surveyed. This consequently affected the completion of the questionnaire and the expected outcomes. Differences in interpretation and understanding of the questions asked also affected the nature and extent of the responses received.

As a result, in conducting future mapping exercises the following approaches might be considered:

- decide what precise data/information are needed, how they can be best accessed, who can best provide them, and the most appropriate timescale;
- simplify the language, clarify the terminology and streamline the format of the questionnaire;
- consider the size, scale and diversity of youth work provision according to the expected outcomes;
- employ different methods for data/information gathering: focus groups, regular online responses, quantitative/qualitative approaches, fora with researchers/policy makers/practitioners, etc.;
- consider the broader policy, information and research context to ensure complementarity, information sharing, mutual support and avoidance of duplication and inconsistencies.



# Chapter 4

## Data analysis

### Policy and legislation (Question 1)

In this section of the report, we will provide an overview of policy and legislation pertaining to youth work across Europe. We begin by summarising the current position in regard to national structures and legislative frameworks across different European countries. This is followed by an assessment of definitions of youth work, other forms of national recognition and current national policy initiatives. The latter is also illustrated with the use of a map providing detail in countries in which we are aware of such arrangements. A concluding note indicates that while there is some common ground across countries in relation to policy and legislation, in regard to the foundational role played by national governments in regulating youth work, for example, the current state of policy and legislation differs markedly according to national context due to factors such as different regional histories of youth work development.

#### **National structures and legislative frameworks**

The opening question set of the questionnaire examined policy and legislation in regard to youth work at national level. The first part asked: “Which national structures are responsible for creating the framework for youth policy and its implementation in your country?”

Table 1, included in the appendices<sup>6</sup>, presents an overview of these institutions as described by the national correspondents, providing us with an indication of where ultimate responsibility for youth work lies. All national correspondents (for the 41 countries and regions for which we have information) noted that some form of governmental structure is in place in their countries. The norm in regard to youth work governance is to situate responsibility at ministerial level, with input from others parties such as youth advisory boards in a small number of countries (e.g. Bulgaria).

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

It is also notable that “youth” is not generally regarded as a distinct policy arena at ministerial level but is typically conjoined with other policy fields, most prominently “children” (in Ireland, Luxembourg and Croatia) and/or interpolated within the frameworks of “sport” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, the Flemish Community of Belgium, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Georgia, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England)) or “education” (Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (England)). In some countries, such as Croatia and Finland, “youth” traverses different policy fields. The outstanding finding from the responses made to this question is a confirmation that there is a lack of dedicated structures for the governance of youth work in these countries at ministerial level.

Moving on to consider legislation pertaining to youth work, we asked respondents if their country had a youth act/law/policy/strategy or youth work act/law/policy/strategy at national and/or regional level. Table 2 in the appendices<sup>7</sup> provides details of this legislation, where present, including the dates on which they came into force. In some cases, the title of the legislation has been translated into English, and elsewhere, a more general description provided. It is notable that in several national contexts, there appeared to be no such legislation: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland and Sweden. This does not mean that there is no legal framework in these nations, only that youth work may fall within the jurisdiction of generic legislation relating to areas such as education; for example the Education and Inspections Act (2006) in the United Kingdom (England). It is also notable that much of this legislation is relatively recent, having been formulated in the last decade, and in some cases, the process of establishing legislation is ongoing or yet to be finalised.

### **Definitions of youth work**

The responses to the question “Is ‘youth work’ or ‘youth worker’ defined or included in any other legislation or national policy document?” provide information about how youth work is legally defined in different countries, although in the majority of cases, no definition of

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

“youth work” or “youth worker” was provided or noted as being codified in legislation. Examples of definitions included in the questionnaires were as follows:

Estonia: youth work is defined in the Youth Work Act as the creation of conditions to promote the diverse development of young persons, which enables them to be active outside their families, formal education and work on the basis of their free will;

Finland: youth work as defined in the Youth Act means efforts to support the growth, independence and social inclusion of young people in society;

Ireland: youth work is defined in the 2001 Youth Work Act as:

a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary participation, and which is—

- (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
- (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.;

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”: the National Youth Strategy defines youth work 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.;

Malta: a non-formal learning activity aimed at the personal, social and political development of young people (Youth Work Profession Act);

Montenegro: youth work is defined in the Law on Youth as “activities which are conducted with young people and for young people, based on non-formal education, in line with their needs and abilities”;

United Kingdom (Wales): in the National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales 2014-2018, youth work is defined using the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (Learning and Skills Improvement Service 2012) as work that “enables young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.”

As we can observe from the above list, these definitions range from fairly literal descriptions of what is entailed in youth work and the role of the youth worker (e.g. in Armenia), to

being grounded in a clear set of duties or responsibilities in institutional terms (e.g. in Ireland). There is also a strong sense of development of growth conveyed (e.g. in Serbia and the United Kingdom (Wales)), to be facilitated by a planned programme of activities (e.g. “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”), implying a systematic understanding of how youth work is to be practiced. More precisely, common features include an emphasis on non-formal learning and voluntary participation. The lack of a clear age limit is however notable in most cases (except the Flemish Community of Belgium).

While the limited number of definitions provided limits scope analysis, we can deduce that there is common concern with issues such as quality of life and linkages with a broader process of societal or communal development. Youth work is also generally situated outside structures of formal education, with associations with non-formal learning and voluntarism. In this sense, we can observe common ground with how youth work is conceptualised at European level, including the approach of institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe, and the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership.

#### **Other forms of national recognition of youth work**

Other forms of national recognition for youth work exist, such as recognition from civil society organisations or specific training courses. Table 3 in the appendices<sup>8</sup> collates the responses received. While information was provided in just over half the responses, we can see that in many of these cases a similar answer was provided in regard to highlighting the significance of national youth agencies. Also cited is the role of European agencies, notably Erasmus+, in providing national recognition for youth work (e.g. in Greece, Poland and Romania).

Even though we have an incomplete picture, we also know that recognition of youth work takes place at national level outside government structures: through courses for youth workers and youth leaders, summer camps and other forms of training organised by voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It may be that awareness of such work is limited by a lack of information or awareness. For example, in Italy it was noted that there are “fragmented initiatives” taking place, supported by local administrations/municipalities. Therefore, it must be the case that much recognition is

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

situated at local levels rather than at national level, but the diverse and undocumented nature of initiatives makes this work less visible than it might be.

### **Current national policy initiatives**

One final question in this set looked at current national policy initiatives for the recognition of youth work, e.g. legislative bills and committees. Responses covered:

- a new law proposal on youth policy, including comprehensive definitions of “youth work” and “youth worker” has been presented to the Parliament of Azerbaijan and is currently under consideration;
- the activities of the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria;
- an ad hoc expert group on linking youth work to social work in the Czech Republic, founded in 2015;
- a mapping exercise in Cyprus regarding the validation of non-formal and informal education;
- a national expert working group in Croatia convened in 2015;
- the selection in Finland in autumn 2017 of 10 to 15 national youth work centres of expertise, seeking to develop and promote competence and expertise in youth-related issues on a nationwide basis;
- the setting up of a working group in France between October 2016 and March 2017;
- the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia’s work with partners to create National Professional Standards and Certification Criteria for youth workers;
- the Action Alliance for Recognition in Germany;
- the translation of concepts of “youth work” and “youth worker” into Greek in April 2017;
- the establishment of a working group by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia;
- a draft law amending the Law on Youth Policy Framework (2017) in Lithuania;
- a joint initiative for recognition of youth work in the National Qualifications Framework in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”;
- the development of youth sector infrastructure and supporting mechanisms in assurance of quality in youth work and a feasibility study on status recognition in the Republic of Moldova;

- the revision of the Law on Youth in Montenegro, 2017;
- an attempt to create a new national youth policy for 2016-2019 in Poland;
- a National Policy initiative associated with Youth Technicians in Portugal;
- research on Occupational Standards in Youth Work commissioned by the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Romania in 2016;
- a revision of the Law on Youth in Serbia;
- a declaration on recognising the contribution of non-formal education in youth work in Slovakia;
- legislative bills on youth and regulations on youth centres presented to the Ukrainian Parliament.

We can therefore see that the governance of youth work is in a state of transition in many countries, with changes in laws and forms of recognition for youth workers. This is inevitably an incomplete picture, given the fluid situation in regard to the conducting of research projects and convening of committees. It is however clear that there is a general movement towards better recognition of youth work and non-formal education in general across Europe.

### **Conclusion**

The diversity of youth work regulation reflects the diversity of Europe, with different national traditions leading to the development of different frameworks. One outstanding factor is the level of government involvement in regulating youth work. As we observed, the norm is to locate this within an appropriate government ministry, usually alongside other policy fields, such as “children”, “family” or “education”. Regulatory frameworks from this point diverge according to factors such as the degree of recognition awarded to youth work as a profession. In looking for reasons for divergence, we can point towards the distinct histories of the development of youth work in each country, as it is more established in some regions than others. In many places, youth work as a profession is still very much a work in progress. And as we shall observe in the subsequent discussion, distinct patterns emerge with regard to education, training and employment, following on from this initial point of orientation.

## **Formal and non-formal education and training (Questions 3, 4)**

While employment and careers can be strongly influenced by issues other than education and training, firm and robust foundations in education and training in any field are necessary for good employment prospects and successful career opportunities as well as for personal development. The questions in the survey were aimed at:

- eliciting information and data on the nature and extent of formal and non-formal education and training opportunities currently available in the youth work field;
- how these relate to the development of the competences of youth workers and prospective youth workers and how they affect their employment and career prospects.

This section comprises two parts. The first part deals with degree- and postgraduate-level courses available in the youth work field and also with vocational and further education courses available at sub-degree level. The second part deals with non-formal education and training for both paid and voluntary youth workers and focuses firstly on the provision, funding and accreditation of education and training, then examines the training methods and topics used to achieve relevant competences. Finally, an attempt is made to present some general conclusions and outline possible challenges for the future.

### **Formal and accredited education**

#### *Courses at degree and postgraduate level*

There are a wide variety of degree- and postgraduate-level courses available in the youth work field. Some of these courses relate specifically to youth work while others relate to associated areas such as social work. Six countries surveyed – Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (England and Wales) – have degree-level courses specifically in youth work. Eleven countries – Bulgaria, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Romania (Table 4 in the appendices<sup>9</sup>) – offer courses in related fields that are associated with and provide educational paths into youth work.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

In the Russian Federation there are 42 universities providing degree-level courses in the university programme Organisation of Youth Work, which was created in 2003 by decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation as an experimental interdisciplinary speciality. It was aimed at providing competent professionals in youth work for youth organisations, as well as for state and public bodies.

The United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta share a common approach that is mainly focused on youth and community work. The United Kingdom (England and Wales) has 36 universities and higher education colleges and institutions in England and Wales that provide 57 courses at degree, graduate diploma and master's level. While most of these courses are at primary degree level and focus on youth and community work/development, youth ministry and practical theology are also noticeable features of provision.

In Ireland, three universities and four institutes of technology provide youth/community and youth work courses to primary degree level while one university provides a postgraduate course at master's degree level. Malta provides both a primary degree and master's degree course as well as a course in youth ministry that entitles the bearer to a youth worker warrant. Estonia provides three graduate diplomas in applied higher education in two universities, two bachelor-level courses that focus specifically on youth work and leisure-time management respectively and a master's degree course that focuses on youth work management. Finland provides eight degree-level courses in civic activities and youth work and there is also an emphasis on research and social equality.

The blurring of lines between youth work and other areas complicates the process of identifying formal and accredited educational and training paths for youth workers. This overlapping between the role of youth workers and others working with young people is a common and recurring feature of the youth field (Kovacic 2017). While this may have less significance for individual countries, it does impact on any attempt at formulating a "European" approach to identifying education and training paths.

Germany, for instance, has a number of degree-level courses in social work with a focus on "youth work", "child/youth work", and "youth in theory and practice of social work". Courses in social pedagogy and social work in both Germany and Austria are paths into youth work as they are in the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.



The Flemish Community of Belgium has degree-level courses in “social cultural work” and “social work and social pedagogy”, while France has a degree-level course entitled the *Licence professionnelle “Métiers de l’animation sociale, socio-éducative et socio-culturelle”*, in five universities, roughly meaning profession of social, socio-educational and socio-cultural animation. Luxembourg has a degree course in educational and social sciences that is also being offered on a part-time basis from 2017.

The Netherlands also provides degree-level courses in “cultural and community education” and “social and pedagogical care” while Latvia has two master’s degree courses in “career counsellor and youth affairs specialist”. Iceland provides degree courses in “leisure studies and social education” and Bulgaria provides a master’s degree course in “youth activities and sport”, both of which can also be done through distance learning. Bulgaria also provides degree-level courses in non-formal learning.

There are also courses in related areas associated with youth work or encompassing youth work. For example, in Germany the professional profile of a youth worker mainly requires studying social work, social pedagogy, pedagogy, psychology and therapeutic education at universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen/Hochschulen*) or universities (*Universitäten*) or completing vocational training as an educator/child care worker (*Erzieher/Erzieherin*). The University of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschule*) at Potsdam (Germany) offers a European master’s degree course in childhood studies and children’s rights. The University of Applied Sciences in Kempten (Germany) has a specialised programme in youth work that combines both study and work placement, while a number of faith-based universities of applied sciences in Germany also provide specialised programmes that focus on religious pedagogy and youth work.

The only formal course offered in Greece is a master’s degree course in European youth policies and culture at the University of Macedonia.

Some countries are initiating new more specialised programmes. The University of Applied Science (*Hochschule*) in Koblenz (Germany) is further developing its existing bachelor’s degree in education (*Bildung und Erziehung*) by adding a course with a focus on youth work, while Romania has initiated a postgraduate certificate in management of youth educational resources.

In two countries surveyed, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the situation as regards the formal education of youth workers has regressed, though there now appear to be measures underway to address the issue. In Serbia, a primary degree and master's degree course in community youth work operated for only one year, 2008/09. A number of part-time courses in leadership and development youth work, operated in conjunction with Jonkoping University in Sweden, were provided over the period 2001-07. In Montenegro, 250 youth workers gained university degrees between 2002 and 2007 under the Jonkoping University initiative. Similarly, 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.

Most degree- and postgraduate-level courses are delivered and accredited for the most part by universities or, in some instances, higher education institutions, such as the institutes of technology in Ireland. In a number of countries – Finland, Germany and the Netherlands – the courses tend to be offered by universities for applied sciences.

#### *Vocational and further education and training courses*

In terms of vocational and further education and training below degree level (Table 5 in the appendices<sup>10</sup>), the level of course provision is both varied and wide-ranging and often tailored to meet specific needs.

The United Kingdom (England and Wales) has comprehensive provision at pre-professional level for youth support workers and there is a clear education path for youth workers from certificate level to master's degree and postgraduate level. France provides diplomas (*Carrières sociales option animation sociale et socio-culturelle*) in 14 University Institutes of Technology (*Instituts Universitaires de Technologie*). Certificates of professional aptitude are also accredited by the relevant ministry, with a focus on youth, non-formal learning and sport. National diplomas, outside higher education, are awarded by the state (*diplômes Jeunesse et sports*), but the training is mainly provided by third sector organisations (*associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire*).

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

Finland provides a vocational (upper secondary) qualification – that can also be acquired as a competence-based qualification – in youth and leisure instruction (120 study weeks) that enables graduates to work as youth and leisure instructors. Portugal provides training for youth “technicians” at Level 4 in some 17 accredited institutions. Norway has a four-year course for training child and youth workers (*Barne- og ungdomsarbeiderfag*) comprising two years in upper secondary schools and two years in apprenticeship, while Sweden has a two-year course for “recreation leader” (*Fritidsledarutbildning*), which is provided by the Swedish folk high schools, and Belarus has a part-time diploma course for “specialists in youth work”. The University of Rijeka and Institute for Social Research in Zagreb commenced a certificate course on “youth in contemporary society” in 2018. In Montenegro, vocational education for Youth Activists (leaders) has been accredited and a six-month course comprising three months’ education and three months’ practical placement has commenced.

Luxembourg provides a three-year course, Educator (*Diplôme d’état d’éducateur*), while the Netherlands provides vocational training for “pedagogical staff member in youth care” and “socio-cultural worker”.

In Germany training can be undertaken in vocational schools (*Fachschulen, Fachakademien, Berufsfachschulen, Berufskollegs*) for educator/child care worker (*Erzieher/Erzieherin*) to diploma level and some faith-based vocational training is also available.

The Russian Federation has a wide variety of training courses and internship opportunities for youth workers that include retraining courses for non-specialists in the youth field and courses for extra qualifications for specialists in the youth field that are provided by universities and certified vocational training organisations. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey provides training for youth leaders and youth and sports experts.

In terms of vocational training, the focus appears to be on the youth work practice, as in the case of both the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as on particular activities such as leisure and culture, as is the case in Finland and Sweden. In the Russian Federation the focus appears to be on retraining and up-skilling. Overall course provision at vocational and further education level is uneven across the countries surveyed, with no clear connection, except in the case of the United Kingdom, France, Finland and the Russian Federation, between vocational training and degree-level courses in youth work.

When compared with the third level sector, provision and accreditation in vocational education and training tends to be more diverse. In France, the relevant ministry plays a major role. In the Netherlands, Portugal and the Russian Federation, vocational training centres or institutions are to the fore, while in Norway the upper second level has a role to play. Romania is one of the few instances where private sector provision is referred to.

### **Non-formal education and training**

#### **Provision, funding and accreditation**

In contrast with the formal education sector, in all but two of the countries surveyed<sup>11</sup> there is some level of non-formal education and training for youth workers (Table 6 in the appendices<sup>12</sup>). In general, the education and training provided can be identified and defined in three contexts:

- provided by state-supported bodies or institutions;
- provided by the voluntary youth sector;
- provided by European support programmes.

The state, either centrally, regionally or locally, and through public bodies or institutions, plays a significant role in a number of countries – Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Germany, Malta and Ukraine. In some countries, such as Austria and Germany, the regions play an important role; in others, such as Finland and Norway, local municipalities are significant. In Malta and Luxembourg state or public institutions play a defining role. In Sweden it is local government together with civil society that play a defining role in funding non-formal education and training of youth workers.

What is perhaps striking from the survey is the extent of the role played by the voluntary youth sector in the provision of non-formal education and training. 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.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>. For the data analysis, sub-degree level courses in France and the Russian Federation have been categorised as vocational rather than non-formal education and training.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

<sup>13</sup>. Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

Another feature is the role that Europe plays in terms of both funding and accreditation.

Some of the countries surveyed present particular challenges in accessing data and information on non-formal education and training. In the case of the United Kingdom (England), it is the sheer size and diversity of provision; in others, such as the Netherlands, Norway and Finland, it is the decentralised nature of much youth work and the “bottom-up” approach adopted. All of these countries have an active and well-supported youth work sector but, because of the factors outlined, much of youth work may be less visible with regard to the availability of information and data. Similarly, difficulties in accessing relevant information and data on youth NGOs can also mean that much of the work they do remains under the radar.

In those countries where the state plays a defining role in terms of provision, funding and recognition, some significant features and variations emerge from the survey. In both Austria and Germany, the role of the regions is paramount. In Austria, training institutes run by the federal regions – such as the WienXtra-institut für freizeitpädagogik in Vienna, Akzente in Salzburg, and in Upper Austria – offer basic and further courses for youth workers, sometimes in co-operation with tertiary education institutions. In Germany, a vast number of courses for specialists in child and youth services are provided by regional youth offices, socio-pedagogical further education institutions, youth organisations and associations and there were over 32 000 Juleica (national standardised card for voluntary youth workers) card holders in 2016.

The Youth Work Foundation in Liechtenstein and the National Youth Service in Luxembourg provide courses on an annual basis that are obligatory for professional youth workers. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Media issues youth worker certificates after completion of an approved training programme, the Kadervorming. In the Czech Republic, the National Institute for Further Education provides courses annually for youth workers. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) provides training courses annually for youth workers, in collaboration with different university colleges. A National Education Programme “Youth Worker” is provided at both national and regional level in Ukraine; while in Malta, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, the national youth agency, is the main provider of training. In Ireland, while the state is the main funder, the voluntary youth sector is the primary provider.

In addition to the central role of the state and the voluntary youth sector, European and other support is also in evidence. EU funding (Erasmus+, European Social Fund) and consequent accreditation (Europass, Youthpass) are seen in a number of countries, including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania and Malta. In Ukraine, financial support for training is provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In Armenia, the central state’s role is supported in terms of both provision and funding by the Kasa Foundation, a Swiss humanitarian foundation, while civil society organisations (CSOs) in Sweden train their voluntary leaders and the Fritidsforum (an association for recreation centres and youth clubs) offers training to youth leaders in open recreational/leisure activities. In Austria, fees are reimbursed on course completion, while in the Flemish Community of Belgium certain municipalities refund part of the participation fee.

In most instances, accreditation is provided by the state, or public bodies or institutions, and incorporated into the national qualifications framework, as in Austria and Germany and on occasion, as in Sweden, where courses provided in collaboration with university colleges can sometimes result in university credits.

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 are indicated, while in Portugal reference is made to youth associations. In Italy, third sector organisations, including faith-based and political organisations, 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.

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 Russia 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.

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 survey responses 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.

### Methods, themes and competences

As is evident from Table 7 in the appendices<sup>14</sup>, the settings, methods and tools employed in non-formal education and training, the themes/topics focused on and the competences promoted are both wide-ranging and diverse. Settings, methods and tools employed include courses, seminars, projects, exchanges, peer learning, group work, networks, exchange of good practices and conferences.

The themes and topics addressed are equally wide-ranging and diverse and 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.

The competences that such training seeks to develop are primarily personal, interpersonal and group related and include leadership, empathy, communication skills and intercultural skills as well as organisational and managerial skills.

While in some of the countries surveyed there does not appear to be a seamless connection

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<sup>14</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

between methods employed, themes addressed and competences promoted, and their obvious relevance for youth workers, this is not the case in others. In some countries, the focus appears to be less on specific methods, themes and competences and more on developing effective and coherent youth work practice. In the United Kingdom (England), “Youth work training seeks to combine learning around theory and practice. Introductory level training tends to be more focused on basic principles of youth work and reflective practice whereas higher levels introduce managerial skills and knowledge”, while the aim in Malta is “Continuous professional development of youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers to increase and strengthen their understanding and capacity to implement different youth work methodologies, approaches and practices.”

In other countries, where the state, either centrally, regionally or locally, or through public bodies or institutions, is involved, then the structures for connecting methods, themes and competences appear more coherent.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium for instance, the Kadervorming effectively sets the themes and topics while the Flemish Government has defined the competences to be achieved. In the Czech Republic, standardised themes and related competences are in place under the National Institute for Further Education. Estonia also has a structured process involving integrated methods and themes that aim to achieve competences as defined by the national occupational standards for youth workers.

In some other countries, particularly those where the voluntary youth sector is to the fore, European support programmes and initiatives undertaken by voluntary organisations themselves provide the necessary structures. In Cyprus and Romania, Erasmus+ provides the necessary structures in terms of methods, themes and competences; in Serbia, NAPOR has developed a vocational-based programme for the training of youth workers that sets out specific topics and their related competences.

## **Conclusions**

When considering formal and accredited education paths for youth workers across the countries surveyed, a number of overriding issues, and as a result challenges, emerge.

The relatively small number of courses available in formal education and vocational training in youth work, except in the case of a minority of the countries surveyed, and the



disconnect between the two, may be an impediment for those seeking employment or a career in the field. This is the case for both paid youth workers and for those voluntary youth workers who wish to pursue employment or a career in youth work.

Limited formal education in youth work also has implications for the recognition of youth work as a profession. While only a minority of the countries surveyed appear to meet the requirements for professional recognition, lack of professional status may be a broader long-term issue for youth work. The European Union's Directive<sup>15</sup> on regulated professions, which also includes European Economic Area countries and Switzerland, does not include a single entry on youth work – the minimum qualification requirement is generally a three- to four-year post-second level diploma. Conversely, teaching has 161 entries, covering all levels from kindergarten to university, while social work has 17 entries. Lack of parity of qualification and professional recognition with those working in related fields, such as teaching and social work, may result in lack of professional parity, poor pay, lack of pay parity and job security.

The issue of providing adequate formal and accredited education and training paths for youth workers is not only a “youth work” issue, but a broader education issue dependent on the policies, provision and priorities of individual countries.

The blurring of lines between youth work and other related fields is a complicating factor as it also tends to blur education/training and career paths. The extent to which qualifications in related areas such as social work and social pedagogy render people with such qualifications as “qualified” to meet the requirements of youth work as defined by the Council of Europe<sup>16</sup> is another matter. The nomenclature associated with youth work – social worker, youth specialist, pedagogical worker, leisure-time based educator, *animateur*, *éducateur*, *animatore socio-educativo*, youth technician, youth affairs specialist – further complicates the issue.

Such related fields as education, social work and social pedagogy appear, in general, to have clearer education and career paths than youth workers and greater professional

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<sup>15</sup>. Directive 2005/36/EC.

<sup>16</sup>. Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work.

Available at [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680717e78), accessed 25 May 2018.

recognition. When social workers do youth work, they retain their professional status as social workers. To what extent, on the other hand, are youth workers accorded the same professional recognition and rewards when they do social work? The blurring of lines between youth work and other related fields may not necessarily mean a two-way street in terms of professional recognition.

To what extent the various terms used in youth work, as regards both nomenclature and qualifications, could be further clarified and streamlined for policy purposes is a task that may be easy or complex depending on the situation in individual countries. It may be the case that nomenclature and qualifications are less important than the type of work done and where it is done. However, if “youth workers” could be identified, regardless of the nomenclature, in countries as well as what education and training renders them “qualified” as youth workers, it might help bring greater clarity in understanding the diversity of education and career paths for youth workers across Europe.

Non-formal education and training across the countries surveyed is wide-ranging, multi-layered, diverse and uneven and our data on, and knowledge of it, are still very limited. Given these factors, overarching structures that ensure some level of provision, funding and accreditation and that align methods, themes and competences would appear desirable.

The survey indicates that there are three main providers of these overarching structures: the state, either centrally, regionally or locally, through public funded bodies or institutions; European support programmes; and the voluntary youth sector itself. In some countries, one or more of these may be the main players, their capacities may not always be proportionate, but they can all be mutually supportive. How to further strengthen and co-ordinate these capacities will largely determine the efficacy and potential of non-formal education and training.

While sources of funding, other than those of individual countries and Europe, are indicated on occasion, as for instance the role of educational foundations in the United Kingdom (England) and Armenia, the private or corporate sector – a possible source of additional funding for NGOs – appears to be largely untapped. There are also a number of innovative practices identified. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, Oscar is an online portfolio to

recognise the competences of young volunteers, while Certificat,<sup>17</sup> an online tool in Luxembourg, gives non-profit organisations the opportunity to award their participants a certificate of competences. Apart from these and a number of other initiatives, there appears to be little evidence of innovative practices, particularly in the field of e-learning and new media.

Apart from European support programmes, there is also little evidence of bilateral partnerships between countries with developed systems of youth work and those with less developed systems. Such bilateral initiatives as Jonkoping University's support for the development of formal education in youth work in Western Balkan countries in the first decade of the century do not appear to have been widely followed.

What also emerges from the survey is a centre/north/west and south/east divide in Europe as regards the provision of both formal and non-formal education and training. Countries in central, northern and western Europe have, for the most part, identifiable paths for the education and training of youth workers and the state plays a central role in terms of provision and/or funding, regardless of how youth work is perceived and regulated and at what level it operates and is funded by individual countries. In most countries in southern and eastern Europe, with the exception of Malta, Turkey and the Russian Federation, the voluntary youth sector largely bears the burden of provision, while Europe largely bears the burden of funding. The state is not entirely absent, but its role appears only intermittent and in some instances peripheral.

This divide has important policy implications, not only for education and training paths for youth workers but for youth work itself. A single all-embracing policy approach at European level may not be enough. The policy issues in those countries where youth work is well established may not necessarily be the same as those in countries where youth work is still being developed. European youth work policy and its implementation may also need to take account of and address these differences.

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://certificat.anelo.lu/about>, accessed 25 May 2018.

## **Quality and competences (Question 5)**

The quality of the work delivered as well as the professional competences of its representatives play a crucial role not only for the establishment of a profession, but also for its recognition and appreciation by society in general. In view of this, it is important to explore these aspects of the profession of youth worker to draw up a clear picture of the level of its development across Europe. This section aims to explore the regulation of youth work in terms of quality assurance and competency requirements for youth workers in different European countries, and to arrive at some conclusions on the competences needed by youth workers and to what extent they reflect and correspond with competences at European level, such as those in the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio.

### **Quality assurance of youth work**

Respondents from 18 of the 41 countries surveyed mention some kind of quality assurance for youth work in their countries (Table 8 in the appendices<sup>18</sup>). In 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)), the quality assurance framework is supported by documents at national level; in one (Iceland), it is organised at local or municipal level; and in four others (Belarus, Finland, Liechtenstein and Sweden) it is mainly organised as internal quality control techniques within the organisations delivering youth work or within a network of such organisations. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, the national quality assurance frameworks for youth work are currently being developed by the ministries in charge of youth policy.

Before proceeding to the analysis, it should be noted that the majority of the examples provided in the questionnaires could not be defined as frameworks as such, but rather as different approaches and methods of assuring quality in youth work. The information gathered is valuable as it provides different perspectives on youth work regulation in the countries surveyed. However, the divergence between the question asked and the variety of responses received might be due to the lack of developed quality assurance frameworks or systems in some of the countries surveyed, or it might reflect the need for a greater understanding of what “quality frameworks/systems” actually are.

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<sup>18</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

Another important point to note is that the existence of some method of quality assurance in a particular country does not always mean that it is necessary or compulsory for youth workers to comply with it. For instance, while the accreditation of training courses for youth workers is compulsory for all training providers in France, the “aufZAQ” certification (in Austria and in the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano – South Tyrol) is voluntary and training organisations can apply for it. The same applies when quality assurance is included in the conditions for financial support for youth organisations (by the government or by municipalities) – only those organisations that apply for such funding are required to implement the necessary quality assurance provisions.

Approaches to quality assurance frameworks/techniques vary widely, from national quality marks or occupational standards, through certification of training providers, to evaluation of youth organisations.

#### *Certification of courses/course providers for youth workers*

Examples of certification for youth workers include:

- “aufZAQ”, a certification of training courses for people active in youth work. It is provided 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. It has been certifying the quality of trainings since 2003 and has thus been contributing actively to the recognition of non-formal education in the field of youth work. The certification procedure takes place as follows: in order to certify a training course, the applicant submits the curriculum of the training course to the aufZAQ Office. If the submission fulfils all formal criteria, the aufZAQ Advisory Board assigns an independent expert from the relevant pedagogical field to examine the quality of the training course on the basis of the submitted curriculum. If considered necessary, the expert can demand additional information and/or amendments of the curriculum. Based on the expert’s report, the aufZAQ Advisory Board decides on the certification of the submitted training course. To assure continuity of quality, training providers commit themselves to sending a report to the aufZAQ Office for each conducted training cycle. In addition, any adaptations to the curriculum have to be reported to aufZAQ.

In this case, the aufZAQ Advisory Board decides if the certification remains valid or if the provider has to apply for the certification anew;<sup>19</sup>

- in France and the French Community of Belgium, organisations providing courses for youth workers should have an accreditation by the responsible institution (the Youth Service in the French Community of Belgium) or ministry (the Ministry of Vocational Training and the Ministry of National Education in France);
- Across the whole of Ireland, the North/South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) provides for the professional endorsement of youth work programmes. NSETS works to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and training of youth workers through an endorsement process based on a rigorous assessment of all aspects of programme content and delivery.

### Evaluation of youth workers

Examples of evaluation for youth workers include:

- the Youth Decree of the German-speaking Community of Belgium makes provision for a compulsory analysis of the work of youth workers every five years (social space analysis for professional youth workers and a SWOT analysis – focusing on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats – for volunteer youth workers) and, based on the analysis, a concept covering their work for the next five years. In addition to this, every six months, they have to explain their youth work practice to a monitoring committee consisting of staff members of the government, the ministry, the municipality and the associations of youth organisations;
- in Finland, some organisations delivering youth work have their own internal quality assurance frameworks. Additionally, peer evaluation is also conducted and it “provides not only evaluative information but also a possibility for mutual understanding and learning” (Nöjd and Siurala 2015: 22).

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19. See [www.aufzaq.at/english](http://www.aufzaq.at/english), accessed 26 may 2018.

### Evaluation of youth organisations

Examples of evaluation for youth organisations include:

- the title “NGO recognised by the Ministry for providing quality youth work” in the Czech Republic can be awarded to those youth organisations that meet 15 requirements concerning the organisation itself, its activities and professional staff (a minimum of 60% of educational staff must have a certificate for accredited training courses). The title is awarded for a four-year period and holds certain benefits, such as the guarantee of getting annual financial support from the government for long-term youth work projects, a lesser administrative burden when applying for funding, or the opportunity to present their activities on the ministerial web page;
- in Liechtenstein, as a measure of quality assurance, the annual reports and financial statements of the Youth Work Foundation are submitted to the board of trustees and the municipalities;
- in Iceland, Reykjavik municipality has guidelines for quality youth work in after-school programmes for children and youth clubs for teenagers.

### National standard documents

National standards can vary in nature (quality frameworks or occupational/educational standards), scope (defining youth work as a whole, or just some of its areas), and origin (some are developed by the respective ministries, others by youth work centres/associations):

- the Estonian Youth Work Centre has developed an occupational standard for youth workers, as well as a quality framework to assess youth work at municipal level;
- in the Russian Federation, there is an educational standard for bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes in the Organisation of Youth Work (approved by the Ministry of Education and Science), defining how specialists in youth work should gain a degree in this speciality. In addition, a professional standard for youth workers is being discussed;
- in Germany, quality assurance catalogues for different areas of youth work, such as youth information, are in place and include the Eurodesk Germany Quality Catalogue

and the National Quality Standards to qualify for Juleica (the Jugendleiter/-in Card for youth leaders, a national standardised card for voluntary youth workers);

- Ireland has adopted the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF) (2010) and the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups (2013), which focus on the quality of youth work provision;
- Luxembourg has a Quality Framework for Institutions Providing Non-formal Learning Opportunities (e.g. regional and local youth centres), which defines specific objectives and outcomes to be evaluated on a regular basis. It was introduced by the revised 2008 Youth Law, which was adopted in 2016;
- the Serbian National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) has introduced a national quality assurance framework;
- the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Turkey has issued Directives on Procedures and Principles for Youth Leaders' and Sports Experts' Training, Development and Working;
- the United Kingdom (England and Wales) has developed Quality Marks for Youth Workers.

### Funding requirements

Funding requirements include:

- in Slovakia, the quality of organisation and work with youth is a criteria in applying for government funding;
- all youth organisations financially supported by the Flemish Community of Belgium must submit an annual progress report that includes a financial report and an activity report;
- ( Decree from 20 January 2012 on a Revised Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan).

### Combination of methods

Some countries rely on a combination of methods:

- in Belarus, quality assurance for youth workers is determined by employment agreements between employers and youth workers as well as by local job regulations documents; in Sweden, a common training plan/curriculum is followed



by all folk high schools providing a two-year study programme (*fritidsledarutbildning*), leading to a diploma in leading leisure-time activities. Since 2005, there has been a network in place for youth work, “Quality and competence in co-operation, KEKS” (*Kvalitet och kompetens i samverkan, KEKS*), which is built on common goals and a common system of quality assurance. The network has developed a quality system that is used by all members in order to advance youth work, through benchmarking, peer learning, exchange of best practices and other forms of co-operation within KEKS.

The variety of methods for ensuring the quality of youth work listed above leads to the conclusion that thus far, there is no universal approach to this matter across Europe.

### **Competences of youth workers**

While quality assurance standards appear to exist in only 18 of the countries surveyed, the process of defining the competences needed by youth workers is at the development stage in another 20 of the countries surveyed (Austria, Belarus, the French Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England and Wales)). These countries have either developed a competency-based framework or have described the competences needed for youth workers.

In two other countries (Azerbaijan and Georgia), such competency-based frameworks are in the process of being drafted, and in the German-speaking Community of Belgium a competency descriptor is expected to be completed in 2018. In Bulgaria, a set of competences for youth workers has been suggested by the National Youth Forum, but has still not been validated by any official or legislative document.

Competency-based frameworks are regulated on a national level in most of the countries surveyed, except Italy and Liechtenstein. In Italy, the competences are defined at regional level – each of the regions has its own repertory of professions, with their own competency descriptors. However, as in Italy, the youth work profession is still not defined by law; other professions, such as educators and social/cultural animators, can deliver youth work. In Liechtenstein, the competences youth workers require (as well as the quality of the youth

work delivered) are defined by agreements between the Youth Work Association and the municipalities. The remaining countries define the competences at a national level through occupational standards (Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, the United Kingdom (England and Wales)), a catalogue of professions (Portugal), a passport of competences (Serbia) or educational standards (the Russian Federation and Belarus).

It is possible to observe two approaches to the sets of competences needed by youth workers. The first focuses on the way competences are acquired by setting educational standards for professional education and training at degree level (Ireland, the Russian Federation) or the specific content of training programmes (France, the French Community of Belgium, Serbia, Slovenia), or by certifying the courses for youth workers (Austria). The second focuses on the way competences are performed by defining professional/occupational/quality standards (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom (England and Wales)), or by setting requirements for the results of youth work in a law (like in Poland, where the 2011 law on supporting family and the foster care system defines a very general criteria for the staff of day care centres), or through other methods (as in Liechtenstein, where the competences of youth workers are defined in agreements between the municipalities and the Youth Work Foundation).

As is apparent from the examples given, a great variety of responses to this aspect of the questionnaire was received. Not all responses accorded with standard definitions of competences. In addition, the understanding of “competence” tends to vary from country to country and some of the competences included in responses were more akin to “skills”. However, the information collected is of great value in understanding the knowledge/skills/abilities/competences youth workers need to ensure the quality and impact of their work with young people.

### **The most common competences and skills in ten countries surveyed<sup>20</sup>**

In addition to defining the competences needed by youth workers, another interesting detail to explore is the particular set of competences required for youth workers as professionals. Tables 9 and 10 in the appendices<sup>21</sup> provide samples of the competence profiles of youth workers in 10 countries.

From the examples provided it is evident that some of the “competences” listed as such in national standards differ from the Council of Europe definition, which in youth work defines competence as having three interlinked dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values.<sup>22</sup>

In order to explore the most common competences/skills for youth workers, they were classified into several groups and then, tracing the (occupational and educational) standards provided, ranked in accordance with how frequently they were mentioned. Competences with frequency four and higher were included in Figure 1.

From the analysis of the information in the table, it is possible to highlight the most common groups of competences and skills of youth workers in the ten countries surveyed:

1. communication/presentation/public relations (PR) skills: this includes the skills needed to successfully communicate not only with young people, but also with various stakeholders within or outside the organisation, such as colleagues, partner and funding organisations, and policy makers;
2. organisational skills/project management: in nine countries, youth workers are required to organise events or information campaigns for youth, or organise and implement their own projects within the organisation;
3. facilitating learning: in seven countries, youth workers play an important role in the learning experiences of the young people they work with. Some of the standards (e.g. in Serbia) require youth workers to organise and deliver trainings for young people;

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<sup>20</sup> The list of competences observed are from national documents from the following countries: Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

<sup>22</sup> See [www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-competence](http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-competence), accessed 26 May 2018.

4. ability to analyse youth (group) needs: in seven countries, youth workers are expected to analyse correctly the (social, educational) needs of young people/youth groups in order to organise and deliver relevant youth programmes and activities;
5. problem solving/conflict management: this is considered important for youth work with young people with fewer opportunities, or simply to solve problems in teams;
6. information management: in some countries, an important task of the youth worker is providing information about different opportunities for young people;
7. facilitating the personal development of young people: this includes not only fostering learning, but also helping young people to develop self-esteem and choose career options;
8. encouraging the participation/socialisation/active citizenship of young people;
9. leadership/ability to motivate young people;
10. economic/financial skills: this refers to management of resources (as an element of project management), but also understanding the economic processes in the country (Russia and Belarus);
11. risk assessment/management;
12. teamwork: this skill has two dimensions – the ability to work together with colleagues and peers, but also to co-operate with young people or mentor/co-ordinate youth teams;
13. knowledge of legislation: this refers to the legislative environment where youth work takes place (e.g. special rules/permissions for work with some youth groups), or to the legislative framework of national youth policies and the need to involve young people in the policy-making process;
14. intercultural skills: these skills are useful not only in the context of international youth projects, but also in youth work in multinational countries (e. g. the Russian Federation);
15. computer literacy: in some countries there are specific requirements for a level of computer literacy of youth workers (Estonia);
16. social skills (understand/analyse/evaluate/interact with society): while it is difficult to define these under one skill, in five of the countries surveyed, youth workers are expected to analyse and predict social processes (Belarus), know the principles of a citizenship-based society (Estonia), or know “the historical development of society in

order to help form a civic attitude” and have “the ability to interact with various social structures and institutions of the society on the creation and implementation of youth policy” (the Russian Federation);

17. administration/document processing: in four countries, youth workers have particular administrative functions;
18. ability to create and maintain purposeful/trusting relationships with young people;
19. evaluation skills: youth workers are expected to conduct evaluations that could cover learning methods or processes (Austria), current youth policies (Belarus) or activities (UK);
20. an awareness of the ethics of youth work or ethical behaviour is required by three countries (Estonia, Serbia and the UK).

It is interesting to note that the first two, and the most mentioned groups of competences/skills in the list above, are generic competences for many professions. The seven groups of competences needed particularly for working with young people in the list are 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 18 and 20.

When comparing the list above with the Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio<sup>23</sup> it becomes apparent that most of the competences included in the portfolio are to some extent mentioned in the national documents of the countries surveyed. What is interesting is that the competences suggested at European level that are connected with facilitating/encouraging learning (function 2) and the personal development of young people (function 3), intercultural skills (function 4) and project management (function 8) are fully reflected at a national level by the 10 countries surveyed. The competences listed in the first<sup>24</sup> and fifth<sup>25</sup> groups of the portfolio are covered to a lesser extent (e.g. only the competences 1.3 “Involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of youth work using participatory methods, as suitable”, 1.4 “Relate to young people as equals” and 5.4 “Stay up-to-date on the latest youth research on the situation and needs of the young people” are partially referred to in the 10 countries surveyed). And finally, the competences

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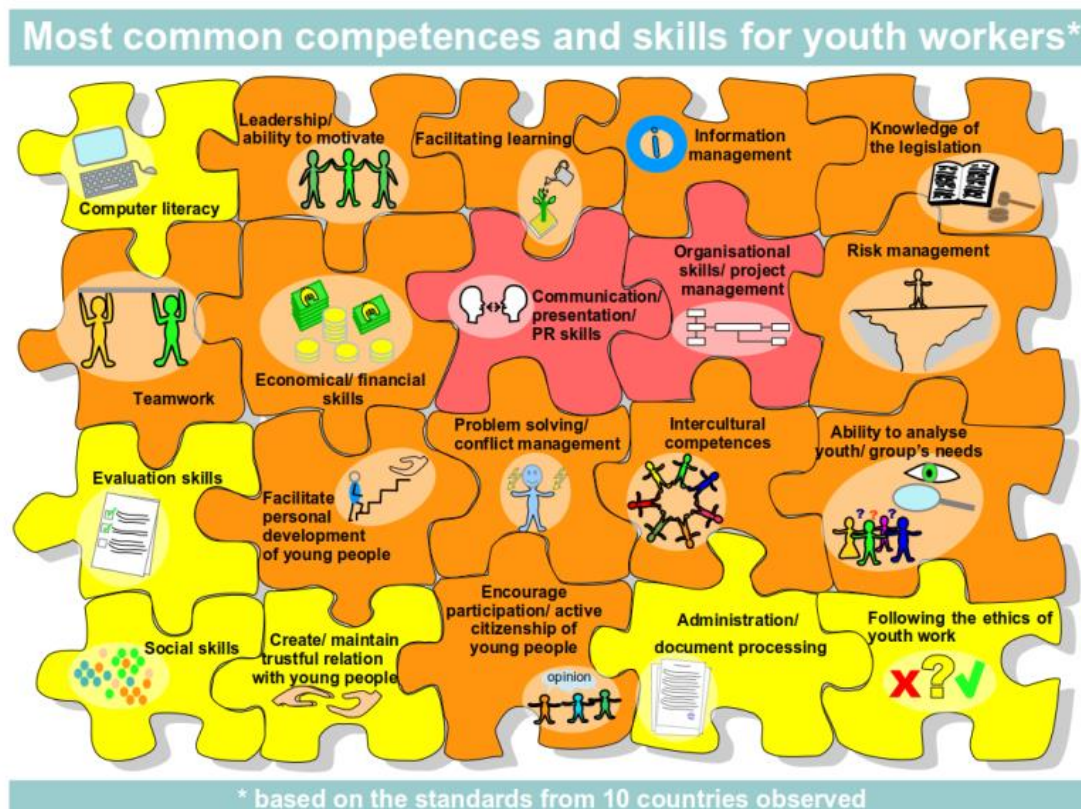
<sup>23</sup> . See [www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-competence](http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-competence), accessed 28 May 2018.

<sup>24</sup> . Function 1: Address the needs and aspirations of young people

<sup>25</sup> . Function 5. Actively practise evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted

from the sixth<sup>26</sup> and the seventh<sup>27</sup> group of the portfolio are covered on a very small scale in the ten countries surveyed.

**Figure 1: Most common competences based on a ten-country analysis**



### Conclusion

Less than half of the countries surveyed have some form of quality assurance for youth work in place or a way of defining the competences needed by youth workers. While there is a wide range of approaches to quality assurance in existence, they do not all meet accepted or standard concepts of quality assurance. Nonetheless, this variety is evidence of interest and experimentation in providing quality youth work for young people, and the need for youth workers to have the necessary competences. Competences for youth workers emerge from the survey as being largely evident at national level and provide a platform for future European co-operation in the field, particularly through exchange of good practices and mutual support among all relevant stakeholders.

<sup>26</sup> Function 6. Support collective learning in teams

<sup>27</sup> Function 7. Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies /programmes work better for young people

## **Associations and networking (Question 6)**

This research question was an attempt to understand what structures, through association or networking, exist to represent youth workers, their capacity and their contribution to the professional development of both professional and voluntary youth workers. From the responses to the questionnaires and for the purposes of data analysis, youth workers are considered in both their professional and voluntary capacity.

Table 11 in the appendices<sup>28</sup> shows the distribution of associations per country, including:

associations of youth workers;

associations representing professionals/volunteers providing youth work;

other structures supporting training opportunities for youth workers/providing youth work.

### **Associations of youth workers**

As we can see from Table 11, 15 of the 41 countries surveyed have associations that specifically represent youth workers and the majority of these provide training opportunities. Eleven of the countries surveyed also identify networks of youth organisations and centres. Part of their mission is to provide initiatives to contribute to the development of the field, and to promote career paths and recognition of the work provided by youth work practitioners. The Slovenian National Youth Network MaMa has developed a programme consisting of a number of different training courses for members, covering:

- basic youth worker's skills;
- monitoring youth work;
- evaluation of youth work;
- project management;
- international youth work;
- PR and communication;
- peer-to-peer information;
- the youth worker as mentor and instructor;

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<sup>28</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

- active participation and social inclusion;
- social competences.

Besides providing training opportunities, other important tasks for these organisations include gatherings of youth workers for mutual support; creating conditions for developing professional competences; raising the prestige of their work and improving the social status of youth workers; protection of the rights of youth and community workers, as well as the interests of association members (Belarus); and supporting the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs (Georgia) in its work to create National Professional Standards and Certification Criteria for Youth Workers and to develop Qualifications Courses for Youth Workers.

The majority of the associations listed in Table 11 are NGOs, but in the United Kingdom (England), a trade union organisation with a membership specifically for full-time and part-time youth workers promotes the public service and professional status of youth workers. Most of these associations represent members working locally and regionally in youth work, and they adopt different approaches to promoting the status and future of the youth work profession and its representation in influencing state policies and legislation.

#### **Associations representing professionals/volunteers providing youth work**

From Table 11, we can see that just 4 of the 41 countries surveyed have organisations that represent youth work and develop initiatives to contribute to its further recognition. They are not focused on representing professionals/practitioners in the field, but rather work for the improvement of working conditions, for investment in career development, and recognition of qualifications. In the case of France, for example, the member organisations of the Committee for International Relations and National Associations of Youth and Popular Education (CNAJEP) provide opportunities for *animateurs/educateurs* to participate in training opportunities towards a recognised certificate – the BAFA. Other organisations mentioned in Table 11 may represent other practitioners in the field.

#### **Other structures supporting training opportunities for youth workers or providing youth work**

In some organisations, there is a peer learning culture where education and learning is developed through initiatives that are supported by different programmes (e.g. Erasmus+) with the aim of improving professional competence, enhancing youth work structures and



systems, and benefiting the end users – young people. Other organisations, such as national youth councils, contribute to legislative initiatives and have close contacts with policy makers and institutions in the field. Such organisations, while diverse in nature and often in aim, have an important role to play in not only promoting youth work as a profession but also in providing clearer employment and career prospects for both professional and volunteer youth workers.

### **Employment, career paths and professionalisation (Questions 7, 8, 2)**

The issue of employment, extending to mapping career paths and the professionalisation of youth work, presents a challenge. This is in regard to establishing an accurate picture of the range of opportunities open to those seeking to become youth workers and the possibilities for advancement among those within the profession. As this part of our discussion will reveal, this situation is attributable to various factors, most prominently the lack of recognition that the job category of youth worker receives from national governments (and perhaps other parties, including the public) in some countries, extending to a perceived lack of a visible career path and/or insufficient levels of financial support for those who do enter the profession.

We did not look specifically at the issue of voluntary youth work, since the focus was on employment and professionalisation, other than requesting statistics on the number of voluntary youth workers in each country. We are however aware that moving between voluntary and paid youth work is an actual experience in many regions although due to a lack of pertinent information we were not able to establish, for instance, a comprehensive perspective on how voluntary youth workers move into paid positions. There is also the relationship between youth work and social work to consider. In some countries, a degree of continuity exists between these professions, with individuals passing from social work into youth work, and vice versa. This means that there is a degree of overlap in terms of issues like certification and career pathways, making it difficult to isolate a distinct youth work career trajectory.

### **Youth work as a profession**

Looking at the issue of regulating youth work as a profession, Table 12 in the appendices<sup>29</sup> presents an overview of responses received from the national correspondents. This illustrates the extent to which there is a standard occupational profile for youth work as a profession, a legal/regulatory authority, and a professional register of youth workers. Standard occupational profiles are also represented in Figure 6, and they are the exception rather than the norm.

The other responses indicate a mixed picture in terms of regulation, with many countries lacking regulatory frameworks. This is a situation that can have consequences for the mapping of career pathways since such frameworks would in theory support professionalisation. As such, we have to acknowledge this deficit as a significant factor in the lack of recognition perceived by many youth workers at policy level, an issue explored later in this section. Relatively few countries appear to monitor numbers of professionally registered youth workers in a comprehensive fashion, with only 10 of the countries/regions doing so, limiting what we can establish about the dimensions of the European youth worker population.

### **Youth worker employment**

Further questions examined the more specific issue of youth worker employment. The information collated in Table 13 in the appendices<sup>30</sup> suggests that there is limited documentation due to a lack of recording mechanisms. For example, in only 13 of the national situations reported on were numbers provided on youth workers employed by the state/public sector/NGOs. These totals nevertheless indicate considerable variation: from 576 310 in Germany and 113 396 in France to 100 in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and 25 in Cyprus.<sup>31</sup>

Even taking into account differentials in population size and missing information, this picture suggests a major disparity in the scale of youth worker employment across Europe, with a divide between a small number of core European countries and smaller, perhaps

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

<sup>30</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

<sup>31</sup> The figure for Germany includes all voluntary employees in the pedagogical sector, not just youth workers. The latest report on youth work in Germany shows that there were 29,126 paid youth workers in 2014.

more geographically peripheral, nations. Eleven national correspondents also reported on numbers of youth workers in NGOs/voluntary organisations, again indicating diversity in size of populations, ranging from 170 000 in Austria and 200 000 in France to 80 in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and 25 in Cyprus.

### **Career paths and employment opportunities**

One other issue on this theme relates to career paths and employment opportunities for youth workers. Table 14 in the appendices<sup>32</sup> provides an overview of main employment opportunities, challenges accessing jobs, identifiable career paths, other occupational fields and the existence of impact studies. Many of these careers are quite obvious in regard to their engagement with the youth population, for example, working in:

- youth centres;
- advice provision;
- young people’s health services;
- NGOs;
- the voluntary sector;
- leisure.

Some of these categories are, we might add, quite broad. For example, NGOs working with young people encompass a wide range of areas, including civic and political participation, and various aspects of social inclusion. The voluntary sector is also diverse, and in some countries (e.g. Ireland) fulfils many of the functions that in others are supported by state-supported agencies.

In terms of identifiable careers, national correspondents identify a large range of employment fields, many of which are self-evident, extending to areas such as after-school support. More novel suggestions relate to issues of particular national significance: for example, tourism in Iceland and the Russian Federation or refugee projects in the United Kingdom (Wales). We do not however know from the information provided just how many youth workers are being employed in these areas, the nature of tenure enjoyed, or indeed the means through which jobs are found and career trajectories pursued.

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<sup>32</sup> See <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/related-publication>

That there may be challenges in accessing jobs is clear and we know what some of the main issues are from the information provided. Particularly outstanding is the question of recognition for youth workers as a profession. This was in fact cited in some form or other by 20 respondents.

Other prominent barriers related to working conditions include: instability of tenure, lack of funding, low pay, long hours, off-peak work and a lack of career structure. These are all serious issues that have a detrimental impact on the lives of youth workers and no doubt have a considerable bearing on defining the status of the profession. Societal factors also matter: for instance, austerity in the United Kingdom (Wales) and an aging population in Portugal.

Given what appears to be a negative situation, it was not surprising that few countries were able to identify viable career paths from education and training or out of and into other professions. It does however appear to be the case that in a number of countries, youth workers start in the voluntary sector, then progress towards employment in state agencies or NGOs (this was cited by our Romanian correspondent as an important career path, and may be happening elsewhere). And in considering trajectories, we also need to note the significance of European-level projects in professionalising youth work, with international agencies also offering alternate career paths.

We cannot, however, say that there is no diversity of employment in the youth sector. Important fields identified include health, education and the broad field of civic society organisations. It may therefore be the case that we have to look beyond the core areas of services specifically tailored for young people and consider other occupational fields that engage with youth as one group among many in order to fully appreciate the range of opportunities open to youth workers.

## **Conclusions**

The picture of youth work employment painted by this overview cannot realistically be described as encouraging, at least in regard to working in dedicated services for young people. The career paths revealed are on the whole quite precarious, characterised by poor working conditions and perhaps limited prospects for advancement. Most of these

pathways are also quite familiar, basically involving working for state agencies, NGOs or even private sector organisations that have young people as their client group. As noted above, this extends to areas such as education and health, and also leisure. In terms of originality, linking youth work with tourism provides a surprise although whether this field can sustain the employment of a substantial number of youth workers is debatable. The current state of youth work employment pathways in most European countries seems to be characterised by limited options and limited quality in working conditions, leaving much room for improvement.

# Chapter 5

## **Main findings, emerging trends and conclusions**

This chapter attempts to summarise the main findings and emerging trends resulting from the descriptive data analysis carried out in the preceding chapters. Each of the sections on policy and legislation; formal and non-formal education and training; quality and competences; associations and networking; and employment, career paths and professionalisation are treated sequentially and are preceded by an overarching section on information and data that considers some of the issues resulting from the responses to the questionnaire. Finally, an attempt is made at arriving at some overall conclusions.

### **Information and data**

Access to reliable and up-to-date data and information is a prerequisite if education/training and employment/career paths for youth workers are not only to be identified but also actively promoted and supported. The information and data gaps in the responses to the questionnaire, of which there are many, may, at least in part, be a result not of lack of information and data but the time and capacity to organise and collect it.

However, there are other aspects of information and data collection that are no less challenging. Some of the countries surveyed present particular challenges. In some of the larger countries, there is the sheer size and diversity of provision; in others, the decentralised nature of youth work and the “bottom-up” approach adopted poses problems. Where central government plays a defined role in youth work there tends to be a clearer picture of the nature of youth work and the available support. Where, however, the state’s role is at regional, municipal or local level, the picture is less clear and less information is readily available. Accessing information and data on the voluntary youth sector and NGOs and specific areas such as employment and career options also poses its own challenges. Because of these factors, much of youth work may be under the radar in terms of accessing information and data on a country and Europe-wide basis.

In seeking relevant information and data, responses to the questionnaire tend to suggest that greater clarity is needed not only with respect to the questions asked and of whom, but also with regard to the terms and terminology employed, such as “formal and non-formal

education”, “accredited and non-accredited education”, “quality assurance”, “competences” and “professionalisation”.

### **Policy and legislation**

All 41 countries surveyed have some form of structure or framework in place, either at national or regional level, for youth policy and its implementation. Responsibility for youth policy and its implementation usually rests with the relevant ministry. Generally, “youth” tends not to be regarded as a distinct policy field but is conjoined or associated with other related policy fields. There does, however, appear to be a general lack of dedicated structures specifically for youth work policy itself and its implementation.

All but seven of the countries surveyed have some form of legislative or strategic policy provision for youth, at either national or regional level. This does not mean that there is no legal or policy framework for youth in these countries but rather that responsibility for youth falls under the remit of a related policy field, such as education. It is also notable that much of this legislation is relatively recent, having been formulated in the last 10 years, and in some cases, the process of establishing legislation is ongoing or yet to be finalised.

Only a small minority of countries surveyed provide definitions of “youth work” or “youth worker” as embodied in legislation or national policy documents. Common features in defining “youth work” include an emphasis on non-formal learning and voluntary participation and shared concerns with issues such as quality of life and societal and communal development. Youth work is generally situated outside structures of formal education.

Policy initiatives and developments in youth work are also underway in 21 of the countries surveyed, which would indicate that youth work is undergoing a period of transition in many countries, with changes in laws and forms of recognition for youth workers.

### **Formal and non-formal education and training**

Six of the countries surveyed have degree-level courses specifically in youth work, while 11 others offer courses in related fields that are associated with and provide educational paths into youth work. Vocational and further education and training for youth workers are also provided by 18 countries, while 9 countries provide both degree and vocational courses.

The relatively small number of courses available in formal education and vocational training in youth work, except in a minority of the countries surveyed, and the relative disconnect between the two, may be an impediment for those seeking employment or a career in the field. The issue of providing adequate formal and accredited education and training paths for youth workers is not only a “youth work” issue, but a broader educational issue dependent on the policies, provision and priorities of individual countries.

The blurring of lines and overlap between youth work and other related fields is a complicating factor as it also tends to blur education/training and career paths. In this context, if “youth workers” can be identified, regardless of the nomenclature employed in different countries, and what education and training renders them “qualified” as youth workers, it might help bring greater clarity to understanding the diversity of education and career paths for youth workers across Europe.

In contrast to the formal education sector, in 39 of the countries surveyed there is some level of non-formal education and training for youth workers. In general, the education and training provided can be identified and defined in three contexts: that provided through state-supported bodies or institutions, that provided by the voluntary youth sector, and that provided by European support programmes.

What is perhaps striking about the survey responses is the extent of the role played by the voluntary youth sector in the provision of non-formal education and training. In almost half the countries surveyed, the voluntary youth sector plays a defining role and most of these countries are in either eastern or southern Europe. Another feature is the role that Europe plays in terms of both funding and accreditation of youth work in these countries.

Non-formal education and training across the countries surveyed is wide-ranging, multi-layered, diverse and uneven. Given these factors, overarching structures – provided through state support, the voluntary youth sector or European support programmes – that ensure some level of provision, funding and accreditation and that align methods, themes and competences would appear desirable.

A centre/north/west and south/east divide in Europe as regards the provision of both formal and non-formal education and training is also evident from the survey. Countries in central, northern and eastern Europe have, for the most part, identifiable paths for the



education and training of youth workers. For most of the countries in southern and eastern Europe, the voluntary youth sector largely bears the burden of provision, while Europe largely bears the burden of funding.

### **Quality and competences**

Of the countries surveyed, 18 have some form of quality assurance framework or system in place. In 13 of these, the framework is at national level while in the remaining 5 it is at local or organisational level, while 2 other countries are in the process of developing such frameworks.

The approaches to developing and implementing quality assurance frameworks, systems or standards varies widely across the countries surveyed, from certification of training providers, through evaluation of youth organisations, to national quality marks or occupational standards and include: certification of providers and youth workers, evaluation of youth workers, evaluation of youth organisations, national standards, and funding requirements.

Of the countries surveyed, 20 also have competency-based frameworks or competency descriptors for youth workers. These competency-based frameworks are regulated at a national level in most of the countries surveyed, while in others competences are defined through occupational standards, catalogues of professions or educational standards.

The responses to the questionnaire also tended to conflate quality assurance with other processes such as course certification, evaluation of youth workers and youth organisations, and funding requirements. Similarly, with competences there was a tendency in the responses to conflate them with skills, educational standards and occupational standards. Consequently, a clear and definitive picture of both quality and competences did not emerge from the survey.

The wide variety of approaches and methods employed in developing and implementing quality and competency frameworks, systems and standards across the countries surveyed presents a complex mosaic where innovation and experimentation are a defining feature.

## **Associations and networking**

In 15 of the countries surveyed, associations of youth workers are in existence that specifically represent youth workers and most of these associations also provide training opportunities for youth workers; 11 of the countries surveyed also identify networks of youth organisations and centres. Besides providing training opportunities, other important features of these associations include creating conditions for developing professional competence, raising the profile of youth work and promoting the professional status of youth workers.

In a number of countries surveyed there are other organisations undertaking the role of youth workers' associations, such as umbrella organisations of youth centres, trade or professional unions, and networks of municipalities.

## **Employment, career paths and professionalisation**

In only 13 of the countries surveyed were numbers provided on youth workers employed by the state, public sector or NGOs. These numbers indicate considerable diversity in terms of scale from country to country. Even taking into account differentials in population size, and lack of detailed information, this picture suggests a major disparity in the scale of youth worker employment across Europe. Eleven countries also reported on numbers of youth workers in NGOs/voluntary organisations, again demonstrating diversity in terms of population size. However, the lack of comprehensive data means that we cannot draw conclusions about numbers of youth workers employed across Europe.

In terms of the professional recognition of youth workers, the countries surveyed present a somewhat mixed picture, with many countries lacking regulatory frameworks, a situation that has consequences for the mapping of career pathways. While 20 of the countries surveyed have some form of legal or regulatory authority for youth work, only 10 appear to comprehensively monitor the numbers of professionally registered youth workers.

Looking at career options, a wide range of employment fields have been identified by the countries surveyed, including youth centres, advice and counselling, health services, NGOs, leisure and after- and out-of-school voluntary activities. We do not know, however, from the information provided just how many youth workers are being employed in these various

fields or indeed what the means are through which jobs were accessed and career options pursued.

The lack of identifiable employment and career paths for youth workers can be attributed to a number of factors, most prominently the lack of recognition of the job category of youth worker on the part of governments in some countries, extending to a perceived lack of a visible career path and/or insufficient levels of financial support for those who do enter the profession. It does, however, appear to be the case that in a number of countries, youth workers start in the voluntary sector, then progress towards employment in state agencies or NGOs. European projects in professionalising youth work and international agencies also offer alternate career paths.

There is also an overlap between youth work, social work and other related fields: in some countries, a degree of continuity exists between these, with individuals passing from one to the other and vice versa. This means that there is overlap in terms of issues like certification and career pathways, making it difficult to isolate a distinct youth work career trajectory.

## **Conclusions**

In all the countries surveyed, some form of structure or framework is in place, at either national or regional level, with responsibility for youth policy and its implementation. A large majority of countries also have some form of legislative or strategic provision for youth, at either national or regional level. Almost all the countries surveyed provide some level of non-formal education and training. However, when it comes to the provision of formal education, the existence of some form of quality and/or competency framework or system, and identifiable employment and career paths, less than half of the countries surveyed appear to have some level of capacity.

Some countries appear relatively proactive and strong in some areas, such as policy and legislation, while relatively weak in others, such as provision of formal education. A minority of countries surveyed appear relatively proactive and strong in most categories, while a minority of others appear much less proactive and weak. To what extent the responses to the questionnaire adequately reflect the underlying reality of youth work across Europe is another matter. To what extent do policies, legislation and quality/competency frameworks underpin, promote and support youth workers and youth work practice on the ground? Can

youth workers have realistic employment and career prospects without formal qualifications comparable with other professions? What competences do youth workers need to maximise the social benefits of youth work? Relevant, reliable and regular information and data on youth work could go some way in attempting to answer these questions.

What emerges from the survey is a variegated, complex, on occasion stark, and at times contradictory picture of youth work across Europe. In a minority of countries, with a history of youth work and where it is embedded, education/training and employment pathways appear reasonably clear – career paths perhaps less so – regardless of how youth work is defined and operates. In other countries surveyed, where youth work is not embedded, education/training and employment paths often appear both limited and sparse.

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