

# EU-NET

## COMPARATIVE REPORT



## CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION	P.2
2. YOUTH WORK MEANINGS AND ITS RECOGNITION AT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVELS	P.3
3. YOUTH WORKER: DEFINITIONS & FEATURES	P.4
4. CONCLUSIONS	P.7
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	P.8
6. REFERENCES	P.9

## 1. Introduction

### *What is EU-NET?*

EU-NET is a project funded by Erasmus+ Programme with the aim of creating an international network for promoting the excellence in youth work, focused on sharing methods, tools and skills of the employees and youth workers in the sphere of Erasmus+. The objectives of EU-NET are:

- To create an international network for promoting the excellence in youth work focused on sharing methods, tools and skills of the employees and youth workers in the sphere of Erasmus+ and beyond.
- Better understanding and recognition of skills and qualifications about youth work in Europe
- Clear understanding of youth work practice, starting from the local level, for then enlarging the focus internationally
- Increased opportunities for youth workers' and their professional development
- Increased synergies and links and improvement transition between the different sectors of education
- Standardizing the youth work at international level, improving their inputs and sharing good practices
- Spreading Erasmus+ mobility & training opportunities
- Creating an online platform with different e-tools for youth workers, which will also serve as a place where youth workers and other stakeholders can share their ideas/ problems/ thoughts- fostering a social dialogue and professional development
- Publishing OER materials, including a Surveys Analysis Report, Handbook, promotional videos and booklets for youth workers

Represented countries in EU-NET are Spain, Italy, Greece and Germany by a Coordinating Organization (Asociación Intercultural Europea - Go Europe, Spain) and four more Participating Organizations:

- IDEA (Spain)
- Futuro Digitale (Italy)
- Inter Alia (Greece)
- Jugend-& Kulturprojekt E.V. (Germany)

### *What is the Comparative Report?*

The Comparative Report has been developed throughout prior Country Factsheets Analysis and Surveys Analysis. On the one hand, Country Factsheets Analysis collected information about ongoing situation on youth work in the four partner countries. On the other hand, Survey Analysis gathered, via questionnaires and interviews, baseline information on situation, issues and attitudes of

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**2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769**

youth work and youth workers in partner countries.

Surveys have reached 105 Youth Workers. Youth Workers represent different roles, from volunteers and trainers to project managers or presidents. Moreover, surveyed Youth Workers work for and/or collaborate with around 114 organizations in total. The 45% represents medium size organizations (between 6 and 20 workers/volunteers), whereas 28% of organizations are formed by more than 20 workers/volunteers (big) and 27% by less than 5 workers/volunteers (small). Thus, the scope of organizations involved is wide.

Therefore, this Comparative Report encompasses and summarizes the state-of-art and the situation of Youth Work/Youth Workers at national level in represented countries and at European level. This document will become a useful paper to understand how this job is recognized and share different solutions on how it could be standardized all around Europe.

## 2. Youth Work meanings and its recognition at national and European levels

At national level, only German law (*SGB VIII -SGB VIII Kinder-und Jugendhilfe–Sozialgesetzbuch*) defines Youth Work as follows: “Youth Work offers to young people a support for their development by picking up their interests allowing codetermination, fostering self-definition and encouraging social responsibility and participation”. In fact, it is officially embedded in Social Work field, thereby becoming an academic discipline and profession that concerns itself with helping individuals, families, groups and communities enhance their social functioning and overall well-being. Moreover, the [2011 Protection of Young People Act](#) legislates with Youth issues and represents a solid national youth strategy.

In Spain, Italy and Greece, there is not a specific law that clearly defines Youth Work at national level. Instead, there are vague or tedious definitions that do not entail a legal regulation.

In Spain, there is a definition of “Youth Advisor”, which is a social worker specialised in groups’ management of young people in many activities related to leisure, personal growth, education and participation. However, the nonexistence of a specific term for “Youth Work” or the lack of translation of the concept into Spanish does not mean that Youth Work does not take place in the country. There is an institutional recognition of “Youth Work” since the Youth Institute (INJUVE) coordinates and promotes policies at national level, but it does not govern youth policy.

In Italy, there is not a definition of youth work, nor a clear definition of “young people”. Overall, there are no national laws regarding both youth work and young persons. All the laws dealing with this issue, both at national and regional levels, have different concepts of what “young people” are. Nevertheless, “insiders” within youth field (members of NGOS, non-profit organizations and public bodies) define Youth Work as *animazione socio-educativa* (socio-educational entertainment) and *operatore giovanile* (youth driving).

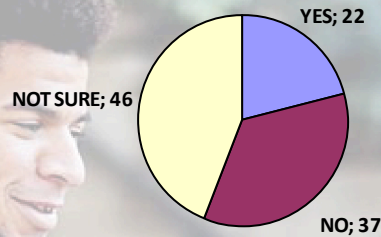
In Greece, the translation of the term “Youth Work” is quite tedious. It is not rare to use the English term because there is not an official recognition. Instead, the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs uses the information by the Council of Europe to provide a description of what Youth Work is. It is defined as a tool outside of the school curriculum, through non-formal and informal learning methodologies, for personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship for young people and

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**2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769**

children regardless of social, cultural, educational and political background.

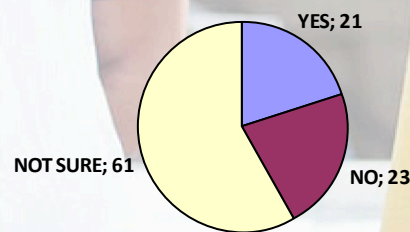
Data show that explained patterns are enhanced in terms of recognition through national youth strategies. Only 21% of surveyed Youth Workers in the four countries are aware about national youth strategies. In Germany, people are the most aware about a national youth strategy (38%), whereas only 23% of surveyed Youth Workers in Spain, 14% in Greece and 8% in Italy are aware about a youth strategy at national level.

**YOUTH STRATEGY AT NATIONAL LEVEL**



Finally, it is interesting to highlight that the perception of Youth Work recognition throughout a youth strategy is almost similar at European level. In four countries, 20% of surveyed Youth Workers are aware about a European youth strategy. However, such awareness is higher in Greece (39%) and Spain (23%) than in Germany (11%) or Italy (4%).

**YOUTH STRATEGY AT EUROPEAN LEVEL**



Most mentioned European youth strategies are Erasmus+ and European Youth Strategy (pointed out in three countries). Other highlighted youth strategies are Youthpass, European Training Strategy, Europe Goes Local or European Solidarity Corps.

### 3. Youth Worker: Definitions & Features

#### *Definitions of Youth Worker*

There are many differences of how Youth Worker profession is defined and recognised among

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**2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769**

represented countries.

In Germany, where Youth Work is defined by law, Youth Worker is considered a Social Worker, a Social Pedagogue or an Educator from Fachhochschule who is specialised in working with young people (target group). Surveyed Youth Workers in Germany define Youth Worker as “a person who develops and implements non-formal education methods to enhance personal and professional competences of young people, thereby becoming a supporter of young people and their affairs”.

In Spain and Italy, where there is a lack of national regulations of Youth Work, regional laws regulate the basic characteristics of a Youth Worker, so they are not standardised in all regions.

In the case of Spain, regional laws regulate youth centres and define the concept of “youth advisors” instead of Youth Worker (e.g. Youth Regional Law 18/2010 of 30 December, Comunidad Valenciana). In this country, surveyed Youth Workers define Youth Worker as “a motivating person who provides counselling/orientation for young people and promotes youth activities of non-formal education to develop young people’s skills and to contribute to youth participation”.

Talking about Italy, Youth Worker it is not a recognised profession. Nevertheless, some regions, such as Lombardy and Piedmont, approved regional laws to define minimum standards requirements for youth workers (between 2004 and 2008). Generally, youth workers could have been volunteering before, but they lack work experience and training in specific sectors which could be applied in the sector they are working/volunteering. Those statements remark both a fragmentation among the Italian regions and the absence of a training strategy for youth workers. In this country, surveyed Youth Workers define Youth Worker as “an enricher/promoter and dynamic actor that encourages youth potential and provides guidance for young people”.

In Greece, where there is a lack of national definition of Youth Work as well, there are not even regional laws that provide a minimum standard. There not official professional nor educational program in Greece that provides certificates for ensuring professional rights to Youth Workers. Some social studies may equip potential youth workers with a good breadth of knowledge, but it is not applicable yet. Surveyed Youth Workers state that a Youth Worker is “a person who contributes to personal, professional and social development of young people by enhancing their competences and providing advice/mentoring. Moreover, a person who promotes the empowerment of young people through non-formal education trainings and educational activities”

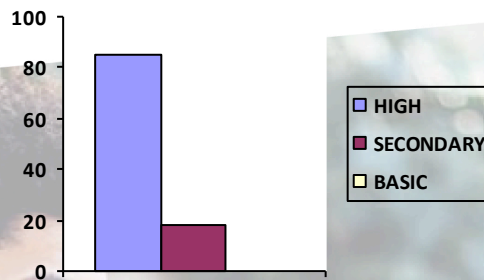
At European level, Youth Worker is defined as “a professional or a volunteer involved in non-formal learning who supports young people in their personal socio-educational and professional development” (European Commission-Erasmus+ Programme, 2017).

### *Features of Youth Workers*

Except in Germany, where Youth Workers need to have a degree of Social Work, Social Pedagogy, Psychology or Educator Degree, there is a diverse academic/training background of Youth Workers in other countries. For instance, Youth Workers in Spain are trained via other professions, so a broader professional group (social workers, social educators or cultural animators) carries out some aspects of Youth Work. In Italy, Youth Workers tend to have considerably different backgrounds (e.g. social work, psychology, sociology, sport instruction) because there are no minimum qualification standards at national level, and Youth Work is mostly delivered among organizations dealing with social services. There

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**2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769**

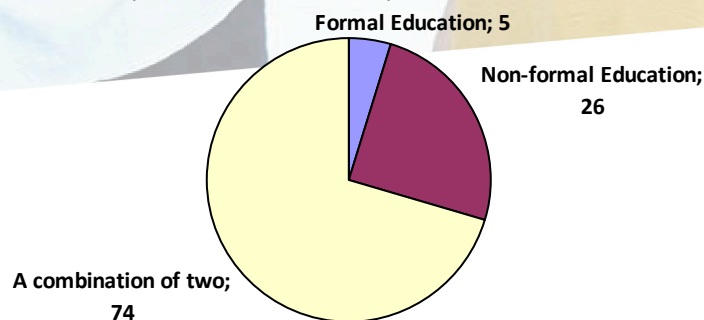
is a high number of Youth Workers who are not qualified or who are learning-by-doing and at the same time. In Greece, no academic degree is needed so Youth Workers are basically people who have experience in developing non-formal education activities with young people. Although there is a wide scope of academic background in countries where youth work is not officially recognised as a professional career, surveyed Youth Workers mainly hold high educational diploma in four countries.



Patterns of pathways to become Youth Worker vary in represented countries. However, it is possible to point out that practical knowledge/experience and non-formal education are essential to become Youth Worker. On the one hand, most of surveyed Youth Workers pointed out that volunteering and/or being Youth Worker supporter was one of the main ways to become Youth Worker. In fact, this option represents the 59% of answers in total (four countries). Due to official recognition, the number of Youth Workers who became professionals thanks to studies is higher in Germany than in other countries.



On the other hand, surveyed Youth Workers who consider that only formal education is the best mean of training to become Youth Worker represent the 3% of respondents.



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2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769

In fact, surveyed Youth Workers highlighted that, apart from the combination of formal and non-formal education, practical experience is very important. Hence, surveyed Youth Workers in represented countries stated that future Youth Workers ought to spend time doing activities such as volunteering or non-formal activities that entail international experiences.

Regarding key competences for a Youth Worker, there is not an official qualification standard of competences specifically for Youth Work at national level in represented countries. However, there are some recognised competences for activities and services carried out by statutory and voluntary youth services in Germany:

- Knowledge about the development of children and youth
- Teaching leadership in theory and practice
- Planning and execution of activities
- Knowledge about structures of statutory and voluntary youth services
- Values orientation
- Knowledge about legal and insurance issues
- Prevention of sexual abuse
- Gender conscious work

In the other countries, there is no official recognition of competences for Youth Workers since Youth Work is not even recognised by itself.

Surveyed Youth Workers were asked to give a score (from 1 to 5) to some competences according to the level of importance. Respondents agreed to give highest scores to following key competences for a Youth Worker:

- Cultural awareness
- Communication in mother tongue
- Resourcefulness
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Networking
- Adaptability to a new environment
- Problem solving
- Conflict resolution (most valued one)
- Creative and innovative thinking
- Learning to learn
- Self-reflection and ability for personal development

On the contrary, the competences that got least score are:

- Communication in English
- Apart from English, communication in another foreign language (the least valued)
- ICT & Digital competences



#### 4. Conclusions

At national level, there are differences among European countries when defining and recognising Youth Work. On the one hand, there are countries like Germany where Youth Work is considered as a professional career. On the other hand, there are countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece, where recognition is up to regional/local authorities' initiatives (Spain or Italy) or it is non-existent at all (Greece). Therefore, it is difficult nowadays to standardise Youth Work characteristics and Youth Worker features at European level.

In order to overcome the harmful situation in some countries, many efforts are being developed in order to improve the recognition of Youth Work. For instance, in Greece, there is collective effort from the Pan-Hellenic Association of Youth Workers (*Πανελληνίου Σωματίου Συμβούλων Νέων*) that advocates for the official recognition of Youth Work and the establishment of the Greek term "*Σύμβουλος Νέων*"

At European level, having a Youth Work Portfolio and different Youth Strategies, promoted by the Council of Europe and European Union, provides a framework of official recognition. Nevertheless, it needs to be known by more stakeholders inside and outside youth field. The fact that most of surveyed Youth Workers state that they are not European and National Youth Strategies, or they are not sure about it, enhances such idea.

Concerning the professional status of Youth Workers, data show that most of them become Youth Workers "by doing". In other words, by practicing Youth Work, not studying it. It means that whether Youth Work is a practical field, or it needs more formal academic support in order to become a recognised and official career.

Finally, it is important to highlight that interpersonal elements are considered more important than technical skills and knowledge in youth sector. Regarding the most important competences pointed out by surveyed Youth Workers, competences encompassing attitudes and behaviours are more valued than the ones that need specific command. Hence, Youth Work can be understood as a field of learning by practicing rather than a field of knowledge.

#### 5. Recommendations

Youth Work and Youth Workers need more support and recognition in order to be better valued by social actors and stakeholders. Among recommendations made by surveyed Youth Workers, it is possible to remark:

- More professional recognition of "youth work" and a specific academic career/diploma.
- More information/communication among young people to take up the profession
- Gathering all active youth and student NGOs and invite them to share their ideas on the matter
- Collaboration between organizations and responsible authorities for the official recognition and standardization of youth work
- Certification based on already existing models in Europe, from and beyond the universities (EOPPEP, master's programmes, special seminars, specific university departments. Consider the high amount of non-formally qualified youth workers in Greece that might have long experience
- Re-evaluation of the social sector and its importance in supporting young people and more financial support

Enhancing a Universal Guide and NETWORK for the Youth Workers of the Future  
2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769

Most of recommendations address the issue of Youth Work recognition. As it has being seen, there are many pathways that someone can go through in order to become Youth Worker. However, the question thus lies in how that person is recognised and valued as Youth Worker.

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Enhancing a Universal Guide and NETWORK for the Youth Workers of the Future  
2016-3-ES02-KA205-008769

A large, semi-transparent photograph of three young people (two men and one woman) smiling and talking outdoors. The man in the center is wearing a white and blue baseball-style t-shirt. The woman on the right is wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

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