

GETTING THERE...

working together to

'establish **a common ground** for a medium and long-term coordinated strategy **toward** recognition of youth work and non-formal learning in Europe **with** the involvement of actors and stakeholders from the various sectors of policy concerned'.

STATEMENT

by participants of the

SYMPOSIUM

**'RECOGNITION OF YOUTH WORK AND
NON-FORMAL LEARNING/EDUCATION
IN THE YOUTH FIELD'**

14-16 November 2011

European Youth Centre Strasbourg

The symposium 'RECOGNITION OF YOUTH WORK AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING / EDUCATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD' took place 14-16 November 2011 in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. It was co-organised by the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth, by JUGEND für Europa – the German National Agency for the Youth in Action programme and by the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, in cooperation with the European Youth Forum

Disclaimer:

All views and opinions expressed in this statement are those of the participants of the symposium "RECOGNITION OF YOUTH WORK AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING / EDUCATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD", and, as such, do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The European Commission and the Council of Europe do not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this statement and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use.

1. Introduction

Youth work aims at empowering and supporting young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood. It offers non-formal learning opportunities and equips young people with skills needed at work and in civic or private life. It provides space and opportunities for young people, especially young people with fewer opportunities, to shape their own future. However, it lacks attention and understanding of its role and of its value for an individual and for our societies.

The Symposium on Recognition of Youth Work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth field took place from 14 to 16 November 2011 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. It was co-organised by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field, by JUGEND für Europa – the German National Agency for the Youth in Action programme, and by the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, in cooperation with the European Youth Forum.¹

The symposium took place 11 years after the first Symposium dedicated to non-formal learning/education in Strasbourg, and it sought to connect past, present and future developments of recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth field. It built on the Working Paper 'Pathways 2.0 – towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe' (the Pathways paper), published by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth in early 2011. It describes the current state of play of recognition of youth work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth field, and its development in Europe over the last decade. Recognition of non-formal learning/education in the youth field plays an increasingly prominent role, both in regard to policy development and in practical terms.

The growing recognition process was accompanied by a number of key activities and events that contributed to creating a common ground among the key players.² Also a range of recognition instruments for non-formal and informal learning have been developed at local, regional, national and European level as well as in different sectors of the youth field.³

The *Pathways Paper* highlights characteristics and impact of non-formal learning/education in the youth field and outlines 10 elements for a renewed strategy.

We, more than 100 participants of the Symposium coming from 35 countries, discussed challenges regarding recognition of youth work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth field and proposed recommendations and ideas for further action, outlined in this Statement and the accompanying Plan of Action⁴. The Statement is addressed to the

1 The symposium was prepared by the ad-hoc European Expert Group on recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education consisting of representatives of the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Advisory Council on Youth and the Steering Committee on Youth in the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, the National Agencies and the Salto Resource Centers of the Youth in Action programme and the Pool of European Youth Researchers.

2 First Pathways-Paper 2004, conferences 'Bridges for Recognition' 2005 in Leuven and 'Continue the pathways towards recognition....', 2008 in Prague, 1st European Youth Work Convention 2010 in Ghent.

3 Most prominent are the tools existing today at European level, the Council of Europe's Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders and Youthpass, the recognition tool for the European Union's Youth in Action programme.

4 The proposed Plan of Action will be finalised by the Expert Group on recognition of youth work and non-formal learning and which will monitor its implementation.

European institutions, to the ministries responsible for youth and to other ministries concerned with the topic of recognition in the Member States of the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as to other structures concerned with young people at national, regional and local level. Secondly and with equal importance, it is addressed to youth organisations, youth work practitioners and young people themselves. Thirdly, the statement addresses all other stakeholders, mainly education providers, employers and social partners, the academic and research community and our partners in civil society.

2. Challenges

While evident progress has been made since recognition of youth work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth field has been on the political agenda, many challenges remain. The Symposium identified the following as key:

2.1 The challenge of making the concept of 'youth work and non-formal learning / education' better understood

Youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth field are not sufficiently understood by broader society, and their concepts differ greatly between countries. The challenge is how to effectively define and communicate the added value that youth work has to individuals and to the society.

2.2 The challenge of keeping all dimensions of recognition in balance

Recognition of youth work and of non-formal learning/education has four dimensions: a. *social recognition*: recognition by society, valuing the positive impact of youth work and non-formal learning/education on young people *and* on societies; b. *political recognition*: recognition by policies, taking the value of youth work and non-formal learning/education into account in political strategies and decisions; c. *self-recognition*: recognition by the learner, understanding his or her learning and using it in different situations and contexts; and d. *formal recognition*: recognition by tools and instruments, valuing the individual learning outcomes of a learner. All dimensions are similarly important. Depending on the context, these different dimensions of recognition need to be taken into account and developed.

2.3 The challenge of risking formalisation of non-formal learning/education

Not every activity within the scope of youth work is measurable and ought to be assessed and certified. Formal recognition of learning in youth work activities could lead to over-formalising of youth work, i.e. the application of formal standards from other fields. Furthermore, youth work has many purposes and focussing for example "only" on the labour market or the education system, can devalue the other aspects of youth work. Non-formal learning/education in the youth field is contributing to the preparation of young people for the knowledge society and civil engagement.

2.4 The challenge of assuring quality in youth work and in non-formal learning/education

Quality assurance is a prerequisite for a better recognition of youth work and of non-formal learning/education. The development of quality in the youth field means increased

professional support to those working in the youth field on voluntary and professional basis (and e.g. not replacement of volunteers by paid staff). Therefore training and capacity building measures are essential to meet quality standards as set in the youth field.

2.5 The challenge of maintaining and cultivating diversity

The youth field is very diverse in its approaches, aims, methodologies and structure. This diversity is a value as it allows the field to address the very diverse needs of young people in Europe. This diversity is also a challenge as we need to develop structures to work together that don't lead to a disappearance of diversity. The huge difference in support for the youth field between the different countries is a related challenge.

2.6 The challenge of building knowledge

In regards to knowledge about the youth field, several challenges need to be kept in mind. An overview of the existing knowledge on youth work needs to be kept, and the gaps filled. Secondly, most academic or institutional research on the impact of education misses out on the contribution of non-formal learning/education of the youth field. Moreover, research in non-formal learning/education too often focuses on learning outcomes but does not investigate the process. Lastly, it needs to be ensured that the knowledge becomes useful for practice and policy making; and that practitioners and policy makers can easily access the knowledge base.

2.7 The challenge of being dependent from different other sectors

Youth work addresses many needs of society: it can be part of the educational, the social or the political system, it is part of the civil society, the third sector and leisure time which all have their own policies, structures and funding facilities. Providers of youth work have to adapt to many different and changing systems at European, national and local level, and this makes them dependent on the development of the other sectors.

2.8 The challenge of creating partnerships

The context in which youth work exists today requires that youth work establishes many partnerships with other actors from all levels such as social and welfare organisations, sport, culture and civil society, education providers, employers, etc. It is necessary to identify the common ground for an ongoing cooperation. This challenge of cooperation and partnerships is also present within the youth field itself where many organisations feel they lack the partnerships and exchanges with other non-formal learning/education providers to work jointly on recognition.

3. Recommendations

We, the participants of the Symposium, highlighted a number of recommendations corresponding to the challenges identified above and addressing the different stakeholders and areas concerned.

3.1 European level policies

Young people all over Europe deserve quality non-formal learning/education and proper recognition of their learning. The European Union and the Council of Europe should make sure that their policies benefit all young Europeans.

Regarding the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning the political process for a better recognition and validation of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth field should be reinforced by a joint strategy called the *Strasbourg Process*. Such a process needs to be based on a strong and sustainable political commitment to further support youth work in all its forms, including youth specific resources and infrastructure. The upcoming Council Recommendation in the European Union on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning should include a youth work and youth policy dimension and commitment from Member States to follow up at national level.

Since the launch of the White Paper on Youth in 2001 there has been a strong dynamic in EU youth policy development. This dynamic should be ensured in the future as well. EU institutions and Member States shall aim at a close cooperation between the youth field and the area of education and training and increase cooperation with other stakeholders such as social partners. The current EU Youth in Action Programme needs to be continued beyond 2013 as a separate and stronger programme that, in addition to supporting youth activities, continues contributing to the development of youth work and youth policy.

The Council of Europe should take advantage of its newly established Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation for strengthening cooperation between the sectors of education and youth and to explore new possibilities for developing non-formal learning/education and promoting its recognition. The co-management statutory bodies of the Council of Europe have a key role to play to start and drive this process.

3.2 National, regional and local policies

To improve the overall opportunities for young people to make their learning outcomes in the youth field visible, the European debate on the further development of the recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field should be taken up and reflected at national, regional and particularly at local level, as these are the levels reaching out to the majority of young people. Developments at these levels, on their turn, should be transferred to the European level in order to make validation and recognition applicable and transferable.

Each strategy for a better recognition of non-formal learning/education in the youth field must be based on the provision of sufficient financial support of youth work and of youth organisations, but also focus on making outcomes visible in order to increase the social and political recognition of the sector.

3.3 Youth Work

Youth organisations and other providers of youth work should make the learning that is taking place in their programmes visible. Recognition needs to start within the organisation, with every participant and should also include youth workers. To increase trust and credibility the youth field should strongly highlight the positive outcome and impact of relevant activities both on the level of individual young people as to the society as such. Recognition is also about adapting and using tools for the identification of learning outcomes and encompasses active advocacy and participation in policy processes. As recognition is a multidimensional process it has to include stakeholders from the political and social sector as well as from the labour market.

Regarding the effectiveness of youth work, assuring quality is one of the most effective ways to give recognition a practical dimension. Thus, ensuring high quality training and education programmes, also for youth workers, is essential for the development of competences in youth work.

3.4 Non-formal learning/education

Based on the principle that recognition is a right and not a duty, and in order to support a holistic approach of education, non-formal learning/education has to be acknowledged as a process that gives young people a chance to develop competences that complement those acquired through formal education. Quality assurance of non-formal learning/education in the youth field is a prerequisite condition to develop effective cooperation mechanisms on an equal level with other education fields.

Non-formal learning/education should be recognised for all the competences gained and its benefit for the well-being of the society and individuals, and not only for its contribution to employability and the labour market. Providers of non-formal learning/education in the youth field should be recognised for supporting and empowering disadvantaged groups, as well as for fostering civic participation through youth work and volunteering essential to the development of society.

3.5 Knowledge building and knowledge provision

The continuing practical and theoretical development of youth work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth field is essential for strengthening its capacity and recognition. The Symposium generated a common ground for a medium and long-term coordinated joint strategy towards recognition of youth work and non-formal learning; it must be maintained and bring together research, policy and practice to deliver scientific and experiential knowledge. The joint strategy should map and compile existing knowledge, identify gaps and needs for further research. The strategy should include ways of transferring the knowledge back to the providers on all levels.

3.6 Lifelong and lifewide Learning

Youth work has its place within lifelong learning, thus the dialogue with the other education fields has to be reinforced. This partnership needs to take place between providers of education and ensure learning mobility between different sectors. The lifelong learning society is being built and the youth field should take the initiative to bring together all providers of non-formal learning opportunities. No lifelong nor lifewide learning policies

should be developed without the involvement of non-formal learning/education providers of the youth field. The recognition tools for learning (such as the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers, Youthpass and the European Skills Passport) need to be further developed in association with relevant stakeholders to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

3.7 Partnerships with other actors

A strategy to provide the employment sector with appropriate information on the potential of non-formal and informal learning in youth work is needed. This strategy ought to start by identifying the competences that are being sought in the labour market. Strengthened communication with social partners is essential for achieving understanding of the competences acquired in non-formal learning/education and of the tools used to make this learning visible. The youth field is part of the social and the third sector. However, strategic partnerships as well as more efficient communication channels must be built to increase the cooperation and coherence between the youth field and the other fields of the social and third sector.

4. Conclusions

We call on all the institutions and partners, from the local to the European level, to heed our recommendations and make them reality through policy and support programmes. We commit to work together and with our organisations to implement the recommendations and the Plan of Action.

Together with all the partners we want to achieve our final and common goal: a Europe in which all young people can take part in quality youth work, where all their learning is recognised and in which all providers of non-formal learning/education and youth work get the appreciation they deserve.

5. Plan of Action

The Plan of Action proposed during the symposium will be finalised by the Expert Group on recognition of youth work and non-formal learning and published at the beginning of 2012.