



CRE8IVE Project

Output 5 – Policy Paper

Compiled by



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Introduction

Youth work aims to improve the status of youth and to support young people to become active citizens and engage in decisions and actions which affect them and their community. From this perspective youth work is considered as a public good for its contribution towards the construction of civil society. Although youth work has gained greater recognition and visibility today in comparison to the past, there is still much to be done on a number of issues, one of which is the improvement of quality youth work through youth workers training programmes.

Training opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) of youth workers is crucial in ensuring the credibility and professional validity of youth workers and in supporting and sustaining the provision of quality youth work. The importance of training youth workers becomes apparent for two additional reasons. First, to help youth workers acquire the skills and competence to deal with both complex issues and challenging behaviour which are evolving in youth work due to the trends in young people's lives, primarily concerning the unemployment and technology. Second, by definition, youth work entails the processes of teaching and learning as it seeks to support young people personal and social development through formal, non-formal and/or informal learning (European Commission, 2017). From this perspective education and youth work are inherently linked and youth workers can be in need of training to pedagogy.

This policy paper covers various aspects concerning training opportunities for CPD for youth workers and adult education staff in the State Members of the European Union. It presents the policy in perspective regarding youth work and youth workers training at a national level and at EU level. In particular the paper briefly discusses the legal framework and the national strategies of youth work and outlines issues of youth workers training. Finally, the paper presents a set of recommendations towards improving CPD for youth workers.

Project Rational

The rational of the CRE8IVE stands on the principle that youth workers training can have a positive impact on youth work. The importance of training courses for delivering quality youth work is identified in the paper of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention (2015). The paper, which describes the elements of quality youth work highlights the significance of youth workers training:

- Quality youth work needs discussions about the necessary set of competencies and qualifications for youth workers and the development and implementation of related competence models.
- Training is a crucial element to support the development of quality youth work. Therefore strategies, concepts and programmes for the training of youth workers based on an agreed set of competences.
- It is necessary to find ways of recognition of qualifications of youth workers - employed, freelancers or volunteers - through adequate forms of documentation, certification and validation of competencies, which youth workers gained throughout their practice.
- To help get youth work and youth workers' competencies recognised, national strategies on recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning in youth work are required.

The CRE8IVE project recognizes the positive impact of continuous training of youth workers on quality youth work. The project underlines the key role to be played by youth workers and adult education professionals in youth work and seeks to ensure that they can benefit from the provision of essential continuous professional development training. The project acknowledges the fact that for many disadvantaged youth, formal education approaches have failed to deliver the learning outcomes required in today's economy and therefore suggests the use of digital media and creative arts as complementary and/or alternative teaching areas to acquire basic and transversal skills.

Specifically the aim of CRE8IVE is to develop, test and pilot a suite of accredited train-the-trainer materials that introduce youth workers and education staff to the use of digital media, storytelling, drama and music for the development of key competences. To this end, the CRE8IVE train-the-trainer curriculum aims to support the achievement of high quality youth work resulting in some of Europe's most disadvantaged and excluded youth being re-engaged in education and training. In particular, the CRE8TIVE project aims:

- To support innovation in education for youth-at-risk and ensure that they acquire the key competences for active citizenship and personal development;
- To support the re-integration of disadvantaged youth to formal education or employment and their progression as valued members of European society;
- To ensure that youth with non-traditional educational history can benefit from innovative pedagogic interventions.

National Policies in Perspective

Youth Workers Profession

It is difficult to identify clear defining features that are universally associated with youth work professional occupation and status. One of the most striking aspects of youth work, and a key strength, is its diversity. A whole range of activities, methods, settings, actors and objectives fall under the umbrella of youth work, often set up in response to local interests and needs. In the majority of Member States, youth workers as such, are not an official separate recognised profession. However, in many Member States there are a number of approaches to recognising youth work as a distinct career covering a variety of workers in the field. Although in some Member States youth work can be a recognised profession, recognition is not universal and legal requirements are sporadic and are primarily in relation to qualification standards (European Commission, 2015a & 2015c).

Youth workers come from a diverse range of educational and occupational backgrounds usually related to fields of pedagogy, sociology, psychology, social works, etc. According to the policy paper of the European Youth Forum (2014) the profile of the typical youth worker is that of a university educated person, primarily in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the paper notes that youth workers have not always pursued university qualifications, with the aim to become a youth worker.

Legal Framework

The legal framework of each Member State is a decisive factor for the sector of youth work at a national level. Though it is rare that aspects of youth work are not regulated by any legislation at all, there is however a diversity of the legal framework in the Member States. As Figure 1 illustrates, legislation which specifically regulates youth work exists in 13 countries, whilst in 11 others, legislation in areas such as social affairs, welfare and education specify the regulation of particular aspects of youth work. According to the European Commission (2014) report, Cyprus, Greece and Hungary were identified as the three countries not having any legislation covering aspects of youth work. The report discusses that this is largely due to a *'lack of awareness, particularly around the potential added value of youth work, lack of recognition and a lack of tradition in youth work in each of the countries mentioned'*. France and Sweden were the only two countries where aspect of youth work are covered within the social affairs legislation. In United Kingdom and Czech Republic aspects

of youth work were primarily covered by education legislation.

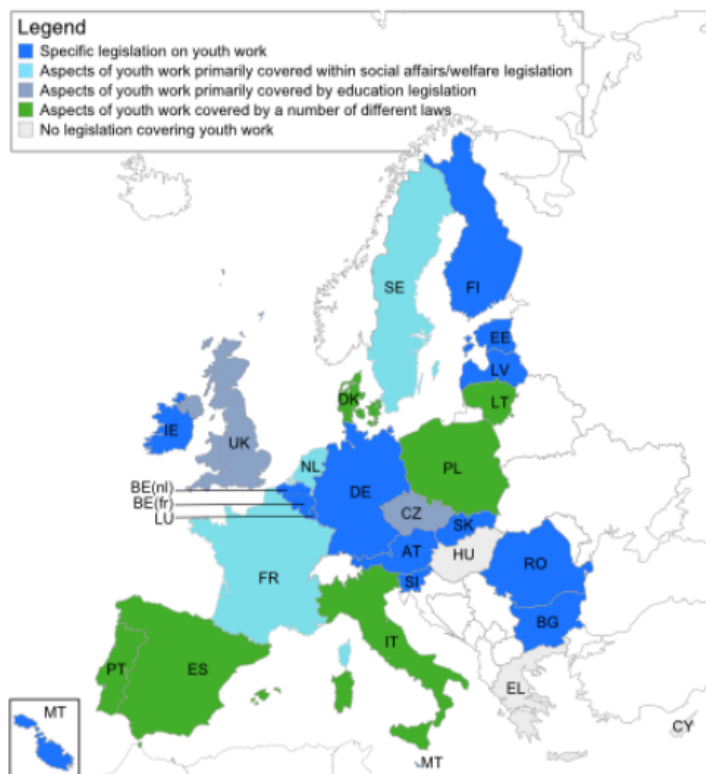


Figure1: Youth Work Legal Context

Source: European Commission, 2014

The legal framework of each Member State sets the frame where youth national policies and strategies are developed. Specifically, under the existing legal frameworks, the most commonly regulated aspects of youth work concern:

- Funding mechanisms- Legislation regulates the necessary funding mechanisms, for allocating the budget for state-provided youth work and/or for the third sector and also define who and what is eligible for public funding
- Definition and recognition - Legislation refer to or define what can be considered to be a youth organisation and/or what can be legally recognised as a provider of youth activities.
- Responsible bodies - Legislation sets out the governing bodies in relation to youth activities. For the majority of EU countries, youth work falls under the authority of ministries responsible for education. The law also includes the requirements of these bodies to implement youth policy, as well as having the responsibility to fund youth organisations

- Requirements and responsibilities - The requirements set out in the laws of several countries range from affirming that the state is required to ensure that youth activities are carried out, to requiring that facilities for extra-curricular activities follow an education programme, or defining the minimum number of staff required for activities.

National Strategies

Examining the political landscape across EU countries there is evidence that young people are a policy priority, and youth work is growing in importance. In the vast majority of countries in Europe there are critical policy developments that affect youth work (European Commission, 2014). In some countries youth policy is at the stage of being developed for the first time, whereas in other countries with longer tradition they are replacing strategies and political commitment to youth. Where progress in youth issues has been slow or has recently been stalled, this is primarily due to the current economic crisis that some member states are facing i.e. Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland (European Youth Forum, 2014).

A number of State Members have developed national youth work strategies or plans whereas, in most countries aspects of youth work are incorporated within the national youth strategy or action plan (European Commission, 2017). Figure 2 shows the cases:

- Where there is an identifiable youth work strategy at national level;
- Where aspects of youth work are incorporated into general national youth strategies;
- Where specific youth work strategies or youth strategies are in development;
- Where there is no evidence of youth work aspects in any strategy document.

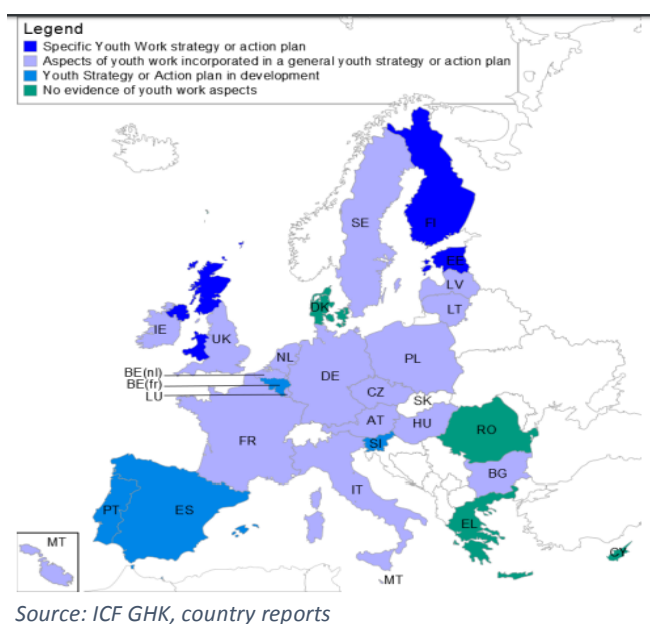


Figure 2: National strategies covering youth work

Regardless of whether youth work aspects come under a specific strategy or action plan for youth work, or under a general youth policy, there are a number of key ways that these policies mention youth work. These policies primarily:

- Set out the priorities, values and objectives of youth work
- Highlight the importance of youth work, aim to raise awareness and illustrate how youth work can contribute to the development of young people
- Focus on quality assurance, evaluation of youth work, ensuring standards, improving the quality of youth work
- Make funding provisions/allocations, set out funding conditions for youth organisations or outline specific measures in the area of youth work

Priorities of government youth policies and funding programmes

Many countries within the EU have different policies, programmes and funding streams in place to develop and support youth work. These approaches range from specific youth work strategies, to incorporating aspects of youth policy into different ministries, to not having specific policy objectives but creating specific programmes and funding streams in given areas to strengthen youth work (European Commission, 2015b). The priorities set out within those approaches highlights the issues of main concern at a political level when it comes to youth work today. These main concerns and priorities can be summarised as:

- Targeting disadvantaged young people and those at risk of social exclusion;

- Preventative youth work and youth facilities;
- Ensuring quality youth work;
- Evidence-based practice;
- Develop a system or infrastructure to support youth work.

The first two priorities show that youth work should target towards specific groups and be preventative in nature. Disadvantaged young people and those at risk of social exclusion is an area of priority in many countries across the EU and special funding streams are allocated to this end. Good quality youth work appears to be an issue of concern for many countries. High quality youth work should entail the use of quality standards and quality assurance. This is done through encouraging youth organisations themselves to set and apply standards or the establishment and implementation of quality standards or a framework for standards at the national level. Within this context of quality youth work, youth policy encompasses elements such as formalising certification or investing in training for youth workers, though most commonly incorporates direct investment for the youth work infrastructure through creating and improving youth centres and their facilities.

In terms of specific thematic priority areas, these are found to be in line with the eight fields outlined in the EU Youth Strategy: participation, culture, social inclusion, volunteering, health and well-being, employment, education and training, and youth and the world (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012). Regarding the thematic area of Culture, this is not as often highlighted in the policies and programmes at the political level. Only in a few countries, the national youth strategies or action plans specifically mention arts and culture as a thematic area.

Continuous Professional Development for Youth Workers

CPD at a National Level

Even though there is evidence that training opportunities available to youth workers are present in almost all Member States and the recognition of learning and the validation of those skills is happening to some degree, clear frameworks in terms of professional development largely absent. According to the European Commission (2015b) report training opportunities and the recognition of learning are identifiable needs amongst youth workers.

CPD training programmes are supported and provided by the Government, by youth organisations or by EU funded programmes (Figure 3). In most cases it is the youth organisations themselves that have developed specific training courses for their youth workers in a way to meet their particular needs. In a number of countries the training programmes open to youth workers are heavily supported by the Youth in Action programme of the EU (European Commission, 2017). Countries

such as Bulgaria, Cyprus Greece and Portugal are heavily reliant on training opportunities made available through the Youth in Action programme. Whilst the Youth in Action programme provides the funding support to make these training offers available, the courses are offered by youth Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

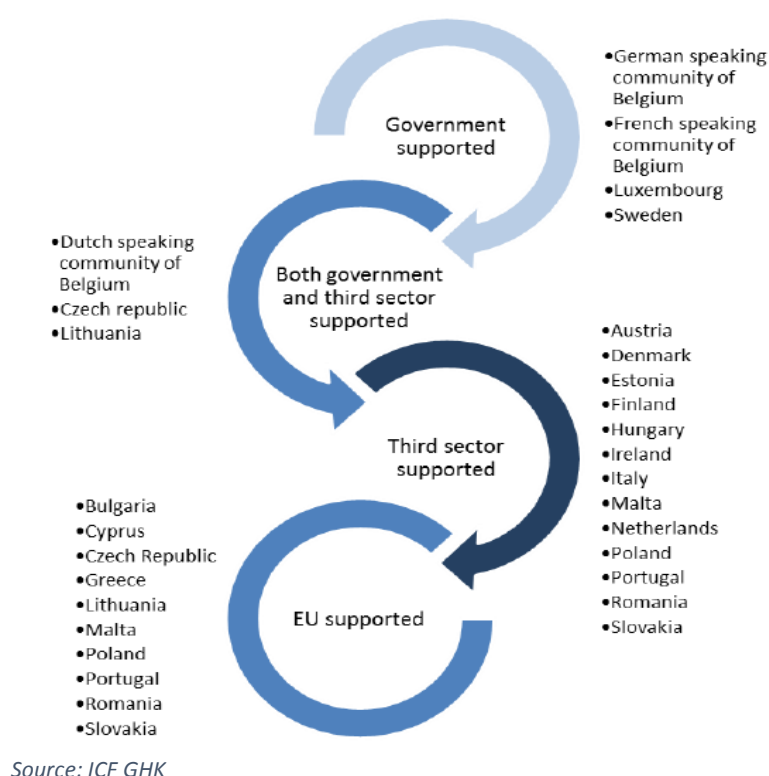


Figure 3: Further Training Opportunities for youth workers

Recognition and validation of learning

Recognition and validation of learning appears to be an issue of great concern in regards to the training programmes offered to youth workers. Specifically, the problem concerns the lack of recognition of the skills and knowledge that youth workers have gained by attending training programmes. Notably, the new acquired skills and knowledge are not linked to specific credentials.

Recognition of learning amongst youth workers is carried out at the national or municipality level and at the level of youth associations and organisations. At a government level, recognition is centred on the completion of particular approved training programmes. In the cases of youth associations, organisations and initiatives, these have developed their own certification for the training that they provide, which often details the quality and learning standards of what was undertaken. However, there is some evidence that there is a shift in this practice, with national level

recognition taking account of competences in addition to specific qualifications. Therefore, increasingly across both state and youth organisation recognition systems, it is the individual competences and skills that are being recorded and validated (European Commission, 2015a; Council of the European Union, 2015).

At the EU level, tools such as YouthPass and the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers have been developed to support the assessment and description of competences acquired in youth work. The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning adopted in December 2012 provides that Member States are to set up validation arrangements by 2018. However, at the national level a number of countries expressed concerns about the recognition given to the role of youth workers. According to the European Commission report (2014) these fall into the following categories:

- A lack of understanding of what it is that youth workers do and not viewing the role of youth work as being a 'real' job or career;
- That there is a need for clear qualifications and or standards related to youth work in order to contribute to greater recognition of youth work as a profession;
- A lack of recognition of youth work as an occupation and career prospects for youth workers in the sector with the lack of recognition being associated with precarious working conditions;
- The lack of weight given to the voices of youth workers

European Training Strategy

The European Training Strategy (ETS) of the European Commission was the main strategy for the development of quality youth work under the Youth (2000-2006) and Youth in Action (2007-2013) Programmes (now in the Erasmus+). The implementation of the ETS represented a major step forward in the assurance of the necessary quality and quantity of training and support measures in the Programmes in the Youth field. Ten years after its implementation, the ETS has been revised to respond to policy objectives under the renewed framework for European Cooperation in the field of youth (2010-2018), as well as to the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). According to the European Commission report (2010) during its first 10 years the ETS had some positive impacts on improving the competence development of youth workers in Europe and on developing tools for the recognition of youth workers' qualifications.

The study of the European Commission (2014) considers learning opportunities, and recognition of achievements of youth workers as being one of the key factors to successful youth work. To this end, one of the recommendation of ETS (2015, p.4) suggests that in order to achieve quality youth work it is necessary to *'promote, through quality youth work opportunities and programmes, experiential learning and skills development ... the recognition and validation of such skills and competences'*.

The ETS pursues six objectives, aiming at the development of quality youth work in Europe through capacity building. For each objective, the ETS defines sets of measures to be implemented.

ETS intends to create a virtual "European Academy for quality youth work" as a sustainable and continuous element for capacity building in youth work in Europe.

1. Encourage European cooperation among the different stakeholders to foster quality youth work in Europe. The Erasmus+ Programme supports project promoters to implement training measures and develop training concepts to foster innovation in quality youth work through new forms of capacity building, training models, material, curricula and strategies.
2. ETS has shown that there is limited knowledge about capacity building and training for youth workers in Europe and its impact on quality youth work.
3. Within the Erasmus+ Programme, the ETS aims to develop, together with National Agencies a modular system to train trainers, which will serve as a framework to train trainers and give orientation and guidance for the different actors in the field of training of trainers. The system will be based on the ETS set of competences for trainers developed under the Youth in Action Programme recognised as "ETS trainings for trainers".
4. With www.salto-youth.net, the ETS has established the most known and used European portal as the main European online communication platform for experts, youth workers and trainers in the youth field and includes the following tools:
 - The European Training Calendar (calls for participants for trainings in youth work);
 - Otlas (allows to find partners for youth work projects in Europe);
 - The TOOLBOX (gives the opportunity to share pedagogical methods);
 - TOY European trainers (offers the services of trainers to training providers).
5. The Knowledge Management and Staff Training (KMST) of the National Agencies offers a set of trainings for National Agencies based on their competence profile allowing regular discussions of concepts, training and exchange of best practice.

ETS has developed a 'set of competences for trainers working at international level' in the youth field and is on the agenda of the European institutions, non-formal learning providers, and Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme providers for some years. The development of a 'Set of competences for

trainers working at international level' aims to provide individual trainers, teams of trainers and training providers like organisations, institutions and their related programmes with a model which helps:

- To develop assessment tools (self-assessment as well as assessment by others) for individual trainers,
- To develop tools for trainer teams to develop their individual and team competences, and
- To develop training strategies and related tools

(SALTO-YOUTH Training and Cooperation Resource Centre)

Since its implementation the ETS has created thousands of non-formal learning opportunities (training courses, seminars, conferences, partnership-building activities, etc.) for several hundred thousand participants active in youth work all over Europe. Overall, EUR 152 million was invested between 2007 and 2013 for youth worker training offers, which were taken advantage of by 300 000 participants in 16 000 projects carried out by NGOs, national agencies and SALTO-Youth resource centres (European Commission, 2015c). With Erasmus+ (2014-2020), a new generation of an integrated programme started quality youth work went high on the political agenda, e.g. the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018), the Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, the Council conclusions on the quality youth work (2013) and the Work Plan of the European Union for Youth for 2014-2015.

Conclusion

Literature review has demonstrated that in order to ensure quality of youth work practice there needs to be a core framework of quality standards for youth work responsive to national contexts, including competence models for youth workers, and accreditation systems for prior experience and learning. Moving towards quality youth work, it is also important that youth workers training programmes maintain an appropriate balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and application of practical skills. In this sense, training programmes should enable youth workers to respond to the realities of youth work at different levels, by adopting creative, innovative pedagogic methods. Ultimately, CPD training programmes should also ensure responsiveness to trends and changing circumstances in young people's lives and needs, especially in youth-at-risk, such as unemployment, immigration, technology, intercultural competence and extremism. The following extract describes the consequences in case we fail to invest in youth work:

'A failure to invest in youth work has three consequences. It is an abdication of responsibility to the next generation. It is a loss of opportunity to strengthen contemporary civil society throughout Europe. And finally, it weakens the potential for dealing effectively with some of the major social challenges (such as unemployment and extremism) of our time.'

(European Youth Work Convention, 2015, pp.10)

Recommendations

The following recommendations concern training programmes of youth workers in the context of CPD as a means for ensuring their credibility and professional validity and supporting and sustaining the provision of quality youth work.

- Quality youth work needs to be further explored in regards to the necessary set of competencies and qualifications for youth workers and the development and implementation of related competence models. There needs to be a core framework of quality standards for youth work responsive to national contexts, including competence models for youth workers, and accreditation systems for prior experience and learning. Though in some Member States youth work is recognised as a profession, pathways for the professionalization of youth work in co-operation with the educational sector are needed.
- The recognition of the skills and knowledge that youth workers have gained through CPD training programmes needs to be linked to specific credentials or to improved conditions.
- To gain more recognition youth work needs active promotion and advocacy by all relevant shareholders in politics, public sector and civil society at different levels.
- To help get youth work and youth workers' competencies recognised, national strategies on recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning in youth work are required. There needs to be recognition and validation of the learning and achievement that takes place through youth work in non-formal and informal learning environments.
- Training is a crucial element to support the development of quality youth work. Therefore strategies, concepts and programmes for the training of youth workers based on an agreed set of competences. There is a need for infrastructure to be built that prepares youth workers for their role, and to support their ongoing professional development as an essential part of professionalising the delivery of youth work.
- Training should correspond to the emerging challenges faced by young people in Europe enabling youth workers respond to the changes and trends in society and politics. Training curriculums need to be adopted in a way that they help youth workers respond to the current

and emerging challenges faced by young people in Europe, such as unemployment, technology, extremism, and immigration.

- Youth workers training curriculums for should include the aspects of arts and culture as these are usually neglected. To this end, youth workers need to build a set of specific skills and key competences.
- There is a need to support the capacity of youth work to respond to new challenges and opportunities posed by new technologies and digital media. Youth workers need to have the digital skills or attitudes to fully benefit from the opportunities created by digital technologies for their own training and for delivering quality youth work. This should include upgrading existing practices in youth workers training, with the use of new solutions of digitalised services and online tools which allow other forms of instruction, such as eLearning and blended learning.
- As youth work engages more with other sectors working with young people, there is an emerging need for cross-sectorial education and training for youth professionals in general.
- Review of the literature reveals that there is a shift in the emphasis of youth work towards more intervention-based youth work, concentrating on at-risk groups and responding to the growing need for support for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Youth workers need to be trained in applying innovative, creative and enjoyable methods, often characterised as 'unorthodox', which can benefit youth-at-risk with non-traditional educational history.

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