

YOUTH WORKERS UNITED

YOUTH

WORK

PATHWAYS



A project implemented by



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**YOUTH WORK PATHWAYS:**  
RECOGNITION, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION

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**Youth Work Pathways:  
recognition, professionalization and standardization**

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## INTRODUCTION

The publication "Youth work pathways: recognition, professionalization and standardization" is an overview of the European and regional practices, as well as the practices in the area of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia.

The purpose of the publication is to serve as a resource to all stakeholders, such as the state and public institutions that design and implement youth policies and the civil society organizations that work with youth, in order for them to better understand youth work and the significance of its adequate recognition.

The need of this advocacy tool emerged from the remarks of the youth workers and practitioners that there is absence of a legal framework in the Republic of Macedonia, along with formal and social recognition, as well as institutional support in the area of youth work. At the moment, youth work in the Republic of Macedonia is not regulated by any law, and consequently there is no legal framework for standardization and development. Youth worker is not a recognized vocation, and anyone can act as a youth worker as there are no formal criteria or standards of quality of youth work as an occupation.

This overview shall contribute towards a clearer understanding of the present situation and the need for policy-building from the area of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia, by taking into consideration the experiences and good practices in Europe, with a special outline of the countries from the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia).

The drafting of this publication took place under the project "Youth Workers United" implemented by the Youth Cultural Center – Bitola in partnership with Youth Association Creative Skopje, the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) from Serbia and the South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was supported within the IPA national program for Transition Assistance and Institution Building 2011 grant scheme "Further development and financial sustainability of civil society."

**YOUTH WORK  
EUROPEAN  
DIMENSION**

## YOUTH WORK DEFINITION

Youth work as a term is used to describe different types of activities, implemented by different actors, which have several characteristics:

- a focus on young people,
- personal development and
- voluntary participation.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'youth work' isn't even present in all European languages and national realities. Also, not all the countries in Europe have formal definition of youth work and the ones that do define it in variety of ways, depending on context in which it was developed, its main purpose, level of recognition on national level, the ways it is organized and funded etc.

In the resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (November 2009) youth work has been defined in such a way: 'Youth work is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of 'out-of-school' education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation'.<sup>2</sup>

In European Youth Strategy youth work is defined as out-of-school education managed by professional or voluntary 'youth workers' within youth organisations, town halls, youth centres, churches etc., which contributes to the development of young people.<sup>3</sup>

## STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

Several institutions on European level are responsible for supporting youth work, giving strategic directions for its development and frameworks for its quality assurance. However, main responsibility for developing and supporting youth work lays on national governments of European countries.

European Union has different ways of influencing and supporting youth policy and youth work - through resolutions and strategic documents (e.g. European Youth Strategy 2010-2018 – Investing and Empowering Youth, 2009 Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), 2009), programs that financially support youth work on European level (e.g. Erasmus +), institutions on EU and national level that are responsible for recognition and support for youth work programs (e.g. SALTO Resource Centres, National Agencies for Erasmus + programme, etc).

Council of Europe covers broader geographical area than EU, thus influencing and supporting youth work also in European countries outside of European Union. Youth department of Council of Europe develops different tools and resources for youth workers (e.g. European Youth Work Portfolio, different publications, etc), financially support youth work programs through European Youth

<sup>1</sup> Working with young people: The value of youth work in the EU. (2014), available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf),

<sup>2</sup> <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-work1>

<sup>3</sup> An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities (2009), European Commission, Brussels, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-52009DC0200&from=EN>



Foundation, while also offering facilities for implementation of international activities (European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest) and also supporting youth centres all over Europe to reach quality level in their work (through Quality Label for Youth Centres). In addition, Council of Europe organizes international educational programs for youth workers, trainers, etc. for building their capacities in different fields (e.g. human rights, fighting violent extremism, working with marginalized youth, etc).

## **PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK**

The profile of youth worker is quite different in each European country - from professional youth worker with higher education in youth work, to professionals educated in other similar fields and choosing career in youth work (e.g. social workers, pedagogists, etc.), to (mostly) volunteer youth workers with quite diverse educational background and additional non-formal education in youth work. Similar diversity could be found in level and ways of recognition of youth worker profession or vocation. In some countries youth worker is included in the list of recognized vocations, but not followed by vocational standard or clear education path, while in other countries this vocation is defined in Law on youth or other youth policy documents with description of youth worker's role, but without clear requirements in terms of qualification. Still, in some countries youth worker is included in the list of recognized occupations, as vocation or profession, with clear set of qualifications required and education available.

When talking about professional youth workers, we usually mean the ones with relevant education and gained qualifications for working with youth, but it still doesn't have to mean BA or MA in youth work. In many countries youth workers employed in youth centres and youth clubs are social workers, social pedagogists, or people with the background in education, etc., so persons who didn't specifically choose youth work as their education path. In other countries there are examples of youth workers from various education backgrounds who choose youth work for different reasons. Very common example of youth workers are the ones who had experience in using youth work services as young people, following the path as volunteers in associations or youth centres/clubs, to gaining required education for youth workers.

Youth worker practitioners are not only professionals, the ones with required education and paid employment - a great deal of youth work programs are run by volunteers. In many countries professional or paid youth workers are employed in youth clubs and youth centres, usually founded and/or funded by local government or the state, while youth associations and NGOs are run by volunteer youth workers who can be of different educational background and level of qualifications in youth work. In other countries, especially the ones without or with small number of state funded clubs and centres, volunteer youth workers in associations are the main creators and implementers of programs for young people.

## QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS

### TYOLOGY OF YOUTH WORK

There are diverse types of youth work programs implemented across Europe and typology of youth work differs from country to country, depending on needs of young people, capacities of youth work providers, national youth policy objectives, etc. One of typologies offered in publication "Working with young people: The value of youth work in the European Union"<sup>4</sup> is presented as diagram with two main axes; one being target group and the other objectives of programs. In terms of target group, some youth work programs are offered and designed to suite all young people, while some are targeted at specific groups, recognizing their specific needs. Objectives of youth work can be personal development of young people in general, or focused on some specific issue. Those specific issues can also be target group specific, but could also be societal issues affecting young people in general.

Types of youth work prevalent in certain countries also depend on capacities of youth work providers. In countries where state funded facilities exist on local level (youth centres, youth clubs, etc), open youth work is present in addition to association based youth work. Available spaces for youth work programs allow also for outreach programs to be implemented. On the other hand, in countries where most or all of youth work is done by associations and NGOs, other types of youth work are more developed (e.g. programs for development of soft skills, active participation and political awareness, health and prevention programs, etc.).

### QUALITY FRAMEWORKS

In recent years researches on national and international level show large impact of youth work programs on different spheres of lives of young people (their personal development, social inclusion, active participation, employability, etc), as well as on communities they belong to. This is one of the reasons why greater emphasis is put on further recognition and quality assurance of youth work programs. On European level Expert Group on youth work quality systems issued their report<sup>5</sup> in 2015, analyzing quality frameworks existing on national levels in EU member states and exploring how common indicators and quality frameworks could be developed. They emphasize the need to focus on qualitative effects of youth work, rather than just quantitative, in order to achieve greater recognition and support from different stakeholders. They give recommendation on how to create a systematic and holistic quality approach, covering the whole youth work context from young people to the political level and explore the common understanding of quality in youth work in order to better understand how the aims of youth work are achieved and how to better communicate them with different stakeholders. Still, because of specific nature of youth work, the expert group acknowledges that any bottom-down imposed quality system wouldn't be appropriate. The creation of quality system should include all relevant stakeholders and should have young people in its centre.

Examples of quality frameworks for youth work programs could be found in some EU member states, but also other European countries. Quality tools on national or regional levels exist sometimes in order to differentiate organizations which will gain financial support from state and/or regional government (e.g. grant scheme of Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic), or they are not directly connected to funding, but are initiated by institutions responsible for supporting youth work (e.g. youth institutes, federations of youth clubs/youth centres, regional or local governmental bodies responsible for youth, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> A. Dunne, D. Ulicna, I. Murphy, M. Golubeva, Working with young people: The value of youth work in the European Union (2014), European Commission – Directorate General for Education and Culture

<sup>5</sup> Quality Youth Work - A common framework for the further development of youth work Report from the Expert Group on Youth Work Quality Systems in the EU Member States (2015) Directorate General for Education and Culture Youth policy and programme

**REVIEW OF REGIONAL  
PRACTICE ON  
YOUTH WORK**

## **YOUTH WORK DEFINITION**

There is no official definition. Although youth work is practiced, it is not recognized by authorities, defined or systematically supported. The only papers where sporadically youth work is mentioned are the Youth Strategy and few other policies related to youth that are supported by European Commission.

## **LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL**

Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare is responsible for youth policy in Albania. It has created National Youth Strategy for the period from 2007 to 2013 (no data found on more recent document). Action plan was designed according to priorities in the strategy, but there are no data about its implementation or monitoring and evaluation.

## **PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK**

Youth work is not recognized as a profession.

## **QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS**

Non-governmental organizations are mostly providers of services for youth and organizers of youth activities. There is no specific definition of youth organization, or organization for young people. Also, there are no quality standards in youth work.

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

### **YOUTH WORK DEFINITION**

Complex political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina made the research about youth work also quite difficult. On the level of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina there is definition of 'work with young people' in the Law on youth. It says that work with young people is "planned, useful and conscientious support for young people through their voluntary participation and represents:

- out of school education, that can be complementary to formal education of youth, together with general, social, natural and technical education;
  - creative, artistic, sports and cultural activities with youth;
  - activities and programs that are directed towards development of their abilities, skills and knowledge, as well as social engagement;
  - activities connected to issues as socializing, work environment, school and family;
  - activities and programs that are directed towards benefit, social and health care for youth;
  - recovering of young people, spending time in nature and activities connected to youth tourism;
  - programs designed for specific groups of young people;
  - international working with youth;
  - intercultural cooperation and exchange;
- other models of creative and planned free time of young people." <sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Law on Youth in Federation of BiH (2010), Official Gazette of Federation of BiH, No 36/10, article 8.

Law on youth organization of Republic of Srpska, in addition to defining youth activities in general, also defines youth work:

“Youth work represents part of youth activities that is organized with young people and for young people, happens during free time of youth and is undertaken in order to improve conditions for personal and social development of young people and general social benefit according to their needs, possibilities and with their voluntary participation.”<sup>7</sup>

## **LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL**

As mentioned before, both political entities have brought Laws that defines youth organization and youth policy, but there is no data about any strategy on the level of Federation. However, Republic of Srpska has Strategy that was lasting from 2010 until 2015<sup>8</sup>. The new Strategy is in process of creation.

From further explanation of youth work in the Youth Policy document, it seems that terms ‘work with youth’, ‘youth activity’ and ‘youth work’ are sometimes taken as synonyms, or there is no clear distinction between them. However, the document defines some important goals concerning professionalization and raising quality of youth work.

## **PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK**

Youth work is recognized as profession in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the name ‘associate for working with youth’ in Vocation classification, but information about vocational standard or possible employment options for the vocation were difficult to find.

Organizations dealing with professionalization of youth work and youth work practitioners in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina report that there are no formal or non-formal programs of education of youth workers, as advocating for their establishment and licensing should involve different levels of administration, or 11 Ministries in charge of youth in total. Still, many organizations implement their own programs (Kult, PRONI Centre, Youth Communication Centre, Perpetuum Mobile, etc). Those organizations are based both in Federation of BiH, Republic of Srpska and Brčko District but usually cooperate among each other and offer their programs to participants all over the country.

In Republic of Srpska, there are no data on processes for professionalization of youth work, or recognition of vocation. However, in youth policy document, one of the goals under area of education is also “Defining and establishing educational profile “youth worker” and professionalization of youth work”<sup>9</sup>. This strategic goal is well explained through specific programs, among which is defining vocational standard, educational program (for university studies), establishing study program on one of universities and promoting it, as well as enabling further training and specialization of youth workers according to youth work typology. In addition, there is strategic goal related to creation of system of non-formal education and licensing of youth workers. Unfortunately, there are still no data about implementation of those programs, or their success.

## **QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS**

In both political entities, work with youth, youth activities and youth work is implemented mostly by youth organizations, youth councils and other non-governmental organizations, as well as non-formal groups. Spaces for youth and their activities are also defined by both laws as closed or open space suitable for realization of youth activities.

There are no much data about quality of youth work programs and services in Bosnia and

<sup>7</sup> Law on Youth Organisation of Republic of Srpska (2004), Official Gazette of Republic of Srpska, No 98/04, 119/08 and 1/12, article 2.

<sup>8</sup> Youth policy of Republic of Srpska from 2010 until 2015 (2009), [http://www.vladars.net/sr-SP-Cyrl/Vlada/Ministarstva/mpos/Documents/Omladinska%20politika%20RS%20\(2010-2015.\)%20finalna\\_039486322.pdf](http://www.vladars.net/sr-SP-Cyrl/Vlada/Ministarstva/mpos/Documents/Omladinska%20politika%20RS%20(2010-2015.)%20finalna_039486322.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Youth policy of Republic of Srpska from 2010 until 2015 (2009), page 22



Herzegovina, although in Youth Policy of Republic of Srpska, one of strategic goals refers to creation of quality standards in non-formal education, issuing certificates and creating catalog of certified programs. Again, there is no data about the implementation of these programs or products that came out of them.

## CROATIA

### YOUTH WORK DEFINITION

There is no official definition of youth work in Croatia, although some serious attempts have been made to define it and also create vocational standards. Civil society organizations and networks define youth work in different ways, depending on the type of youth work that they are practicing. Also, when trying to define youth work in literature on the subject authors cite definitions given on European level (European Union and Council of Europe) and by different European countries.<sup>10</sup>

Activities in the field of youth work are described in National program for youth (2014 – 2017) as those which contribute to personal and social development of young people, are voluntary for young people, complementary to formal education, contribute to development of self-confidence and self-employment of young people, as well as competences for establishing and developing quality personal and social relations. Youth work, according to the Program, gives young people opportunity for learning and development of their knowledge and skills in different areas and empowers them for active participation in society and processes of decision making.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to notice that the term “youth work” is translated in Croatia as “rad sa mladima” (work with youth), which makes it a bit difficult to distinguish youth work from other forms of working with young people.

### LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

Law on youth in Croatia is still not adopted. Draft law was introduced in 2014, but suffered serious criticism by civil society, led by Croatian Youth Network. Main requests of youth organizations and organizations for youth were to better define their status by law and enable financial support for their programs, as well as definition of youth work as an activity and as vocation. The recommendation was to involve civil society sector more actively in creating policy documents and apply evidence-based policy making.

At the moment, Croatia has National program for young people, a strategic document valid from 2014 until 2017. In the section about education and training in the context of lifelong learning, one aim is dedicated to youth work: 2.1. Creating institutional prerequisites for promotion of youth work.<sup>12</sup>

### PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK

According to the National program for youth, several measures are foreseen in the field of youth work development; financing of non-formal education programs and fostering capacities of youth organizations and organizations for youth, fostering capacities of staff in government administration by participation in non-formal education programs about youth work and creation of analysis of possibilities for professionalization of youth work.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Bužinkić, E., Čulum, B., Horvat, M., & Kovačić, M. (2015). Youth Work in Croatia: Collecting Pieces for a Mosaic. Child & Youth Services Morić, D., & Puhovski, T. (2012). Rad s mladima-definicije, izazovi i europska perspektiva. Zagreb: Agencija za mobilnost i programe Europske unije

Kovačić, M., Čulum, B. (2015) Teorija i praksa rada s mladima: prilog razumijevanju rada s mladima u hrvatskom kontekstu, Mreža mladih Hrvatske, Zagreb

<sup>11</sup>Nacionalni program za mlade za razdoblje od 2014. do 2017.godine (2014), Ministarstvo socijalne politike i mladih, Zagreb, page 21

<sup>12</sup>Nacionalni program za mlade za razdoblje od 2014. do 2017.godine (2014), Ministarstvo socijalne politike i mladih, Zagreb, page 23

<sup>13</sup> ibidem

Together with attempt to create official definition of youth work, the Ministry of social affairs and youth tried to create vocational standard for youth workers. Experts group was functioning in 2015, but their work stopped before concrete results were visible. Some researches were undertaken in order to create basis for developing vocational standards, but the process wasn't continued. Croatian youth network has implemented series of training courses in the field of recognition of youth work with representatives of its member organizations and in cooperation with NAPOR, but follow up to the project is still waiting for the official recognition of youth work as vocation and creation of its vocational standards.

In the meantime, youth organizations and organizations for youth are developing and implementing their own training programs for youth workers, without official curriculum.

#### Quality of youth work programs

The definition of youth work program and its distinguishing from projects and activities is not officially included in strategic documents, although organizations in the field of youth design and implement various programs in different types of youth work. In publication of Croatian youth network, several types of youth work are recognized; non-formal education in youth work, international youth work, open youth work, activism and youth participation, peer education, social inclusion of youth, free-time activities and information and counseling.

Providers of youth work programs are almost exclusively civil society organizations, who usually run different services and spaces where those programs are implemented. Most usual are youth clubs, youth centres and youth information centres. Youth clubs are led by youth workers who create the programs together with young people, while youth centres are wider than clubs in the sense that they have different activities for and with youth, not limited only to youth work. Youth information centres are following standards created by European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYCA) and European Youth Information Charter. Financial support for youth clubs and centres is provided by EU Social Fund, through open calls, which is additional motivation for organizations to implement these services.

## MONTENEGRO

### YOUTH WORK DEFINITION

Youth work is defined in the Law on youth, which is adopted in 2016. The definition is as follows:

“Youth work represents activities that are organized with young people and for young people and are based on non-formal education, according to their needs and abilities.”<sup>15</sup>

More detailed definition and explanation in National Strategy, which was also adopted in 2016, together with Action plan. It explains that youth work is conducted in the frame of extracurricular activities, in youth clubs, youth centres and civil society organizations, institutions, schools, etc. It contributes to development of young people into conscientious, responsible and active members of society, who contribute to community development, show initiative and respect diversity. In close cooperation with families and other professionals, youth work helps in efforts to lower youth unemployment, early school leaving, social exclusion and structured leisure time.

### LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

As mentioned before, both Law on Youth and National Strategy on Youth are adopted last year. Ministry of Education is in charge of both documents and youth policy and youth work in general. Under the ministry there is Office for Youth and Sports (Uprava za mlade i sport) that is directly creating and

<sup>14</sup>. Law on youth (2016), <http://www.sluzbenilist.me/PravniAktDetalji.aspx?tag=%7BCA09F0D9-2A12-4305-9421-5C2E3D4AFC72%7D>

<sup>15</sup>. National Strategy on Youth (2016),



implementing those documents, through cooperation with civil sector.

Professionalization, recognition and quality assurance of youth work is defined in National Strategy on Youth<sup>15</sup> under overall goal: Young people are healthy, secure, have access to adequate support system for transition to adulthood and self-actualization, they are self-conscientious, innovative, show initiative and respect diversity. The value of youth work is recognised in this document as support for youth in their transition to autonomy and its development is envisioned through professionalization of youth workers and youth activists, recognition of its value and effects on society, quality assurance of programs and support to establishing and maintaining the work of local youth clubs and youth centres.

## **PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK**

### **VOCATIONAL STANDARD**

There is professional standard for youth activist, defined by Council for Qualifications (Savjet za kvalifikacije)<sup>16</sup>. This vocation requests high school qualification and represents 2st vocational level in youth work. According to description, a youth activist has competences to create and develop project proposals, organize different activities for and with young people, supports their initiatives and "recognizes, uses and directs leadership potential within him/herself and other young people and transfers it to activism in local communities". The last citation seems to explain that youth activists are also young people, working with their peers.

As mentioned above, National Youth Strategy calls for professionalization of human resources in youth work, youth activists and youth workers, through creation of standardized and accredited educational programs. It is interesting to note that this measure already foresees that those youth workers and youth leaders would be employed in youth clubs and youth centres, but also schools and other institutions on a local and national level, in addition to engagement in civil society organizations.

### **EDUCATION FOR YOUTH WORKERS**

Some forms of formal education in youth work used to exist on Faculty of Philosophy, as elective courses - Youth work I and Youth work II from 2008 until 2010 on study programs of sociology and philosophy. At the moment, there aren't any subjects connected with youth work on universities, nor study programs in youth work within formal education system.

On the other hand, there are different non-formal education courses for youth work or some aspects of it. Still, there is no official recognition from the state for any of them, no certification or licensing of youth workers. These programs are mostly implemented by civil society organizations.

### **QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS**

Youth activities, projects or programs aren't defined in any document on national level, therefore it is also not determined who could be providers of those activities. Law on youth defines youth organizations and organizations for youth, but their functioning is still very broad and is not defined more clearly in National Strategy on Youth either.

The situation at the moment is similar to most of Western Balkan countries, in the sense that

<sup>16</sup> [http://upravazamladeisport.me/index.php/mladi/aktivnosti/item/download/56\\_2acbdb1c45f91998a0ea152c69d40f07](http://upravazamladeisport.me/index.php/mladi/aktivnosti/item/download/56_2acbdb1c45f91998a0ea152c69d40f07)



most of youth activities and youth work programs are implemented by civil sector. Youth organizations and organizations for youth offer services according to their target group, organizational goals and capacities, as well as depending on financial possibilities. There are no quality standards defined or system of accreditation; therefore programs aren't recognized enough by youth, institutions and general public.

National Strategy on Youth foresees creation of the system for quality assurance of youth work programs together with measures for assessment and monitoring. In addition, support to youth centres and youth clubs on local level is also one of the measures in the Strategy, whose implementation would ensure available spaces for youth work programs and youth activities in each municipality following the standards of Council of Europe, as well as professional staff to implement them.

It would be only fair to add that Montenegro has certain tradition in youth work professionalization, promotion and implementation, having in mind that PRONI Institute for social education of youth (later Forum Syd) has educated generations of youth workers who further worked on establishment and quality assurance of youth work programs. The legacy of PRONI is now in the hands of Forum MNE, which is intensively working on all the issues mentioned above, concerning professionalization of youth work.

## SERBIA

### YOUTH WORK DEFINITION

Youth work is defined in the Law on Youth together with youth activities. The definition is as follows: "Youth work shall mean such youth activities organized by and for young people, based on non-formal education, carried out in young people's free time and undertaken with the aim of improving the conditions for personal and social development of young people, in accordance with their needs and abilities, in which young people voluntarily participate."<sup>17</sup>

National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) was established in 2009 and one of the first documents adopted by the Assembly was "Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Youth Work", which defined youth work and its main characteristics. According to NAPOR "youth work presents a professional, pedagogical work with young people that takes place outside the formal education system, i.e. within leisure time of young people, and in which young people participate on a voluntary basis. Youth work is complementary to formal education. It represents planned (and continuous) process of educational character, created with a purpose of providing support to young people in the process of becoming independent. Youth work is implemented by youth workers, who help young people in their personal and social development in order to become active members in the community and participants in decision making processes. The idea of youth work is based on creating safe environment and opportunities for active participation of young people. Young people in youth work acquire competencies for employability, reflect on and build their value and attitudes, hence their identity."<sup>18</sup>

NAPOR also makes clear distinction between youth work and work with youth, where the later includes all activities where young people are target group; like education, social work, cultural, sports activities, etc. and among them youth work.

<sup>17</sup> Law on Youth (2011), article 3, <http://www.mos.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/The%20Law%20on%20Youth.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Andrašević I., Bulat M. Kalaba V., Volf I., Prkosovački V., Milutinović J., Hadrik N. (2015) Rečnik omladinske politike - Definiranje pojmova i aktera omladinskepolitike u Republici Srbiji i njihovih uloga, Novi Sad, NAPOR, page 35

## LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

Ministry of Youth and Sports is in charge of youth policy, therefore for youth work and all regulations concerning it. On national level there is Law on Youth, adopted in 2011 and currently in the procedure of amendments. Even before the Law is introduced there was National Youth strategy adopted in 2008 for the period from 2008 until 2014. This first Strategy had quality assurance and professionalization of youth work among its specific objectives. It aimed at developing and implementing quality standards in youth work, together with mechanisms for their monitoring and quality improvement. In addition, development of standards in education and training of youth workers, as well as development of vocational standard was some of the objectives<sup>19</sup>.

New National Youth Strategy for the period of 2015 - 2025 was adopted last year and continues to support youth work, through specific objective: "Improved quality and availability of youth work and ensured recognition of youth work."<sup>20</sup>

### PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK

NAPOR has developed vocational standards for 3 occupational levels in youth work: youth leader, youth worker and specialist in youth work. Curricula for education of youth leaders and youth workers are also developed, as well as mechanism for their implementation, while for the third level university degree is required. There is also a mechanism of validation of previously gained competences in youth work for youth leaders and youth workers, which enables people who already have extensive experience in youth work to gain certificate without following the whole education process.

However, the vocation is still not officially recognized by the state and youth workers still mostly work in civil society organizations. Therefore the certificate that NAPOR issues to youth

workers and youth leaders after successful process of training or validation is recognized by its member organizations and Ministry of Youth and Sport, but not by other institutions where youth workers could find their employment. There are guarantees that vocation of youth worker and youth leader will be included in the new National Qualifications Framework, which should be finalized very soon. This would give grounds for further advocacy in the direction of employment of youth workers in different formal institutions that have young people as their target group (e.g. schools, university, centers for social work, police departments, etc).

Curricula for education of youth leaders and youth workers developed by NAPOR are based on non-formal education methodology with strong practical component. Curricula for both levels consist of 5 (youth leaders) or 4 (youth workers) 'theoretical' modules, where participants are introduced with basic concepts of youth work and are developing competences important for their future vocation. Modules are organized in combination of online learning and direct work with group of participants, with specific tasks after each of the modules (in the forms of essays, small projects, activity plans, etc.). In addition to modules, participants have mandatory practical work with young people in their organizations, which includes creation of program with and for young people, its implementation through 25 to 30 meetings with the group, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The whole practical placement is supervised by experienced youth worker, who is in charge of mentoring participants' learning throughout the whole education program.

<sup>19</sup> Nacionalna strategija za mlade 2008 - 2014. Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia No 55/08, page 40

<sup>20</sup> National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2025, page 19

<http://www.mos.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/NSM%202015-2025%20ENGLISH%20..pdf>



According to mechanism for implementation of curricula, there are 2 options for carrying them out; the first is coordinated by NAPOR, where Secretariat is fundraising for the course and is in charge of selection of participants, logistics and all the organizational aspects of the course, while member organizations are licensed to implement modules and practical placement. In the second option, each of member organizations can be licensed by NAPOR to implement the whole course, independently, or in partnership with other member organizations. In this case, NAPOR is also issuing certificates for participants who successfully finished the program, which is documented with their grades for each of the modules and reports from practical placement.

At the moment there is no formal education for youth workers in Serbia. Several attempts of introducing formal education in youth work have been made in the past, but none was sustainable enough. Bachelor studies Communicologist - community youth work was developed in cooperation of Centre for Youth Work (NAPOR member organization), Alfa University and Jonkoping University from Sweden. Only one generation enrolled in 2007 and finished their studies. Master studies in Community youth work were developed through TEMPUS project on University of Novi Sad and first generation enrolled in 2012/2013 school year. At the moment, there is no call for next generation of students for this course, which is probably because of little interest for it in previous years. Currently there is only one electoral subject - Introduction to community youth work on master studies in pedagogy. NAPOR and its member organizations aren't giving up on forming partnerships with public and private universities in order to develop program for education of youth workers through formal system. We are convinced that with recognition of the vocation, this process will have a significant reason to move forward.

## **QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS**

Law on youth recognizes youth associations and associations for youth as two entities which are implementing youth activities, thus youth work as part of youth activities. Still, the law sees other subject of youth policy as responsible for youth activities, which allows different institutions to implement youth work programs, although it is currently not the case.

NAPOR has defined 9 types of youth work, after consulting its member organizations and their youth work practice. Youth work typology is integral part of Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Youth Work and includes: political awareness and active citizenship, health education, prevention of social exclusion, social education, intercultural and international awareness, youth information, environment protection, youth counseling and youth work based on free time.

In 2010 NAPOR has adopted a document defining quality standards for youth work programs - "Quality assurance of youth work programs". The document introduces 8 standards that cover different aspects of youth work programs, together with mechanism for accreditation, as well as for support to organizations in implementation and improvement of standards. So far more than 50 organizations got involved in accreditation process, some of them already working continuously for more than 5 years on improvement of their youth work program through process of reaccreditation. At the same time NAPOR is lobbying and advocating to donors and decision making bodies for recognition of accreditation according to these quality standards in youth work. The main idea is to promote accreditation as guarantee that organizations have certain level of quality in their work with young people and are open and motivated for continuous improvement. Ministry of youth and sport is supporting accreditation process through its financial contribution to NAPOR programs, as well as by valuation of accreditation during evaluation of projects in annual open calls for associations.



## YOUTH WORK DEFINITION

“Youth work is an organized and target-oriented form of youth action and is for the youth, within which the youth, based on their own efforts, contribute to their own inclusion in society, strengthen their competences and contribute to the development of the community. The implementation of various forms of youth work is based on the volunteer participation of the youth regardless of their interest, cultural, principle or political orientation”<sup>21</sup> is definition found in official youth policy document.

## LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

Authority responsible for youth policy and youth work is Ministry of Education Science and Sport and within it Office of Republic of Slovenia for Youth.

Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act is policy document brought in 2010 and it describes youth work and areas of youth work; provides measures for public funding of youth work as well as awards for youth work projects and youth workers. Pursuant to this act, the entire youth work sphere is in the public interest.

National Program for Youth is made for the period of 10 years (2012 - 2021) and defines concrete measures in the sphere of youth work, such as:

- annual call for youth work programs;
- specific calls for youth and youth work organizations to develop youth sector capacities and improve young people’s competencies using the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund in the period 2007-2013;
- annual call for youth work awards and youth workers awards;

development of non-formal educational paths for youth workers, further improvement of validation of non-formal learning are included in the Operational program of Republic of Slovenia for the programming period 2014-2020 (the coherent strategy of Slovenia for investment of the EU Cohesion Policy funds).

## PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK

### VOCATIONAL STANDARD

There is no officially recognized vocation or profession, so there is no standard as well. Office for Youth has an initiative to prepare professional standards and catalogs of standards of professional knowledge and skills for youth worker. Initiative was proposed in May 2015 and is adopted by sectorial committee for professional standards so the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training started with the procedures of drafting the professional standards and catalogs of standards of professional knowledge and skills<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>. Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (2010)

<sup>22</sup>. [http://www.ursm.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/mladinsko\\_delo/](http://www.ursm.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/mladinsko_delo/)

## PROGRAM OR CURRICULA FOR EDUCATION OF YOUTH WORKERS

There is still no program in the frame of formal education for youth workers. The first step would be the definition of professional standards, recognition of the profession and/or vocation and then designing the university program. However, some steps were made already in that direction, through projects of civil sector in partnership with formal education institutions and government. One example is project "Razvoj modelov neformalnega in formalnega izobraževanja za mladinskega delavca za vključevanje v programe organizacij"<sup>23</sup> that was led by Institute for development of social responsibility and had partners among youth organizations, youth centers, universities and secondary schools. Result of the project was designing several models for education of youth workers, including subjects on Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor, as well as optional subject for high school students. The project also designed manual that was used by many organizations in developing their own models of education in the frame of non-formal education.

National program for youth also defines priorities in youth work professionalization, among others: Creating capacity for quality youth work and the establishment of a national system of training and education for youth workers and youth leaders. One of the indicators for this priority area is also implementation of national education program for youth workers and youth leaders.

## QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK

Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act recognizes youth organizations and organizations for youth as providers of activities for young people<sup>24</sup>. In addition, youth centers are defined, as well as local and national youth councils, as entities who are also implementing youth activities. There is a distinction between 'youth program', implemented by youth organizations and 'program for youth', implemented by organizations for youth. Both types of programs are defined as set of activities/measures that are 'carried out continuously throughout most of the year and involving a large number of participants (and holders of activities in case of youth programs).

It seems that there are no quality standards in youth work, recognized by the state, but there are other mechanisms for recognition of organizations and programs. One is the possibility for organizations to obtain the status of an organization in the public interest in the youth sector.

Criteria are:

- regular implementation of youth programs or programs for the youth;
- important achievements in the development and integration of youth work;
- appropriate material and personnel capacities for their operation.

The Ministry is obliged to keep the record of organizations in the public interest in the youth sector, who gain certain benefits with this status, such as advantage in tenders for obtaining funds from the state budget, exemption from payment of administrative fees for documents and actions in connection with the performance of their activities in the public interest, possibility to use immovable property of the municipality or state (offices, etc.) for their activities free of charge, etc.

The Ministry is also responsible for issuing awards for 'extraordinary achievements in the youth sector'. One of them is National award for quality and successful work in the field of youth work over a long period of time. It is yet another way for the state to recognize quality of long-term and sustainable youth work programs.

<sup>23</sup>: <http://www.mladinski-delavec.si/>

<sup>24</sup>: Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act (2010)

**REVIEW ON YOUTH  
WORK PRACTICE IN  
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

## DEFINITION OF YOUTH WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Like in most other countries, defining youth work in the Republic of Macedonia is a long term process of finding the adequate wording to describe the various activities and approaches to providing support for development of youth. Considering the fact that youth work in the Republic of Macedonia has still not been formally established as a standardized system supporting youth, the youth work providers implement youth work programs which differ in various aspects to a higher or lesser extent. In line with this, there are various ways to define, not only youth work as an activity, but also the types of youth work, the youth worker as a profession, the youth work providers and other related concepts. The challenge is to establish a definition that would be broad enough to cover all the various approaches to youth work, developed by civil society organizations, but also specific enough to distinguish youth work from the other related approaches in the work with young people.

What is striking is that the initial attempts to define youth work in the Republic of Macedonia mainly stuck to defining its goal, and not its essence as an activity. In this process, the goal is usually narrowly defined and only covers one aspect of youth work, without capturing the comprehensiveness of its share in the development of young people. Thus, for example, according to the National Youth Strategy from 2005, the goal of youth work is "active participation of youth in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the local community"<sup>25</sup>. According to the Leadership and Youth Work in the Community Program, implemented in the Republic of Macedonia in 2011 by the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle and the South East European University, the goal of youth work is to "develop the capacities of young people, create conditions and build positive relations with young people so that they can respond to the needs of the community"<sup>26</sup>.

As a result of the more intensive networking processes among the stakeholders in the area of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia, in recent years definitions have emerged which define the term more broadly, covering various approaches and fields of action in the development of youth. One of the more comprehensive definitions is the one conceived at the meeting for the establishing of the National Union for Youth Workers, held in April 2012, as part of the initiative of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in order to recognize and professionalize youth work. This definition was borrowed by the newly-established Union for Youth Work (UYW) and defines youth work as "a term used to describe all the activities, approaches and processes aimed at building the capacities of youth by means of non-formal and spontaneous learning for the purpose of their personal development and active inclusion in society"<sup>27</sup>. Through several meetings with civil society organizations offering youth work, UYW has also defined other concepts related to youth work: types of youth work, geographical scope of youth work, youth work providers, youth worker, etc.

According to UYW, a youth work provider is "any legal entity that offers youth work, according to the criteria for youth work", while a youth worker is a "physical person providing youth work to youth providers. A youth worker is a person who possess the necessary competences to do youth work. A youth workers carries out his/her activities within an organization/institution which is a youth work provider"<sup>28</sup>.

Unlike the National Youth Strategy from 2005, the latest national strategy for the period between 2016 and 2025 includes the definition of youth work. According to this document, youth work is an organized and systematic process of education and support for the authentic development of youth in order to realize their overall personal and social potential"<sup>29</sup>. The National Youth Strategy

<sup>25</sup>. National Youth Strategy 2005, p. 19

<sup>26</sup>. Youth work in the Republic of Macedonia – Stefan Manevski's MA thesis p. 13

<sup>27</sup>. Defining the basic terms – UYW internal document

<sup>28</sup>. Defining the basic terms – an internal document of UYW

<sup>29</sup>. National Youth Strategy from 2016, p. 17



2016-2025 does not delve into defining the remaining concepts related to youth work.

The most serious attempt to define youth work was carried out within the legislative initiative for recognition and professionalization of youth work, initiated in 2012. Apart from defining youth work, the draft-framework for the Draft-Law also proceeded to set the criteria for quality of youth work, the criteria for youth workers and other related areas. However, the legislative initiative came to a halt and the Law on Youth Work never entered assembly procedure.

The Draft-Law on Youth from 2011 had a similar destiny. Article 3 of the third chapter from this Draft-Law contained a definition of youth work. According to this article, "youth work implied activities directed towards improving and aiding the personal and social development of youth through their voluntary participation, where their formal, academic and vocational education and training is upgraded, and is provided through voluntary organizations for youth work"<sup>30</sup>.

From the analysis of the previously proposed definitions of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia, it can be concluded that the main differences refer to the following issues:

- Youth work as an activity directed mainly towards strengthening of youth participation, or their own personal development;
- Involving non-formal and/or informal education as an integral element of youth work;
- Youth work as an activity offered exclusively by civil society associations, or other social stake holders, mainly educational institutions, or other public institutions.

Despite these profound differences in the way of understanding youth work in the Republic of Macedonia, recently there has been a noticeable tendency to bring the standpoints of most of the civil society organizations and the other social stakeholders closer, with the purpose of achieving consensus that youth work is a structured set of various approaches to working with youth which could lead to building the youth capacity as individuals and members of society by using the methods of non-formal education and informal learning conducted by youth workers engaged by civil associations and other legal entities working to support the development of youth.

## **AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

Although youth work is often labelled as a new activity in the Republic of Macedonia, organized activities for support of youth development have existed for many years back, albeit in different forms. After the independence, the necessary structural and critical changes in the work with young people occurred, which led to the need to redefine the activity – a process which is still in progress.

In the period when the Republic of Macedonia was a part of SFR Yugoslavia, youth work was practiced through the pioneers' centers and associations of the communist and socialist youth (SKOJ and SSO).

The measures and activities conducted by these organizations involved giving scholarships, youth employment programs and housing allocation. Through SKOJ and SSO, as first forms of youth work, young people gained the values deemed necessary for an active engagement of youth in society. This model of youth work was guided by the ideology of self-managing socialism. Therefore, the principle values of youth work during this period were "applying an education with a previously set

<sup>30</sup> страна 8 Draft- Law on Youth from 2011



goal, promoting patriotic values, volunteering, no religion/atheism, collectivism, brotherhood and unity, equality and uniformity that was typical of the existing system<sup>31</sup>.

Some of the structures in the previous state remained functional after independence was declared in 1991, but with the course of time they were covered by the processes of transformation and privatization. The National Youth Union of Macedonia, which was the inheritor of the Union of the Socialist Youth of Macedonia, was closed. At the same time, the pioneers' centers became a potential subject of privatization, especially due to the inability of the local governments to take over their funding. These changes took place when the Macedonian civil sector was still in its infancy and was not able to play a more active role in creating a functional system for support of the youth.

The situation significantly changed with the initiation of the project for opening of the Babylon Centers, initially on the premises of the existing pioneers' centers. These centers were open at the initiative of an Italian NGO financed by the European Confederation of Organizations that provide care and nurturing, with the financial support of the Children's Fund of the United Nations (UNICEF). The initial idea was to develop programs that would correspond to the needs of children and youth to fill their time. According to the media reports from that period, the project goal was to improve the level of building trust among the different ethnic groups, develop programs to fill the children's and youth free time as well as help them with employment<sup>32</sup>. The Babylon centers offered various activities for children and youth, such as computer skills, creativity, social skills, English, debate, law and journalism. Apart from this, they also organized drug, alcohol and smoking prevention activities.

After UNICEF withdrew the funding, the Babylon centers continued functioning with the support of World Bank. After the World Bank completed its program as well, most of the total of 23 Babylon centers stopped working. In spite of this, the project played a major role in the development of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia. The Babylon centers were not directly promoted as models of youth work, but their way of work had a profound influence on the approach that most of the civil associations adopted as a way to support the youth development.

The absence of an autochthonous and formally accepted model of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia left space for the civil associations to develop various, differing approaches to youth work. With the financial support of foreign and international foundations, several Macedonian associations attempted to introduce different approaches to youth work based on the models from other European countries. Sharing other countries' experienced was particularly facilitated with the launch of the European programs for education and mobility, that Macedonia was entitled to take part in since the beginning in the 2000s. As a result of this, youth work in Macedonia picked up elements from Britain, France, Belgium, Austria and other countries. These diverse approaches included opening open youth centers, youth information centers, youth street work, activities with youth with limited abilities, etc.

Another significant milestone in the development of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia was the training organized by the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle in collaboration with the Jönköping University from Sweden in the area of youth work. In the period between 2008 and 2011, a large part of the youth workers attended the long-term training "The Fundamentals of Youth Work in the Community", which was implemented in 6 modules on an annual level. The Proactive Youth Centers were also founded within their project, as an attempt for sustainable model of youth work

<sup>31</sup>. How to understand youth work in the community, Vanja Kalaba 2009, p.7

<sup>32</sup>. Dnevnik daily, 18 March 2006

at a local and national level in order to facilitate the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes among young people, support them in the exercise of their rights and encourage them to take active part in the community. What was typical of this program was the involvement of youth workers, youth organizations and organizations working with youth, professors, parents and institutions of education, the decision-makers at the local/national level, in order for them to get acquainted with the benefits of youth work. The long-term initiative of the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle in the area of youth work resulted in the introduction of the graduate studies in Leadership and Youth Work in the Community, a program implemented in 2011 in collaboration with the South East European University. Only one generation of youth workers enrolled at the course, and after it closed down, the other activities of the Triangle Center in this area also stopped.

The last surge of more serious interventions in the area of youth work started in 2012, with the initiative to recognize and professionalize youth work in the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). One of the outcomes of this initiative was the establishing of the Union of Youth Work, as the only professional association of youth workers in the Republic of Macedonia. This initiative was followed by several other projects for standardization and professionalization of youth work, two of which under the Erasmus+ Program of the European Commission, implemented by the SEGA Coalition and the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, as well as this project within the IPA Program for Further Strengthening and Financial Sustainability of Civil Society. Thanks to the large number of activities in this area, implemented by several different civil society associations in a short period of time, the understanding of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia largely increased in a short period of time, both in the civil sector, and among the state and public institutions, and it also led to the creation of a climate beneficial for initiation of specific processes for formalization of youth work, such as the submission of the initiative for a vocational standard for the occupation of youth worker.

## **LAWS AND STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON A NATIONAL LEVEL**

Considering the fact that in the Republic of Macedonia there is no Law on Youth, the highest legal act in the area of youth is the National Youth Strategy. The National Youth Strategy is a document adopted by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia at the proposal of the Agency for Youth and Sport. Thus far in the history of the Republic of Macedonia two national youth strategies have been adopted – the first one for the period between 2005 and 2015, and the second one between 2006 and 2025.

Youth work is mentioned in both of the youth strategies, under the term local youth work. In both strategies there is a separate section on youth work, in 2005 as one of the thematic priorities, and in 2016 as a thematic area. However, if we compare the two texts, it can be noticed that there is an evolution in the treatment of youth work as an activity. While the first strategy largely confuses youth work with youth participation and activities of youth associations, the strategy from 2016 distinguishes it as a separate activity much more clearly, with corresponding goals, priorities and challenges. The difference in the treatment of youth work in the two documents probably indicates an increased social and institutional recognition of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia over the period of 10 years.

The Youth Strategy from 2005 singles out youth work as one of the thematic priorities, but fails to define its meaning. According to this strategy, the goal of youth work is “active participation of youth



in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the local community”<sup>33</sup>. The strategy highlights two goal interventions which are not directly and necessarily related to youth work – establishing mechanisms for implementation of local youth strategies and support of local youth civil associations. Later on, the document names strategies covering some of the areas treated by youth work, such as social inclusion, youth information, career counseling, etc.

The Action Plan for implementation of the National Youth Strategy from 2005 sets three specific goals:

- Improved social life of young people
- Increased active participation of youth through development of local youth strategies
- Improved financial and material circumstances of the national and local youth civil associations<sup>34</sup>

From the manner in which the strategy and the action plan define the goals in the area of youth work, it can be noticed that during this period there was a lack of understanding of the essence and function of youth work. The goal of youth work is only presented for the purpose of strengthening youth participation in the social life and the local processes of youth policy-making. At the same time, youth work is perceived as identical to the activity of youth civil association, which leaves the impression that back in 2005, youth work was considered to be a set of activities of youth associations with youth, and mainly directed towards civic activism and engagement.

The national Youth Strategy from 2016 defines youth work as one of the nine thematic areas. According to this document, “local youth work is an organized and systematic process of education and support to the authentic development of youth with the goal of fulfilling their overall personal, social and societal potential”<sup>35</sup>. With this document, for the first time the Macedonian institutions recognize youth work as an organized system of activities with an educational function and its share in the personal development of youth. The Strategy states that unfortunately, youth work in Macedonia is still not defined as one of the key components in the process of education, protection and development of youth and comes to a conclusion that consequently, this activity in our country mainly relies on the activities of civil society organizations. In this way, this strategy lays down the foundation for broadening of the term of youth work provider in such way that it would cover other social stakeholders apart from civil associations. The strategy identifies the fact that youth work is not formally regulated, standardized and integrated as a part of the system of education, and that protection of youth is the main challenge to youth work, which is very close to the challenges recognized by Union of Youth Work. In order to address the identified challenges, the strategy sets three goals:

- Recognizing youth work as a key tool in aiding the positive personal and social development of youth;
- Formal recognition and regulation of the application and offer of youth work as an integral part of the educational system in the country;
- Ensuring high quality and available supply of youth work on the territory of each municipality.

From the measures envisaged under the three long-term goals it can be concluded that the Macedonian institutions are eager to support the processes for standardization and institutionalization of youth work; to recognize the vocation of a youth workers and develop adequate education process for it; to set quality standards for youth work, as well as support the local authorities in providing conditions for implementation of youth work in every municipality. By adopting this document, the Agency for Youth and Sport largely recognizes and supports the processes in the area of youth work, initiated by the civil society associations in this area.

<sup>33</sup>. National Youth Strategy 2005 – 2015, p 19

<sup>34</sup>. Action Plan for implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2005-2015 of the Republic of Macedonia, p. 32

<sup>35</sup>. National Youth Strategy 2016-2025, p. 17

Additional recognition for the ongoing processes was carried out through the Action Plan for realization of the national strategy for the period from 2016 to 2017. This document integrates the planned activities of the associations which had ongoing initiatives to recognize youth work, along with the donor funds already provided in the course of the drafting the action plan. In addition, the Agency for Youth and Sport commits to provide support to the processes of recognizing the building the capacities of youth workers for implementation of quality work with youth. However, what this document lacks are additional specific measures outside the projects of civil society organizations. It remains to be seen whether the next action plan will envisage more specific measures for the purpose of realization of the strategy goals.

In the period between September 2012 and June 2013, the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) worked on a legislative initiative for recognition and professionalization of youth work. The Agency for Youth and Sport also joined the initiative and signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with CID. An expert was also engaged, with additional support from OSCE who worked on preparing the Draft-Law on Youth Work, together with the civil associations active in the area of youth work. Although the draft-framework for the Law on Youth Work was prepared, the process was interrupted, and the law never went into procedure. The main reason for the termination of the process was the conclusion of the newly-founded Union of Youth Work that the conditions for adoption of a legal document had still not been fulfilled due to the lack of familiarity with the act on the part of the social stakeholders, above all, civil associations, with many of the issues from the area of youth work.

## **PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK ASSOCIATIONS**

The first professional youth work association in Macedonia was founded in 2008, under the title of National Association of Youth Workers (NAYW). NAYW was created under the initiative of the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle, in collaboration with several civil society associations and government institutions. NAYW's goal was to improve the quality of youth work and enhance the knowledge, skills and behavior of youth workers, thus providing their personal and professional development. NAYW had the mission to develop and promote the vocation of youth worker and establish the youth work standards that would be recognized and accepted by society.

This professional association was created in the period when Triangle implemented trainings for youth workers under the title "Foundations of Youth Work in the Community". The main driving forces behind the creation of NAYW were individuals involved in this training. NAYW did not manage to realize the set goals and was fully shut down after the trainings conducted by Triangle stopped.

In 2013 the Union for Youth Work (UYW) which is nowadays the only professional association of youth workers in the Republic of Macedonia, was founded. UYW was created as a result of the initiative of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID), supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The founding of the organization was preceded by a large number of bilateral meetings, meetings with civil associations and other networking activities. The title, goals, vision, mission and objectives of UYW were defined at a meeting for the establishing of a national association, attended by 23 youth workers from several civil associations, as well as a representative of the Agency for Youth and Sport.

UYW is working on systematization of youth work and support to youth workers in the Republic of Macedonia by creating a platform for networking, collaboration and creation of a public awareness about the importance of youth work. UYW's goal is to provide recognized and quality youth work and a solid system for support of youth. In the process of founding of the Union its main activities



were set to be: public recognition of youth work, adoption of legislation related to youth work, setting the criteria for standardization and building the capacities of youth workers and organizations.

The Union for Youth Work has fifteen members – civil associations acting as youth work providers. Since its founding, UYW has been actively involved in all the initiatives in the area of recognition of youth work. Despite the lack of human resources, UYW represents an important stakeholder in the area of youth work in Macedonia, as the only body that represents the interests of youth workers and youth work providers.

## **EDUCATION OF YOUTH WORKERS**

The most serious attempt to educate youth workers in Macedonia was the training “Foundations of Youth Work in the Community”, implemented by the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle, in collaboration with the Jönköping University. In the period from 2008 to 2011, Triangle conducted annual trainings with groups of youth workers, structured in 6 separate modules.

The trainings target group were representatives of civil associations, professors from primary and secondary schools, as well as representatives of the local institutions. The training was held in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tearce and Kavadarci, and the topics covered involved: introduction to youth work in the community and personal development: adolescence; work with individuals and groups; work with conflict and diversity; management of youth work in the community. Apart from participation in the modules, youth workers also got individual support in the form of tutorials i.e. mentorship. The final part of the training consisted of mandatory practical work of about 25 hours of direct work with youth.

In 2011 the program became part of the South East European University as a graduate course in Leadership and Youth Work in the Community, once again in collaboration between the Center for Non-formal Education Triangle and the Jönköping University from Sweden, in consultations with the University from Bologna and the University from Ljubljana. The program for these graduate studies in youth work was drafted based on research, analyses of the needs of the youth, taking into account the most pressing issues and challenges that young people in Macedonia faced .

The program had the goal to educate and professionally enable youth workers and trainers to work towards improvement of the situation of youth, maximum utilization of their personal potential and incentives for their active role in the community. Only one generation of youth workers signed up for this program, mainly consisting of previous participants in the trainings offered by Triangle. The low interest in the study program can probably be explained with the low recognition of youth work on a social level, as well as the non-existence of youth worker as a vocation. In fact, although the studies in youth work had started, the initiative for standardization of the vocation of youth worker was never submitted, thus failing to address one of the main needs of youth workers – the legal grounds for their employment.

In order to fill the gap that occurred with the termination of the trainings offered by Triangle, some civil associations, active in the area of youth work, have tried to conduct trainings for youth workers on several occasions. Some of them are the Center for Youth Activism Krik, the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, (CID) and the Youth Association Kreativ. The aim of these trainings was, through a few modules, the participants to gain knowledge, techniques and skills to conduct various types of youth work with the associations’ target groups. Upon the completion of the trainings, the participants often had the chance to continue to develop new projects and programs within the organizations’ annual activities.



In recent years professional pilot projects for youth workshops were conducted, as a part of several projects in the area of standardization and professionalization of youth work. An example for this is the training "Your first step towards becoming a youth worker", implemented in 2016 by the SEGA Coalition and its partnering organization from France as part of the Erasmus+ Project "Recognizing Youth Work", supported by the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility.

A pilot training was also conducted within this project "Youth Workers United", supported by the IPA Program for further strengthening and financial sustainability of civil society, and implemented by the Youth Cultural Center – Bitola and the partnering organizations – Youth Association Creative, the South East European Youth Network (SEEYN) and the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) from Serbia. The program for the pilot training was prepared in collaboration with the Union for Youth Work and one module from the methodology of youth work – peer education, was implemented.

## **QUALITY OF YOUTH WORK PROGRAMS**

Due to the non-existence of formal documents in the area of youth work, at the moment there are no defined criteria on the quality of youth work programs in the Republic of Macedonia. The only source of guidelines on how to achieve quality are the internal documents of the Union for Youth Work. The UYW's main goal is to ensure recognized and high-quality youth work and a solid youth support system, so some of the meetings between the member-associations were directed towards synchronizing the basic quality standards. Other associations active in the area of youth work have also developed their criteria and ethical standards.

The draft-framework of the Draft-Law on Youth Work from 2012 contained an article which stipulated that the quality criteria should contain indicators in the following areas: technical capacities, human resources, non-profit activities and program quality (inclusion of youth, learning possibilities, inclusion of youth with limited abilities, adequate approach). The idea at the time was for the quality criteria to be additionally prescribed by the Agency for Youth and Sport in collaboration with the Union for Youth Work and apply as a minimal standard on a national level that would serve to guarantee the quality of youth work.

Considering the fact that the draft-law did not enter assembly procedure, the quality criteria were never formalized. However, in general, there is consensus that there should be minimum criteria that any youth work program proposed by a youth work provider will have to fulfill. In addition, most of the stakeholders in this area agree that there should be criteria for youth workers that would define the basic competences that anyone working with young people should have.

In the period between 2015 and 2017 two projects were implemented involving activities related to setting up criteria for youth workers – "Recognizing Youth Work" by the SEGA Coalition and "Youth Workers United" by Youth Cultural Center – Bitola. A large number of meeting with CSOs and state institutions were organized within these projects, the outcome of which was the draft-standard for the vocation of youth worker.

## **PROJECT "YOUTH WORKERS UNITED" - KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND RESULTS**

The main goal of the "Youth Workers United" project was to improve the institutional mechanism for cooperation between youth organizations and state institutions, as equal partners in



designing youth policies and making decisions related to youth work. Consequently, the project generally aimed to include the youth organizations in the policy-making and participation in the decision-making processes with regards to recognition of youth work on a national level.

Under this project, a series of activities were conducted in 2016 in order to encourage the dialogue and establish collaboration between the youth civil society organizations and the relevant state and public institutions (meetings, round tables, a conference), as well as to strengthen the advocacy capacities of youth organizations and networks, mainly members of the Union for Youth Work (focus groups, workshops, trainings and a study visits). Apart from this, the project enabled the start of the process of developing a national framework for recognition of youth work and drafting of quality standards based on the regional best practices and a participatory approach to policy-making (workshops on drafting the standard of the vocation of youth workers and national program model for education of youth workers).

What is especially important is that the implementation of these activities had a strongly pronounced participatory component, meaning that the initiative successfully included all the stakeholders interested in further advancement of youth work, and all those involved in developing and implementing better strategies and instruments for its recognition: youth organizations and youth workers as key providers of non-formal youth education, represented mainly by the national network of youth organizations – the Union for Youth Work; the national agencies – The Agency for Youth and Sports, the National Agency for European Youth Educational Programs and Mobility, the creators of policies related to the recognition of the skills gained from youth work – the Ministry of Education and Science, the Centre for Vocational Education and Training, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Center for Adult Education and the Employment Agency.

Consequently, the key project achievement is uniting all the relevant stakeholders and intensifying the efforts for better positioning of the youth sector and youth workers. The initiative gave a new impetus to the establishing of a political dialogue between the youth civil society organizations and the relevant state institutions, despite the unstable political situation in the country.

### **CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS, THE GROUP WORK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY OCTOBER 2016:**

- ✓ In Macedonia, similarly to most of the countries in the region, there is lack of understanding of what youth workers do and what the role of youth work as a vocation is.
- ✓ There is a need of developing clear qualifications and/or vocations standards in order to provide quality in the work and contribute towards recognizing youth work as a profession.
- ✓ The Republic of Macedonia has a solid legislative support to this area within the adopted National Youth Strategy 2016-2025. This Strategy includes goals and measures that clearly define the state's steps and commitments:
  - Goal 1: Recognizing youth work as a key tool in aiding the positive personal and social development of young people,
  - Goal 2: Formal recognition and regulation of implementing and offering youth work as an integral part of the country's educational system;
  - Goal 3: Ensuring a high quality and available supply of youth work on the territory of each municipality.
- ✓ One of the steps that need to be undertaken is strengthening the collaboration with the Center for Vocational Education and Training and the other relevant institutions and working on creating vocational standards in partnership with them, so that later on we can continue creating programs and achieve accreditation of the youth work providers. In order to start



this process, it is necessary to prepare a description of the knowledge and skills required in order to be a youth worker. Furthermore, when creating the vocation, it must be taken into consideration that it reflects the needs of the labour market.

- ✓ The program for training of youth workers needs to be developed in collaboration with the Adult Education Center.
- ✓ Embedding youth work in the long-term programs of the Macedonian civil society organizations and finding alternative forms of reaching youth.
- ✓ It is recommended to have at least one youth worker employed in each municipal administration who will be trained or have his/her knowledge and skills validated by an officially recognized/accredited youth worker program.
- ✓ Concerning the framework for development of youth work, it is necessary to allocate funds for this area – through national state funds and the budgets of the local governments. This needs to be perceived as an investment, and not as a short-term subsidy support by the state.
- ✓ The value of youth work needs to be recognized by the decision makers and youth work needs to be perceived as one of the services to youth/citizens.
- ✓ The non-financial assets for support of youth work should be recognized, and all of the municipalities and local government should support the operation of at least one youth center or youth club.
- ✓ Collaboration with the other sectors – the business sector should be improved, in order to create sustainable partnerships.
- ✓ In the process of developing a more detailed legislative framework, it is necessary to organize broader consultations at a local and national level by including all the interested stakeholders. It is necessary to unite them all in the advocacy efforts with an openness of the organizations and youth workers outside the already established networks of cooperation and consult as many of the available options as possible.
- ✓ It is important to raise the visibility of the results of youth work, whereby local and national informative campaigns with this goal may be recognized as a possible tool.
- ✓ It is a general recommendation that the process of recognition of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia should be conducted in such a way as to take advantage of the existing opportunities, given that some of the procedures are already established on a state level. It is of exceptional importance in this process to take advantage of every available expertise and experience and to first address the processes recognized as priorities, bearing in mind the relevance of the process and the motivation of all stakeholders involved.

As a result of the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the activities realized in this stage of the project, from November 2016 to May 2017, the two key stakeholders – the civil sector and the state, engaged in an inclusive process of standardization of youth work and recognition of youth worker as an occupation.

The starting point in this process was the National Youth Strategy 2016-2025 which defines local youth work as “an organized and systematic process of education and support for the authentic development of youth in order to realize their overall personal and social potential. Youth work is directly related to the development of the local community through which the youth not only become active subjects in the process of their own development, but also active participants in the community. Therefore, a large number of youth organizations and networks, in fact the youth organizations – members of the Union for Youth Work, the National Youth Council of Macedonia and the SEGA Coalition, in close collaboration with the Agency for Youth and Sport, initiated the issue of recognition and future systematization of the vocation of youth worker, a process aided by the professional support of the Center for Vocational Education and Training. This process resulted in official submission of the initiative for drafting of the standards for the occupation of youth worker – practitioner, to the Center for Vocational Education and Training at the start of May 2017. With this initiative and the inclusive process that was conducted through workshops and meetings within the project, the description of the national vocational standard (NVS) of a youth worker – practitioner and her/his key competences were drafted:





"A youth worker – practitioner, is a person who plans, conducts, monitors, assesses and reports about simple or more complex activities, projects and programs for provision of services for fostering of the capacities of young people with the goal of their personal and social development and active engagement in society.

The youth worker – practitioner may autonomously, or under supervision, plan, organize and realize her/his work and evaluate the effects of the activities, apply simple research procedures to canvass the needs of the youth, prepare programs and projects for young people according to the needs they have expressed, develop the young people's skills by using the methods of non-formal education, engage in the community, foster the quality and develop an effective, efficient and ethical practice of youth work, provide counsel to the youth and mediate the information. At the same time, the youth worker – practitioner does individual work with young people or a group of young people, collaborates with young people, their parents or other stakeholders – institutions and specialists in the sector and thus establishes and fosters confidential relationships with the youth and supports their socialization.

Core competences:

- Plans, organizes and realizes activities independently, or under supervision, individually or in a group;
- Does research on the young people's needs that should be addressed;
- Designs and realizes programs and projects based on the needs expressed by the youth;
- Plans activities for knowledge acquisition, skills development and shaping the young people's attitudes towards various topics by using the methods of non-formal education and informal schooling;
- Takes part in the drafting of strategies on providing care for the youth and creates the necessary conditions for exercising of their rights;
- Realizes activities aimed at enabling youth for active participation in the social processes and decision-making processes;
- Assesses and gives support to initiatives proposed by youth;
- Aids the development of core skills among youth;
- Makes rational use of materials, equipment and money;
- Communicates with the users of the services; the groups of participants, the superiors, institutions, by employing ethical principles;
- Applies measures for protection of the health and environment, in accordance with the hygienic-technical, fire-fighting and other protective measures".

The recognition of the vocation of youth worker would be one of the indicators of a systemic, comprehensive care for the youth, and at the same time would enable establishing quality work with youth through the means of non-formal education.

The development of the program for education of youth workers was the second step in the already ongoing initiative for a national framework for recognition of youth work in the Republic of Macedonia. The national model for an education program for youth workers was based on the already existing programs of youth organizations that deliver this types of training. Taken into consideration that the process of model development ran simultaneously with the work on the vocational standards, the final program for education of youth workers would be a more time-consuming process which would exceed the timeframe of this project, but the success of this process within the project is the establishing of the basis for the program and the possibility to test of the modules – methodology of youth work, which involved 20 young people, representatives of youth organizations from the Republic of Macedonia who gained competences from the area of peer education.

The perspective of the already designed program structure is to continue developing it through the Union for Youth Work and have it undergo the accreditation process by the Center for Adult Education which would enable formal recognition of the competences of youth workers who would successfully pass it, and would provide quality in the delivery of services from the area of youth work.

## FURTHER READING

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Council Conclusions on youth work, 2010

Joint EU Youth Report, 2012 EU Youth Conference Conclusions, May 2013

Council Conclusions on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people, 2013

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