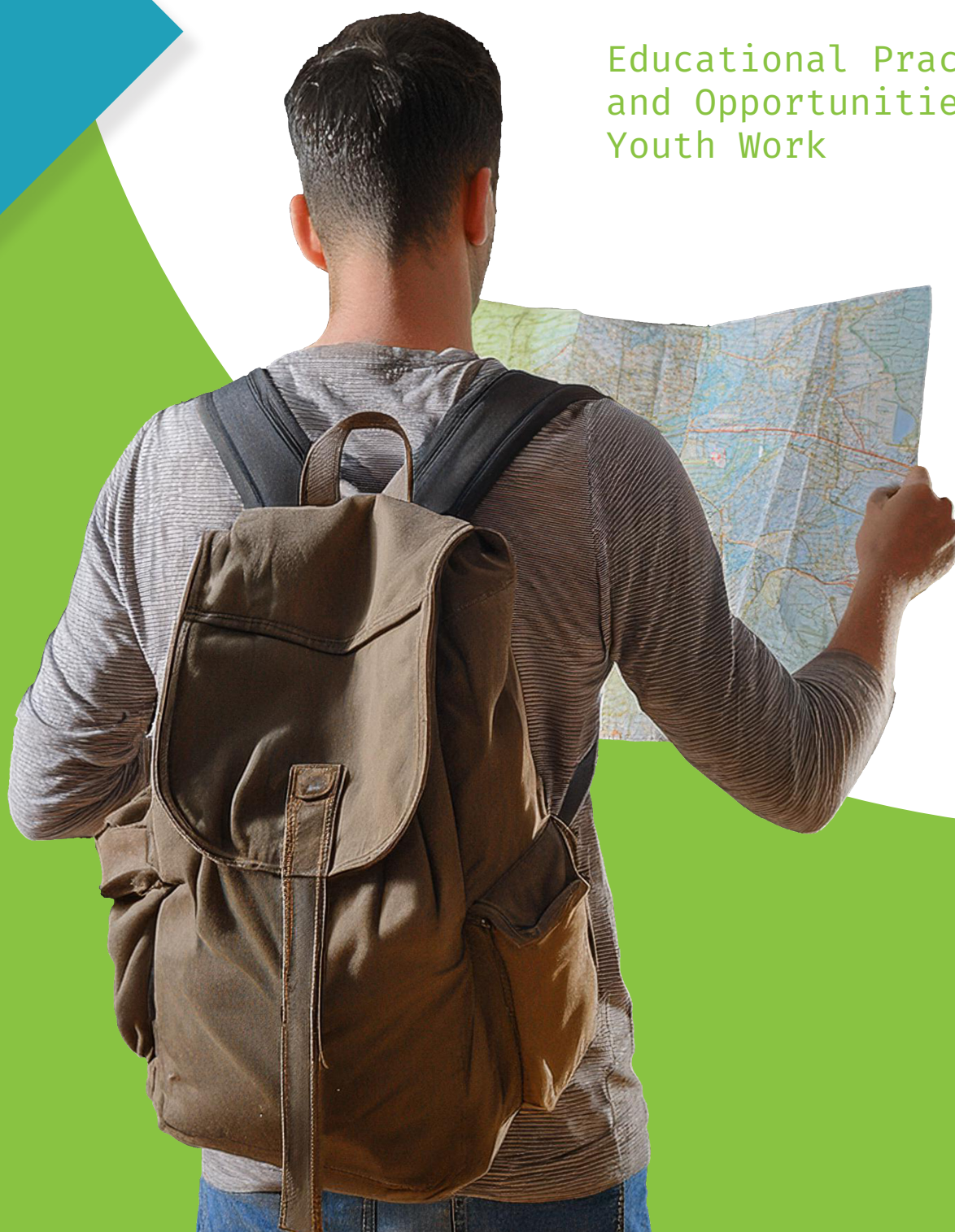


COUNTRY REPORTS

Educational Practices
and Opportunities in
Youth Work





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This brochure provides an overview on educational procedures, training opportunities and career paths in the field of youth work in Austria, Belgium, Croatia and Serbia. It is based on research, analysis, interviews and an online survey conducted in the EU-project „Blockchained Youth Work“. The results were implemented in a Quality Framework for youth work trainings.

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AUSTRIA

In Austria, youth work is defined by the Ministry as a social educational field focusing on informal and non-formal learning through diverse activities provided by nonprofit associations, self-administered youth clubs, and various organizations. The sector operates in different settings, acting as an interface with partners such as legal guardians, educational institutions, and health care. While there is no uniform qualification, youth workers often acquire skills through tertiary education or training courses, and aufZAQ plays a role in certifying and ensuring the quality of these programs, offering a Competence Framework that aligns with Austrian and European Qualifications Frameworks.

There is no legally regulated training for youth work in Austria, but individuals often acquire knowledge and skills through social pedagogy, social work, or youth work programs at universities or adult education institutions. The aufZAQ Competence Framework for Youth Work serves as a certification and quality assurance tool, aligning courses with national and European qualification frameworks and providing a systematic display of youth workers' competences at different levels.



EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

In Austria, the ministry responsible for youth defines youth work as a “social educational field of action and an extra-curricular socialization field.” The focus is on leisure activities which aim at informal and non-formal learning. The institutions providing youth work are as versatile as their offered activities. They are nonprofit associations, self-administered youth clubs or social organizations, some with their own youth groups or corresponding departments. Local authorities and confessional or party-political institutions can also assume this role. Youth work is therefore carried out in different settings, for example in coffee shops for young people, parks, community institutions or other places. The different activities basically correspond to the mentioned dimensions of our understanding of youth work. Youth work plays an interface role: with partners such as legal guardians, school systems, child and youth assistance, health care institutions, cultural organizations and educational institutions, legal and executive branch, municipal work, labour market service, private sector companies, interest groups as well as administration and politics. In Austria, youth work is regulated by legal and institutional framework conditions at the municipal, state and federal level. In principle, the nine federal states with their corresponding youth departments are responsible for the technical management and funding. In addition to the states, local authorities and municipalities are the most important and nearest regional contacts and funders: they create the necessary resources for personnel and infrastructure. In some cases, local authorities offer activities that enable young people to participate and provide a platform for their suggestions and needs. The Federal Ministry responsible for youth work oversees the quality assurance of trainings and commissioned aufZAQ for quality assurance matters. In Austria, a distinction is made between three main areas: youth work in associations, open youth work and youth informa-

tion. In addition, there are regional or local initiatives which are often organized by young people themselves. The three areas are also reflected in the establishment of the three national organizations: The Federal Youth Association as a legally anchored interest group, the Federal Network of Austrian Youth Information and the Nationwide Network of Open YouthWork (bOJA). There is no uniform qualification or study program in Austria, which is mainly concerned with youth work. There are different courses at universities, universities of applied sciences, higher schools and middle schools, which consider youth work as one of several fields of social-educational activity. In addition, there are various trainings which also prepare for youth work. Non-formal qualification offers for fulltime professional and voluntary youth workers are provided in several federal states on behalf of the corresponding youth departments by regional educational institutions. Here aufZAQ uses its certification services: they offer a quality certificate in the form of certification and quality assurance for educational providers who prepare for extracurricular youth work with their courses. This not only makes the skills of youth workers more readable, but also ensures the quality of their training, while aufZAQ is acting in accordance with current technical developments and European wide education policies. In 2016, 61% of youth workers in open youth work in Austria had formal tertiary education, 27% had non-formal education and 12% had no specialist training.

LEGAL POSITION

There is no legally regulated training for the profession of youth work in Austria, but training in the field of social pedagogy/social work/youth work is advantageous and often required by employers. The necessary knowledge and skills can be acquired by graduating university with a bachelor's or master's degree (social pedagogy or social work) and/or within the framework of training courses at various adult education institutions as well as at private training and further education institutions offering non-formal trainings.

Tertiary sector: Bachelor's/master's degree in social pedagogy, Bachelor's/master's degree in social work, graduates of related tertiary sector training in the psychosocial and pedagogical fields.

Post-secondary sector: College of Social Pedagogy (part-time)

Secondary sector: Educational institution for social pedagogy (five years), graduation with matriculation and diploma examination, university course in leisure pedagogy and advanced course in youth work courses in combination with two years of practical experience under the guidance of a specialist and with supervision.

AUFZAQ – QUALITY OF TRAININGS AND COMPETENCE IN YOUTH WORK

aufZAQ offers the certification of basic and further education and training courses for people active in youth work and accompanying fields. The aufZAQ Competence Framework for Youth Work was developed by aufZAQ and serves as a translation tool for the qualifications of youth work to the Austrian and European Qualifications Framework. As a quality assurance tool for youth work trainings, aufZAQ has included the aufZAQ Competence Framework as a standard in order to be able to consider different learning paths for the completion of the course. Through the aufZAQ Competence Framework, courses can be assigned to the National Qualifications Framework in Austria. The aufZAQ Competence Framework displays the competences of youth workers systematically and at different levels. It is also the basis for a course certification by aufZAQ: curricula of trainings and further education courses are assessed and classified according to the aufZAQ Competence Framework. Therefore, the aufZAQ Competence Framework is not only of interest to education providers and students but also to those who want to work competently with young people (e.g. universities, schools, students, scientists, etc.). Apart from being a training standard for courses in Austria, these competence descriptions can be used as a resource for the new and further development of all educational programs. The content can also be adapted and used to create job profiles, job postings and self-assessment tools.



A TYPICAL AUSTRIAN YOUTH WORKER

Charlie is an Austrian youth worker who works in a youth center in Vienna. As a youth worker Charlie provides support for young people concerning their identity development and all sorts of personal matters. To do this, Charlie organizes various leisure activities such as football tournaments or excursions, supports young people with their homework, provides information and advice on educational and career opportunities and is there to advise them if they have any problems or questions. The focus is the further development of the personality of the young person with a focus on independence, personal responsibility and empowerment. Additionally Charlie plans various events and projects like holiday camps, cooking workshops, city tours or film evenings.

HOW DID CHARLIE GET THERE AND WHAT DID THEIR EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY LOOK LIKE TO GAIN THE QUALIFICATION TO WORK IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH WORK IN AUSTRIA?

Charlie attended a vocational school in Austria with the main emphasis on social professions. Charlie knew that they wanted to work in the social field and in the course of finishing school decided that supporting young people to find their paths in life would be the perfect career-fit. In Austria Charlie now had a few different possible paths to choose between. Either to finish school with a diploma and go to university to study in the field of social pedagogics or social work, which would lead to a wide range of work possibilities in the field of social pedagogics/social work but would not specifically qualify Charlie to work as a youth worker. Or to finish middle school a bit earlier with a certificate and to start a course specifically for youth

work right afterword. Charlie decided that the more direct way to access the field of youth work would be a better fit, so they/he/she chose to finish the vocational middle school with a certificate and to start a training to become a youth worker at an adult education institution. Of course one could also have chosen to still finish school with a diploma to keep the possibility of studying at University later on, or to study first and do the training for youth work additionally later on – so there are a few different paths to eventually become a youth worker in Austria.

After Charlie's decision, 10 months of "youth work training" and already doing some voluntary work at different youth organizations Charlie was ready and qualified to start working as a youth worker and had the possibility to choose between different offers like working in the mobile youth work area, where youth workers focus on reaching out to young people or to work in one of the many different youth centers with individual emphasis on different themes, which ended up being Charlie's first choice.





BELGIUM

Belgium offers a variety of educational opportunities in the field of youth work at both national and regional levels, aiming to equip individuals with the skills necessary to effectively engage and support young people. The Flemish Government runs a national program, „Basiscompetenties Jeugdwerk“ (Basic Competences Youth Work), covering youth participation, group dynamics, and project management. The Flemish Institute for Youth (Jeugdwerk Vlaanderen) provides additional training courses, workshops, and seminars on youth policy, communication skills, and more. In Wallonia, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels Youth Service offers similar training opportunities focusing on youth work methodologies.

Higher education institutions in Belgium, such as the University of Antwerp and the Haute École de la Province de Liège, offer Bachelor's programs in Social Work and Social and Educational Sciences, respectively, with specializations in Youth Work. Specialized training centers like the Youth Work Training Center (Vormingscentrum Guislain) in Ghent also provide targeted courses and workshops.

Youth work education in Belgium encompasses both formal education and non-formal training. Formal education includes Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in Social Work or Youth

Work, which offer structured curricula and practical experience through internships. Non-formal training, organized by youth organizations and specialized centers, focuses on practice-oriented learning, covering topics like youth participation, project management, and intercultural competence. Local communities and authorities also organize workshops and seminars to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among youth workers.

A typical educational pathway for a youth worker in Belgium involves completing secondary education, followed by a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, with optional advancement to a Master's degree in Youth Work or a related field. Throughout their career, youth workers engage in continuous professional development through non-formal training, internships, volunteering, and employment within youth organizations, ensuring they stay updated on current practices and trends.

The legal framework in Belgium, governed by decrees in both the Flemish and French-speaking Communities, ensures the quality and professionalism of youth work practices and education. These regulations establish the requirements for education and training programs, certification of youth workers, and adherence to quality standards. Professional codes of ethics and quality assurance mechanisms further support the effectiveness and credibility of youth work in Belgium.



EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

In Belgium, there are several existing education opportunities in the field of youth work at both national and regional levels. These opportunities aim to provide individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to work effectively with young people and contribute to their development.

National Youth Work Training Program: The Flemish Government organises a national training program for youth workers called „Basiscompetenties Jeugdwerk“ (Basic Competences Youth Work). It offers a comprehensive curriculum covering various aspects of youth work, including youth participation, group dynamics, and project management.

Regional Training Institutes: The Flemish Institute for Youth (Jeugdwerk Vlaanderen) offers a range of training courses, workshops, and seminars for youth workers, volunteers, and professionals in Flanders. These programs cover topics such as youth policy, youth participation, communication skills, and project management.

In Wallonia, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels Youth Service (Service de la Jeunesse de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles) provides training opportunities for youth workers. They offer courses on youth work methodologies, group dynamics, and project management.

Higher Education Programs: Several universities and colleges in Belgium offer higher education programs related to youth work. For example, the University of Antwerp offers a Bachelor's program in Social Work with a specialisation in Youth Work. Similarly, the Haute École de la Province de Liège offers a Bachelor's program in Social and Educational Sciences with a focus on Youth Work.

Youth Work Training Centers: There are also specialised training centres in Belgium that focus on youth work education. For instance, the Youth Work Training Center (Vormingscentrum Guislain) in Ghent offers training courses,

workshops, and study days for youth workers and educators. In the field of youth work in Belgium, there are possibilities for both formal education within schools and colleges, as well as non-formal training organised by youth organisations and other communities. Specifically:

FORMAL EDUCATION

Bachelor's Degree Programs: Various universities and colleges offer Bachelor's degree programs that include youth work or related fields. These programs provide a structured curriculum and theoretical foundation in youth work. Examples include:

Bachelor in Social Work with a specialisation in Youth Work: This program focuses on equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary for working with young people. It covers topics such as youth development, social policies, community work, and intervention methods.

Bachelor in Education Sciences with a specialisation in Youth Work: This program combines educational theory with youth work practices and prepares students for roles as educators and youth workers. It covers subjects like pedagogy, psychology, and social sciences.

Master's Degree Programs: Some universities offer Master's degree programs that delve deeper into advanced concepts in youth work or related fields. These programs often require a Bachelor's degree in a relevant discipline. They provide an opportunity to specialise and conduct research in specific areas of youth work practice, policy, or management.

NON-FORMAL TRAINING

Youth Organisations: Various youth organisations and associations in Belgium offer non-formal training programs for youth workers, volunteers, and professionals. These training opportunities are often practice-oriented, focusing on skills development and experiential learning. Youth organisations offer workshops, seminars, conferences, and study days on topics such as youth participation, communication skills, project management, and intercultural competence.

Training Centers and Institutes: There are specialised training centres and institutes dedicated to providing non-formal training in youth work. These centres often collaborate with youth organisations, universities, and governmental bodies to offer comprehensive training programs. They focus on practical skills development, networking, and professional growth in the field of youth work.

Workshops and Seminars: Local communities, municipalities, and regional authorities organise workshops and seminars on youth work-related topics. These events serve as platforms for exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and fostering collaboration among youth workers and stakeholders. It's important to note that both formal education and non-formal training play crucial roles in the professional development of youth workers in Belgium. They complement each other by offering theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and networking opportunities. The availability and specifics of these education and training opportunities may vary across regions, so it is advisable to consult relevant institutions, youth organisations, and educational institutions for detailed information and current offerings.

YOUTH WORK PLATFORMS

Notably, there are a couple of platforms and databases in Belgium that list and compare various educational offers in youth work. These platforms serve as valuable resources for individuals interested in pursuing education and training opportunities in the field of youth work. Notably:

YouthInfo Belgium: YouthInfo Belgium (Jeugdinfo Vlaanderen) is an online platform that provides information and resources on various youth-related topics, including education and training opportunities. The platform features a database of educational programs, including those in the field of youth work. Users can search and compare different courses, degrees, and training options available in Belgium.

Youth Service of the French-speaking Community: The Service de la Jeunesse de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, which is responsible for youth work in the French-speaking Community, maintains an online platform that provides information on training courses and resources for youth workers. The platform includes a database of training opportunities,

allowing users to explore and compare different programs in youth work education.

These platforms aim to centralise and facilitate access to information about educational offers in youth work. They often include details such as course descriptions, providers, locations, schedules, and registration procedures. Users can utilise these platforms to find relevant educational opportunities, compare different programs, and make informed decisions regarding their professional development in youth work.



A TYPICAL BELGIAN YOUTH WORKER

In Belgium, a typical educational pathway for youth workers can encompass a combination of formal education and non-formal training. The specific pathway can vary based on individual preferences, career goals, and the available opportunities.

Secondary Education: The educational journey often begins with completing secondary education (secondary school or vocational education). This provides a general foundation in core subjects and may offer some elective courses related to social sciences, psychology, or education.

Bachelor's Degree in Social Work: Many aspiring youth workers pursue a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. This program typically lasts three to four years and provides a comprehensive understanding of social work theories, methods, and practices. The curriculum may include courses specific to youth work, such as youth development, youth policy, community work, and intervention strategies. Students gain practical experience through internships or field placements, which offer hands-on opportunities to work with young people.

Master's Degree in Youth Work (Optional): After completing a Bachelor's degree, individuals may choose to pursue a Master's degree in Youth Work or a related field. This step is optional but offers further specialisation and advanced knowledge in youth work. The Master's program may focus on research, policy development, management, or specific areas within youth work, depending on the university and program.

Non-formal Training: Throughout their educational journey or as part of professional development, youth workers engage in non-formal training programs, workshops, and seminars offered by youth organisations, training centres, and other institutions. These training opportunities cover a wide range of topics relevant to youth work, including youth participation, project management, communication skills, intercultural competence, and specific intervention methods.

Professional Experience: Practical experience is vital for youth workers' development. During and after their formal education, individuals engage in professional experiences such as internships, volunteering, or employment within youth organisations, social services, or community-based programs. These experiences allow youth workers to apply their knowledge, develop practical skills, and build relationships with young people and other professionals in the field.

Continuous Professional Development: Throughout their careers, youth workers engage in continuous professional development to stay updated on current practices and trends. This may involve attending conferences, participating in specialised training programs, pursuing advanced certifications, or undertaking further academic studies, such as a doctoral degree.

It's important to note that this presentation represents a prototypical educational and training biography, but individual paths may vary. Some individuals may enter the field of youth work through alternative routes, such as transitioning from related fields like education, psychology, or community development. Additionally, the availability and specific educational programs can vary across regions and universities in Belgium. Ultimately, a combination of formal education, non-formal training, and practical experience contributes to the professional development and effectiveness of youth workers in Belgium.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework in Belgium provides guidance and regulation for youth work education and ensures the quality of youth work practices. In Belgium, there are laws and regulations that govern educational trainings in the field of youth work. These regulations aim to ensure the quality and professionalism of youth work practices. In the Flemish Community, youth work is regulated by the Decree on Flemish Youth Policy (Decreet Jeugdwerkbeleid). In the French-speaking Community, it falls under the Ministerial Decree on Youth Animation (Arrêté Ministériel sur l'Animation Jeunesse). These decrees establish the legal framework for youth work, including the requirements for education and training programs.

Competency Standards: The educational programs and training courses in youth work are designed to develop specific competencies and skills required for effective youth work practice. Competency standards may vary depending on the specific role, context, and level of responsibility within youth work. These standards cover areas such as youth development, communication, group dynamics, project management, and intercultural competence.

Educational Requirements for Employment: The specific educational requirements to be hired as a youth worker can vary depending on the employer, the type of position, and the level of responsibility. In many cases, employers seek candidates with a relevant educational background, such as a Bachelor's or Master's degree in Social Work, Youth Work, Education, Psychology, or a related field. Additional requirements may include practical experience in working with young people, specific certifications, and a demonstrated commitment to youth development.

Flemish Community: In the Flemish Community of Belgium, youth work is regulated by the Decree on Flemish Youth Policy (Decreet Jeugdwerkbeleid). This decree sets out the general principles, objectives, and framework for youth work in Flanders. It also establishes the legal basis for recognizing and subsidising youth work organisations and initiatives, including education and training programs,.

French-speaking Community: In the French-speaking Community of Belgium, youth work falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministerial Decree on Youth Animation (Arrêté Ministériel

sur l'Animation Jeunesse). This decree outlines the principles and regulations for youth work activities and organisations. The decree also addresses the requirements and quality standards for youth work training programs and the certification process for youth workers,.

Certification of Youth Workers: Both the Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community have established certification systems for youth workers. These systems define the competencies and qualifications necessary for professional youth work practice. Youth workers can undergo a certification process to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and experience. The certification is typically based on a combination of formal education, practical experience, and professional development.

Quality Assurance: The legal frameworks in Belgium emphasise the importance of quality assurance in youth work. They promote the development and implementation of quality standards, guidelines, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness and professionalism of youth work practices. Youth work organisations and training providers are encouraged to adhere to recognized quality criteria and participate in accreditation processes to enhance the quality of their programs and services.

Professional Codes of Ethics: Youth work in Belgium is guided by professional codes of ethics that outline the principles, values, and ethical standards that youth workers should uphold. These codes provide guidance on issues such as confidentiality, respect for diversity, and the well-being of young people.

Quality Standards: There are established quality standards and guidelines for youth work training programs in Belgium. These standards define the expectations for the content, structure, and delivery of the courses. Quality standards may cover various aspects such as curriculum development, learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, practical experience, and evaluation processes. These standards ensure that the training programs meet certain criteria for effectiveness, relevance, and professionalism in preparing youth workers.

Control Bodies: Control bodies or accreditation agencies play a crucial role in monitoring and ensuring the quality of youth work training programs in Belgium. These bodies

evaluate and accredit training courses based on established quality standards. They conduct assessments, site visits, and reviews of the programs to ensure they meet the required criteria. Accreditation by these control bodies provides recognition and assurance of the quality and credibility of the training courses.

Specifically:

In the **Flemish Community**, the Flemish Agency for Youth (Agentschap Jeugd) and the Flemish Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming) are responsible for overseeing and accrediting youth work training programs. In the **French-speaking Community**, the General Directorate for Education and Research (Direction Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche) is involved in accrediting youth work training programs.

There are specific rules and regulations for training courses in youth work in order to receive public funding in Belgium. Public funding for youth work training programs is often contingent upon meeting certain criteria and complying with established regulations.

Accreditation Requirements: Training courses in youth work may need to be accredited by the relevant governmental bodies or accreditation agencies to be eligible for public funding. Accreditation processes typically involve an evaluation of the program's content, structure, learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, and assessment methods. The accreditation requirements ensure that the training courses meet the established quality standards and criteria set by the funding agencies.

Compliance with Youth Work Standards: Training courses seeking public funding in youth work are generally expected to align with the recognized youth work standards and guidelines. These standards may cover various aspects, such as youth participation, non-formal learning approaches, intercultural competence, and ethical principles. Compliance with these standards ensures that the training courses reflect the principles and values of youth work and adequately prepare youth workers for their roles.

Relevance to Youth Work Practice: Public funding for youth work training often requires that the courses are directly relevant to the needs and challenges of youth work practice. The training programs should address the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge required for effective youth

work, considering the evolving landscape of youth issues, policies, and methodologies.

Monitoring and Evaluation: To receive ongoing public funding, training courses may be subject to monitoring and evaluation by the funding agencies or designated authorities. Regular assessments are conducted to ensure that the funded programs continue to meet the established standards and remain aligned with the objectives of youth work policies.

It is important to note that specific regulations and funding requirements vary between different regions or communities within Belgium. The Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community have their own regulations and funding mechanisms for youth work training programs.

A POSSIBLE WAY OF DESCRIBING AN EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY OF A YOUTH WORKER IN BELGIUM

Emma, a compassionate and socially conscious individual, has always been passionate about working with young people and making a positive impact in their lives. From a young age, she actively participated in community service projects and engaged in activities that fostered youth development.

Upon completing her secondary education, Emma decided to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Social Work at the University of Antwerp. During her undergraduate studies, she enrolled in various courses related to youth work, including youth policy, group dynamics, and counselling techniques. She also completed an internship at a local youth centre, where she gained practical experience in designing and implementing youth programs, facilitating group discussions, and providing support to at-risk youth.

Driven by her desire to further specialise in youth work, Emma decided to pursue a Master's degree in Youth Work at the same university. The Master's program provided her with a deeper understanding of research methodologies, policy analysis, and youth advocacy. Emma conducted a research project exploring the impact of youth participation in decision-making processes, which further fueled her passion for empowering young people.

Alongside her formal education, Emma actively engaged in non-formal training programs and workshops offered by youth organisations. She attended training sessions on project management, intercultural competence, and conflict resolution, enhancing her practical skills and expanding her professional network.

To gain more practical experience, Emma secured a part-time position as a youth worker in a local community organisation. In this role, she worked directly with young people, organising recreational activities, facilitating workshops on life skills, and providing individual counselling support. Emma also participated in regular supervision and professional development sessions offered by her organisation to enhance her effectiveness as a youth worker.

Recognizing the importance of continuous learning, Emma regularly attended conferences and seminars on emerging trends in youth work and engaged in ongoing professional development opportunities. She also became an active member of the Flemish Youth Council, where she contributed to policy discussions and advocated for the needs and rights of young people.

As Emma gained more experience and expertise, she began mentoring younger youth workers and took on leadership roles within her organisation. Her dedication, combined with her solid educational foundation and practical experience, opened up opportunities for her to contribute to the development of youth work policies and programs at the regional level.

Throughout her career, Emma remained committed to the growth and well-being of young people, continuously seeking new ways to support and empower them. Her educational journey, from her Bachelor's and Master's degrees to non-formal training and practical experience, provided her with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make a meaningful difference in the lives of countless young people in Belgium.





CROATIA

Croatia faces significant challenges in formalizing youth work education. The higher education system provides insufficient opportunities. Students can learn about youth work but are limited by the narrow and specific competencies offered by their chosen faculties, resulting in fragmented knowledge.

In 2018, the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and the University of Rijeka launched a life-long learning program, “Youth in Contemporary Society”, to address these gaps. This 15-week program, accredited with 30 ECTS credits, is designed for professional development in youth work, targeting those already working with or considering careers in the field. The program consists of three modules: youth research, work with youth, and youth and community development.

Non-formal education opportunities for youth workers are also minimal, with few civil society organisations providing targeted training. These trainings often focus on broader social topics and are project-funded, leading to discontinuity. Furthermore, CSOs rarely issue certificates for completed training, and existing programs, like the Croatian Youth Network’s “Youth Studies for Young People”, depend heavily on project funding and are not continuous.

Currently, there are no procedures to validate skills and competencies gained through non-formal learning. No legal framework exists for youth work education at any level, and the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb is still developing competency standards for youth workers. The only recognition tool available is the Certificate of Competences Acquired During Volunteering, which is not youth-specific. Croatia lacks recognized training courses, quality standards, and control bodies for youth work education. The Erasmus+ and ESC programs set some optional standards, but there are no national regulations. Additionally, no platform exists to compare educational offerings for youth work, leading to a fragmented and inconsistent landscape.

Youth workers in Croatia typically come from diverse backgrounds, primarily education, social work, and humanities. They gain competencies through volunteering, non-formal training, and hands-on experience. Two typical pathways to becoming a youth worker are through intrinsic motivation and volunteering or by accident, who start in a related field and transitions into youth work.

Both pathways highlight the need for more structured, recognized, and accessible training and development opportunities for youth workers in Croatia.



EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Croatia is **lacking of specific and formalized educational opportunities** in the field of youth work both on national and regional level.

Opportunities for formal education through the higher education system (college education) are **insufficient**, as shown by the study „[Formal education for youth workers in Croatia](#)“. Students can and do have the opportunity to learn about young people and thus train for youth work, but the structure of formal education prevents them from choosing more of those courses from different institutions of higher education. The competencies that students acquire are closely related to the faculty they attend and the major they unroll in. Formal education at the moment can therefore offer relatively narrow and specific competences to people who work with young people for dealing with more narrowly defined work with them. However, the student does not have access to other competencies necessary for working with young people and their knowledge is fragmented.

In 2018 the [Institute for Social Research in Zagreb](#) and the [University of Rijeka](#) embarked on a joint project of creating the life-long learning educational programme “[Youth in Contemporary Society](#)”, the first of its kind in the Western Balkans region. One semester-long programme (15 weeks long with weekend lectures), accredited with 30 ECTS credits is designed as a certified programme for the professional development of those already working with young people in civil society organizations (CSOs), relevant institutions as well as for those considering a career in the youth work field. The program is a part of high formal education. The program consists of 3 modules: 1) youth research, 2) work with youth and 3) youth and community development.

Possibilities for the education of youth workers within the framework of **non-formal education** are also **minimal**, that

is, there is a small number of CSOs and their educational programs/activities that are really dedicated to education/training for youth workers in the narrower sense. CSOs educations/trainings unfortunately do not aim exclusively at youth workers, i.e., on the acquisition of relevant competencies for working with young people in the narrower sense. Most of the training offers are for educational workers, social welfare workers and young people themselves.

The topics provided by the CSOs are focused on a **wide range of social topics for work with young people** (youth unemployment, migration, sustainable weaving, global education, civic competences, volunteering, activism in the community, active citizenship). The maintenance of these educations depends on project funding and is characterized by **discontinuity**. It is also noticeable that CSOs do not have the habit of giving certificates of completed education or proof of professional development. There are several CSOs that stand out with their educations/trainings: [Breza](#), [Carpe Diem](#), [Centre of Tehnical Culture Rijeka](#), [Forum for Freedom in Education](#), [Lokalni info centar za mlade ZAGOR](#), [Mreža mladih Hrvatske](#), [Association Žmergo](#), [DrONE - association for social development and informal education](#) and [Association Delta](#).

For example, Croatian Youth Network has been conducting non-formal training „**Youth studies for Young People**“ since 2010. Training is not continuous because it depends on project fundings. This educational program is intended to inform, educate and empower young people and is not aimed at educating youth workers exclusively. Trainers are other youth workers who strive to encourage young people to take responsibility in their community. Many training participants are current or future youth workers.

Another example are **Information centres for young people** in Croatia. The persons who work in them are obliged to become trained trainers by [ERYICA](#) for further work with young people. About their education, as well as about Information Centres for Youth, is taken care of by the Association of Information Centres for Youth, founded with the aim of developing a quality youth information system in Croatia.

Currently, there are **no procedures for the validation of skills and competences** gained by youth workers through non-formal and informal learning.

There is **no legal basis for educational programs/quality in youth work in Croatia**, just as there are no regulations at the national, regional or municipal level. A set of **competency standards for youth workers is still being developed**, that is, the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb is working on the preparation of occupational standards and qualification standards for youth work. Therefore, the educational requirements to be a youth worker in Croatia do not exist either for employed persons or for volunteers who work with young people. CSOs that recognize work with youth and youth workers strive to be guided by the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally.

Furthermore, Croatia doesn't have generally recognised training courses, binding quality standards or control bodies, as there are no national/regional guidelines for the field of educational practices/quality parameters in youth work. The only recognition tool promoted by the national authorities is the so-called Certificate of competences acquired during volunteering ([Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim kroz volontiranje](#)). However, the tool had not been developed specifically for young people but for volunteers of all ages.

Further to what was said previously, there are **no development goals or strategies related to work with youth** that influence training in work with youth, nor are there any umbrella organizations in work with youth in the country. The only one with a national level of influence is the National Agency for Erasmus+ and ESC programs, which through the Erasmus+ Program Guide prescribes the goals of the program (promotion of youth participation, improvement of the quality of the informal and non-formal learning process, development of quality work with young people. The Program Guide also states that a focus on the process) learning and recognition (Youthpass) and that the mobility of persons working with young people should include various activities and respond to the needs in the field of working with young people. Erasmus+ projects or ESCs implemented by CSOs should be based on the important values of work with young people (tolerance, equality, human rights, inclusion), based on non-formal and informal learning. These projects/programs should cover key topics for young people and aim directly at empowering young people as well as youth workers. CSOs that apply for their projects should follow the instructions of the Erasmus+ Program Guide in order for their activities to be funded. This is the only way to define (optional) quality

standards. There are **no any other specific rules** or regulations then this **for receiving funds for organizing training courses** in youth work, especially not by national authority, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth. Central state is also a source of funding for youth work organizations but it does not proscribe any specific rules due to trainings for youth workers, nor does it recognize them as funding specific. CSOs most often report training as one of the project's activities.

And finally, in addition to all the mentioned shortcomings Croatia is facing, we would add that **no platform or database** has yet been developed that displays or compares different educational offers in work with young people. The offer can most often be found on the websites/social networks of the CSO and other relevant institutions.



A TYPICAL CROATIAN YOUTH WORKER

There are no specific educational paths for youth workers in Croatia. Youth workers in Croatia have diverse backgrounds but they are predominantly coming from education, social work and other social and humanities fields (like sociology, psychology and political sciences). Apart from their original fields of study, they acquire their youth work competences by the “learning by doing” principle as well as by undergoing non-formal training in the field of working with young people, mostly organized by other CSOs.

“REAL” YOUTH WORKER

The most common way a person in Croatia becomes a youth worker is most likely by volunteering in a CSO that works

with young people; takes care of the interests and needs of young people; or at best in a local youth organization. Given that there is no legally regulated training for the profession of youth work in Croatia, a person based on his/her/their own (intrinsic) motivation shows an interest in working with young people. This person, let's call him/her/them Sacha, gets to know the work of associations through volunteering, goes to workshops and trainings where gains knowledge, but also learns methods in working with young people (quite possibly unconsciously adopting new methods and tools). At the same time, Sacha provides logistical assistance in the CSO, accompanying other employees, helps in the implementation of activities and receives more or less demanding tasks. The trainings that Sacha attends may be some organized, for example, by the [Association Status M](#) (training on the topic of gender-responsive work with young people, according to [Program Y](#)), so among other things, Sacha has the opportunity to learn the methodology of youth work. Sacha can also attend the one-semester training of the Croatian Youth Network „Youth Studies for Young People“ where they can learn about (public) policies for young people, young people, protection of human rights through activism and youth work in the community. Sacha has a good mentor in the association where volunteers, who directs Sacha to all these opportunities, and also encourages to go on some youth mobility within Erasmus+. This is where Sacha's horizons open up, expands inclusive understanding and acceptance of multiculturalism. At the same time, Sacha will attend various workshops, round tables, conferences, read manuals and learn through informal learning, and get to know more and more the community of practice of youth workers. In the best-case scenario, latter on when looking for a job, Sacha will be recognized as a person who, during or after university education, has put in extra effort and had the opportunity to train itself for working with young people, gained experience and knows how to write and implement project in the CSOs. Sascha is already aware and self-identifies as a youth worker, and now, when is more or less financially secure with first job, Sacha continues to work on own professional improvement and upgrading skills. Sacha collects certificates of participation and enters them in CV as proof of training. In addition, Sacha is thinking about enrolling in life-long learning educational programme “Young People in Contemporary Society” at the University of Rijeka. Over time, Sacha becomes recognized and recognized within the community of practice of youth workers and grows professionally over the years.

ACCIDENTAL YOUTH WORKER

Borna is a young student of psychology and hopes to work with young people through state institutions (nursing and educational institutions, social welfare institutions, etc.). However, Borna applies and gets a job in an CSO that deals with improving life in the local community, so Borna, given his/her/theirs age, gets to lead projects aimed at young people. This is where our young psychologist realizes that lacks in knowledge, project management, how to work with young people, so starts asking for the help of older colleagues, researching what literature to read and trainings to intend for direct work with young people. Borna follows the work of its colleagues more and more carefully, acquires the „learning by doing“ competencies, gets permission to attend seminars, workshops, and trainings during, but mostly outside of working hours, covering a wide range of different topics that concern young people (from housing, violence prevention, addictions, NEET youth, etc.). After a long time, Borna realizes its narrower interest in a certain topic and sharpens expertise in a certain area of work with young people (e.g., education for human rights of young people).

Given that Borna is not primarily involved in a youth organization, Borna finds it difficult to get some information and does not perceive itself as a youth worker. It is very likely that Borna is not even familiar with this term, which is still very invisible in Croatia. The trainings that Borna attends are more educations focused on educating the participants on certain topics, and less on strengthening skills for working with young people and learning about relevant (digital) tools. Quite by chance, Borna meets a real youth worker who introduces Borna to quality trainings through which will develop itself as a youth worker (e.g., Compass training, Erasmus+ mobility for youth workers) and work even better with young people in local community. After a few, if not more, years of working in CSO as program managers for young people, Borna finally realizes the wider spectrum of

professional training opportunities offered by various CSOs and embarks on another process of its own education for working with young people as a youth worker. Borna is initially confused because cannot find information in one place/platform, but collects what needs in a fragmented manner. Borna also understands that its additional professional development and training will not be recognized according to the Croatian professional qualification framework. But, Borna is thinking about enrolling in life-long learning educational programme “Young People in Contemporary Society” at the University of Rijeka.







SERBIA

The National Association of Youth Work Practitioners (NAPOR) in Serbia is a key player when it comes to youth work education, providing education and accreditation. Training options include two levels: Youth Leader and Youth Worker. The curriculum is based on non-formal education, covering theoretical and practical aspects. While formal education for youth workers is still in progress, NAPOR offers non-formal training programs. The existing university course, „Leadership and Developmental Youth Work in the Community,“ is the only formal education for youth workers in Serbia. The National Youth Strategy 2023-2030 aims to standardize youth work in non-formal education.

The legal basis for youth work education is evolving, with ongoing efforts to create a National Qualification Framework. Although NAPOR's curriculum is not nationally recognized, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth recognizes it and provides funding. The development of qualifications for the 5th and 7th levels of youth work is underway, aiming for official national recognition. The criteria for enrolling in training programs include age, motivation, and previous experience.

NAPOR, established in 2009, is the umbrella organization for youth workers in Serbia. It plays a central role in education, and its members have received recognition as publicly approved organizers of adult education. The National Youth Strategy sets goals for improving the quality of life for young people, emphasizing standardized youth work in non-formal education.

There are policies and guidelines for child protection and safety in youth work programs. While there are no specific rules for public funding of training courses, NAPOR's training has received funding from the Ministry of Tourism and Youth. However, there is no centralized platform or database for comparing educational offers in youth work in Serbia.

In summary, Serbia's youth work education is primarily non-formal, led by NAPOR, with ongoing efforts for formal recognition and standardization. The National Youth Strategy provides a framework for development, and NAPOR's role is crucial in shaping the education landscape for youth workers in the country.



EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Systemic education of youth workers is provided by NAPOR in accordance with the adopted curriculum. The curriculum envisages two possibilities for the implementation of training for the education of youth workers. Training can be conducted in two ways:

1. NAPOR finds funds and announces a competition for members who want to implement training modules;
2. NAPOR members find the means to implement the entire training;

In the first case when NAPOR finds funds, the NAPOR secretariat announces a public call for members who want to implement training modules for licensing. Interested members select the module/s for which they wish to apply for implementation and submit the necessary tender documentation. The NAPOR committee, according to predefined criteria, se-

lects the member with the most points, i.e. the member who is judged to be able to perform the module/s with the highest quality, i.e. part of the training.

In the second case, when the NAPOR member finds the means to conduct the entire training, the member submits documentation for licensing the conduct of training. In this case, a NAPOR member is in charge of the entire administration and implementation of the training, while the role of NAPOR is quality assurance and issuing certificates to participants. This means that the NAPOR member that finds funds for the implementation of the training must also include the cost of the NAPOR related to:

- The cost of the licensing commission;
- Cost of quality assurance monitoring;
- Cost of participation of NAPOR representatives in the final day of student assessment;
- Cost of issuing certificates;

The process of licensing NAPOR members for the implementation of the entire training or parts of the training is carried out on two levels, namely:

- Association licensing
- Licensing of individuals (coaches and mentors)

Until now, in addition to NAPOR, a one-member organisation of the NAPOR association conducted the course in its entirety – the Center for Youth Work from Novi Sad.

The university course implemented by CzOR is a one-year university course „Leadership and Developmental Youth Work in the Community“ which is conducted under the licence of Jönköping University from Sweden. It is the only formal education for youth workers in the Republic of Serbia. Upon its completion students receive a certificate from Jönköping University from Sweden, which carries 30 ESBP points.

www.czor.org/programi/obrazovanje/univerzitetski-kurs

In Serbia, there are still no possibilities for formal education for youth workers according to the national framework. Establishing a master program at Belgrade University is in process. Currently the only possibility is non-formal education that NAPOR and its organisation members provide.

Educational programs that take place in accordance with the NAPOR curriculum allow interested persons to acquire the know-

ledge, skills and attitudes necessary for quality youth work.

Curricula for two levels of occupations in the field of youth work – assistant in youth work programs and youth work program coordinator were adopted for the first time by the NAPOR Assembly in 2011, and then the curriculum was piloted in practice through three generations.

After piloting and conducting evaluations, the need for revision of the lesson plans was observed, which was carried out through the consultative process in 2014/15. During this process, occupational standards were also revised, and occupational names were changed:

- from youth work program assistant to youth leader (activist) and
- coordinator of the youth work program to youth worker.

These two occupations should not be seen as 1st and 2nd levels of occupational complexity, but as two occupations that are focused on two different areas in youth work.

Occupational standards are the starting point for the development of curricula. Curricula have undergone changes in relation to more realistic setting of learning outcomes as well as training methods. This primarily refers to the use of online learning opportunities following the development of Internet technology in order to reduce the hours of direct work aimed at mastering theories, and increase the number of hours of direct work provided for interactive and experiential learning. The advantage of this kind of work is the overall reduction of training costs, which increases the possibility for its more frequent implementation.

Curricula are based on non-formal education methodology and provide a balance between theoretical and practical work. The theoretical knowledge included in these plans is extracted from practice in youth work, and in addition to representing the basis for practical rewards, they are also necessary for youth work to finally be recognized as an applied academic discipline.

Practical work is the essence of youth work and therefore it is given due attention in these educational programs. Special focus is also placed on mentoring and supervision, through which future youth workers learn primarily how to learn, how to self-assess and develop their individual plan for further professional development.

Both trainings prepare participants for active work and engagement in youth work. Each student acquires and develops the necessary professional competences and qualifications to perform the tasks envisaged.

Youth leader/activist training modules	Training modules for youth workers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basics of youth work 2. Basics of communication and acceptance of diversity 3. Basics of the project cycle 4. Leadership and activism in youth work 5. Informing young people 6. Practice in youth work 7. Mentoring and supervision 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth work in the community and adolescent development 2. Individual and group work 3. Leadership in youth work and the transformation of conflicts 4. Project management and volunteer management 5. Practice in youth work 6. Mentoring and supervision

All participants who meet the prescribed enrolment conditions can enrol in training courses for the acquisition of qualifications for performing activities in the field of youth work. The group can count from ten to twenty-five participants. Participants should have high motivation and interest in working with young people in different activities and conditions, with the aim of empowering young people and contributing to the development of the social community.

Criteria for enrolling in youth leader training:	Criteria for enrolling in youth worker training:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 15 years of age; • Previous volunteer or work experience is desirable; • High motivation to work with young people • Enrolment interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 18 years of age • Possessing the competencies for a youth leader* • Having previous volunteer or work experience; • High motivation for working with young people and training in the field of youth work; • Enrolment interview

There is no specific form of formal education leading to a qualification as a youth worker. In addition, no training for continuous professional development, either directly

organised or funded by public authorities is available to youth workers. Most of education is provided through non-formal education conducted by the NGOs.

There are no specific platforms or databases listing or comparing various educational offers in youth work in Serbia. All information about educational offers in youth work are communicated through existing NAPOR channels – website, e-mail list, social media.

National Association of Youth Work Practitioners – NAPOR organises training for youth workers and awards their accreditation. The process is guided by a handbook for accreditation (NAPOR 2009) and the Council for Ethical Questions. NAPOR has developed curriculum for the education of youth workers based on quality standards developed for qualifications in youth work on two levels:

- Youth Leader
- Youth Worker

The curriculum includes training for both levels of occupation, as well as a defined mechanism for the validation of previously acquired competencies in youth work. For practitioners who conduct youth work, continuously work on their training in this field, but do not have a comprehensive formal or non-formal education in youth work, it is possible to show and prove the competencies they have gained through experience and various trainings before the commission, based on which they receive a certificate for one of the 2 levels of occupation in youth work.

For those who do not have enough experience in youth work that they can validate, a training process has been created. It consists of several thematic modules and practice in youth work. Thematic modules, with defined learning outcomes, cover competencies defined by the standard of occupation and contain the theoretical basis of youth work. The modules are conducted through online learning, as well as practical work with trainers. In the revised Curricula for education of youth leaders and youth workers (2014), each module of multimodular education begins with online learning. Internship in youth work is an integral part of the training and implies the implementation of a continuous programme of youth work with a group of young people which each participant implements in their local community, in the home organisation.

The certificate that youth workers receive after the NAPOR training/validation process is private, not a public document. There are no public documents yet, but as the process of creating qualifications for the 5th and 7th level of youth work at the national level is going on, it is moving towards obtaining public documents for those who will go through those processes. Recently adopted National youth strategy 2023-2030 provides a good foundation for it, having in mind that youth work is defined as one of five main specific goals.

In Serbia, there is currently a curriculum developed by NAPOR that defines competencies for different levels of the title of youth worker. The curriculum was defined by the working group for curriculum development established by NAPOR in 2011 (revised in 2014/2015) and adopted by the NAPOR assembly, which consists of all members of the NAPOR association.

The curriculum is not nationally recognized. However, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth recognizes the NAPOR curriculum, not through its procedures and regulations, but in a way that, through various projects, provides funds for the education of future youth workers in accordance with the curriculum and program that it foresees.

Since the beginning of 2019, a new Classification of Occupations has been in force in Serbia, which included a total of 3,641 occupations. A youth worker as a profession was included as well under the code 3412.03. Recognition of occupations enables the placement of competent youth workers in the chain of systemic care for young people, which should respond to the problem of sustainability of youth programs, as well as the cooperation of various actors in youth policy. This is a major step towards recognition of skills gained through youth work even though the occupation is still not officially part of the National Qualification Framework document adopted in 2018.

The next step of work at the national level is development of the qualification for the 5th and 7th level of youth work, which would be recognized nationally and an official document recognising the youth worker as an occupation would be issued. The requirements for volunteering youth workers are the same. There is no difference.

Adult education is implemented by primary and secondary schools, as well as other organisations that in special procedures receive the status of publicly recognized organiser of adult education activities (JPOA). The most important elements of JPOA status approval are regulated by the Adult Education Law and the National Qualifications Framework Law, while the standards for obtaining JPOA status are defined in secondary legal acts depending on the type of adult education activity, i.e. depending on whether it is a non-formal education program, or prior learning recognition activities. Several NAPOR organisation members got this JPOA status. This means that issued diplomas are publicly recognized.

In January 2023 National youth strategy was adopted for period 2023-2030. The main goal is “Improved quality life of young people”. It has five specific goals. The first specific goal is “Youth work is standardised in the system of non-formal education and is continuously implemented”. It has six measures where one of the indicators is whether there is a publicly recognized organizer of adult education activities in youth work.



A TYPICAL SERBIAN YOUTH WORKER

Dajna is a Serbian youth worker who works in a youth club in Novi Sad within the organization Center for youth work – CZOR (NAPOR organization member). Dajna provides support for young people concerning their identity development, but also professional development by exploring different possibilities for startup, running new ideas etc. To do this, Dajna organizes various leisure activities such as movie nights, competition in video/board games, table football etc. They also support young people with their tasks on faculty/high school, provides information on educational

and career opportunities and they is there to help young people to make their own choices. The focus is the further development of the personality of the young person with a focus on independence, personal responsibility and empowerment. Additionally, Dajna runs different programs/projects/activities. One of the main programs in the organization is Mobile Youth club which involves going to the settlement where the young people are and holding activities with them there (outreach). Target group in this activity are mostly vulnerable groups of young people such as Roma youth, rural youth, poor youth etc. Activities are organized in a way that young volunteers from the youth club of CZOR go (with the support of Dajna) in the community by van and organize different activities outdoors. Focus of this program is socialization and integration of marginalized youth.

HOW DID DAJNA GET THERE AND WHAT DID THEIR EDUCATION LOOK LIKE TO GAIN THE QUALIFICATION TO WORK IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH WORK IN SERBIA?

Since they were 16, Dajna knew that they wanted to work with young people. Firstly, they became a volunteer in a youth club in a town where they grew up, after which they passed training for peer educators and were promoted to youth leader. In that period, they were organizing different activities with young people. When they turned 18, with several friends Dajna established a youth organization where they were active until they enrolled in the Faculty of law in Novi Sad. When they moved to Novi Sad, firstly started to volunteer in several organizations for youth, where they heard about training for youth workers that provides Center for Youth Work (CZOR) in cooperation with Jönköping University from Sweden. They enrolled in training in 2017. After 10 months they got a diploma for youth work and job offer in Center for Youth Work where they are still working and implementing activities with young people.