



# Political Recognition

Value and recognition of youth work  
4-7 December 2023  
Zagreb, Croatia



## POLITICAL RECOGNITION

Political recognition is when young people and/or youth work are included in policies about young people and/or are the focus of policies. This can be at local, regional, national, and international levels. It is about youth work getting onto the political agenda, entering legislation, and becoming a part of political strategies - and supporting the involvement of young people and youth work in those strategies. It is the political level acknowledging and recognising youth work and the value of youth work.

Visible Value:

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/about-recognition>

## BACKGROUND

The conference “Value and Recognition of Youth Work” took place from 4 to 7 December 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia. The conference was part of the strategic partnership of 16 National Agencies (NA) for the implementation of the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, and four SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres (SALTO RC) which are keen to implement and strengthen the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA) through the Bonn Process.

The conference aimed at empowering those stakeholders who are already engaged in the professional debate on recognition. It was a space where they could look for additional cross-border exchange and inspiration, resources, and practical tools as well as strategic alliances within and beyond the youth work community of practice. It also aimed at contributing to the recognition of youth work and providing a platform for further reflection on youth work recognition, which is one of the eight thematic priority areas of the EYWA and Bonn Process.

“The recognition of youth work comes under four dimensions, self, social, political, and formal recognition. This conference highlighted that systematically working on all four dimensions is extremely valuable and necessary. We need to be working on the different kinds of support that are needed and to work on how the recognition of youth work can be supported. To these questions we need answers and approaches.”

Antonia Gladović, Director of the Croatian NA for Mobility and EU programmes

“While it is a role of the bigger institutions, if we really want recognition, it must “start with us”. Once the process of self-recognition gets established, then we will see more recognition at the social dimension, as social recognition develops then the political recognition can come more into play because of society demanding more and therefore more policies will come. With more policies the recognition process automatically influences the formal aspect, and we will see more validation and certification of youth workers.”

Laszlo Milutinovits from the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

No dimension of recognition stands alone, but it is also easy to fall into the trap of trying to do all four dimensions at the same time. We need to take it slowly, focus on small things, and take small steps. We still need to develop a good synergy between EU and national governments concerning youth work, this will be a good support for recognition at all levels.

This booklet is N° 4 in a series of five and explores political recognition.

## POLICIES, PAPERS, AND MOVEMENT

Charalampos Papaioannou, Policy Officer - European Commission, explained that one recent example of political recognition was the European Year of Youth 2022. It created a strong starting point in many countries for talking about youth work and for pushing the European Youth Work Agenda. Directly from this Year of Youth, the governments of several countries are exploring the possibilities for the recognition of youth work and youth workers.

Other examples of political recognition include the Recommendation on Youth Work, the programme Erasmus+ Youth, the European Youth Strategy 2019 to 2027, and the European Youth Work Agenda. The 2024 Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is expected to make a Council resolution on youth work. Both the European Union and the Council of Europe are active in terms of events, actions, papers, and recommendations related to young people and youth work. Political recognition, at least at the European level, is strong.

However, it is important to communicate what is happening at the European political level with youth workers who are active locally. This information needs to be made available in short and understandable ways and in each member country language.

When political recognition is happening at the European level it supports pushing national or local decision-makers for more recognition. It can be important to encourage local authority personnel responsible for youth to attend European youth work events. This has a knock-on effect at the local and national levels, events such as the Bonn Process Meet-ups or Exchange Forum on National Processes are vitally important for this.

Youth organisations also need to be informing local and national authorities about the work they are doing on a regular basis, highlighting the successes and changes being made in young people's lives. Also, as part of political recognition work, youth work organisations need to be lobbying local and national authorities to influence policies.

## POLITICAL RECOGNITION ISSUES

### POLITICAL LEVEL UNDERSTANDING

For many politicians, youth work equals social work, or it equals school and education. Too many ministries and political leaders do not know what youth work is, in most countries there is a severe lack of political understanding of youth work. We need to build a greater understanding of what youth work is at the political level. The youth sector needs to be in constant dialogue with the decision-makers, so they will start to understand the effects and importance of youth work. We need to be aiming at having youth workers involved in youth policies and youth work policies and decisions.

### LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY

Youth workers need to be empowered to lobby for youth work, we need to be showing that youth work empowers young people and to help those at the political level to understand its importance. We need to ensure decision-makers are invited to youth work events, conferences, and major activities – especially European level events. Coverage in media and social media of the importance of youth work and of stories about its impact act as a useful tool for visibility and for creating pressure for political action.

### LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

In general, there is a lack of youth work policy in European countries and in too many instances there is no law or legal framework for youth work. We need to be pushing for the development of and introduction of national policies, guidelines, and frameworks at the national level to ensure the professionalism of youth work.

### FUNDING

There is a lack of funding mechanisms in most countries, we need financial commitment at national and municipal levels for a youth work budget. Something that is structured, stable and long-term, and moves beyond project-based funding.

### NETWORKING

We need to be developing networking and cooperation between European partners to share youth work policy frameworks, especially between those who have policies in place and those who do not. There is also a need for a stronger synergy between the EU and national governments regarding youth work developments and policies.

## THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This section focuses on the role and influence different aspects of the community of practice have towards political recognition.

### YOUTH WORKERS

#### Policies and political

It is important for youth workers to recognise that their work is part of the political dimension. Youth work is about empowering young people to make their voices heard and a part of this work is trying to push decision-makers to recognise the needs of the young people and to involve them and the youth workers in policymaking.

#### Local to global

Most face-to-face youth workers generally think at the local level because that is where their work focus is. However, while the EU and its policies seem far away, it is necessary for youth workers to know about these policies and to have some understanding of the realities of youth work in other countries. The more information we have the more we can push for better policies and policies that meet the ever-changing realities around us.

#### European platforms

There is a need for European platforms for youth workers to exchange and advance – the Alliance of European Youth Worker Associations is part of the answer to this and the platform for youth workers to be established by the European Commission is another part.

#### Financial support

Better policy recognition should come with increased financial support, this will allow the sector to improve the quality of youth work and also the coverage (working with specific marginalised youth for example).

### PROJECT MANAGERS

#### Becoming proactive

Many project managers are too often reacting when they need to be proactive and mindful towards the trends that are coming up in the future. This is also in terms of societal pressures, political pressures, and shrinking civic spaces. There is a need to be defining youth work priorities accordingly.

## Funding

Project funding is generally accessible; however, ongoing costs are most often not considered. Project managers often find themselves implementing projects and at the same time writing new projects to secure stability. Too often funding results arrive late, so sometimes youth workers and other employees are fired because there is no money to keep them. Project managers need to be lobbying institutional bodies to develop policies for sustainable funding.

## TRAINERS/EDUCATORS

### Defining

There is a need for the development of a common understanding about what a youth work trainer is. In some countries there is some kind of recognition but in many the concept simply does not exist yet. Youth work policy needs to include this role.

### Holistic approach

Training and education work requires a holistic perspective on how the whole system works - the youth sector and society as a whole at both national and European levels. This makes the role political, civic engagement needs to be a priority for youth work trainers and educators. This knowledge and expertise also need to be fed into policymaking.

## POLICYMAKERS

### European level

There are many processes at the European level that are important for national recognition. This information needs to be shared widely amongst all policymakers at all levels. Exchanging information works to ensure that parallel processes are not started.

### Recognising accomplishments

In national policy work it is very helpful to look at what other European countries have accomplished, there is a need for the creation of a common and accessible space where good examples of policy accomplishments are collected.

## **Bonn Process**

Youth work policies reinforce the Bonn Process and give an overview of the status of the European Youth Work Agenda in all the countries.

## **Youth test**

There needs to be an integration of the youth perspective across policy areas when designing or changing policies. The Commission is introducing a 'youth check' by using the Better Regulation tools and consultations under the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy. The 'Youth Test' is being developed so that all new legislation and policy is subject to a youth-focused impact assessment, including consultations with young people.

## **NA STAFF**

### **Strong supportive role**

One of the responsibilities of the NAs is to ensure environments and spaces for youth work to develop. With different tools they can support a common direction for youth work development (projects, policy, support activities/TCA, materials, youth work platform...). They also have a strong financial role.

### **Policies**

With new policy priorities, sometimes NAs can respond quickly and support policy documents that are in development. Also, in changing political situations NAs need to be reflecting on the core needs and role of youth work.

### **Priority topics**

The capacities of NAs are limited. Stronger coordination can prevent every NA from jumping onto every topic. Some topics need to be prioritised for the entire NA network to work on while others need to be prioritised for specific NAs to work on. Current European policies have a lot of potential to support national developments, NAs can serve as bridges in these instances.

### **National and international**

NA staff should be involved in more national working groups and connect national and European realities to reach the full potential of youth work. European projects like 'Learning mobility' and the 'Europe on the move' project can be more used on the national level.



## ENGAGING WITH POLITICAL RECOGNITION

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### LOBBYING

Youth work and youth work policy has increasingly been in the focus of the European Union and the Council of Europe in the last years. This has supported policymaking at the national level. Actors from the youth work field need to be bringing together the different political stakeholders and lobbying them with a common message.

### LEGISLATION

Encouraging governments, from local to national, to develop legislation that supports long-term processes and process-oriented approaches to youth work. To establish platforms for youth work organisations to connect better within their countries and across borders.