

# Recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning within the field of youth

Current European developments



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## A. Policy developments

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### A.1. Recommendation of the Council on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

On November 26, 2012, the Council of the EU adopted a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, based on the European Commission's [proposal](#). The adopted Recommendation invites Member States to establish a national system of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes by 2018. The system would provide the opportunity for citizens to have their skills, knowledge and competences validated, and to obtain a full or a partial qualification on the basis of these validated learning outcomes. The system should be connected to the [National Qualifications Frameworks](#) and create synergies between the existing European frameworks for recognition of non-formal and informal learning. One of the guiding principles outlined in the recommendation proposes that "the use of Union transparency tools, such as Europass and Youthpass, should be promoted".

The final adopted text of the recommendation will be made available at the end of 2012 / beginning of 2013.

### A.2. Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe

The document [Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe](#) is a working paper of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe within the field of youth. The previous paper, which had been released in 2004, served as a basis for important developments concerning the recognition of learning experiences within the youth sector in the past years (Youthpass, Portfolio, Bridges for recognition, European Principles for Validation etc.).

The paper encourages the consolidation of the existing developments and proposes, in this context, ten recommendations for action:

1. Develop a common understanding and a joint strategy in the youth field and improve co-operation and communication
2. Visibility of the particular role of youth organisations
3. Assure quality and training in non-formal education/learning
4. Increasing knowledge about non-formal education/learning in youth work
5. Develop existing tools further and make them accessible and transferable
6. Reinforcement of political processes on the European level
7. Link youth to the lifelong learning strategy and vice versa
8. Involve stakeholders of the employment sector

9. Associating the social sector

10. Cooperate with other policy fields and with stakeholders of civil society

The Pathways 2.0 paper has inspired a European process, steered by the Expert Group on Recognition, to enhance further developments around recognition (e.g. the symposium on recognition, [section D.1](#)).

### **A.3. Resolution of the Council on youth work**

[The resolution](#) (Nov 2010) sets forward a broad definition of youth work, and among other suggestions, declares that competences developed through youth work need to be sufficiently valued and effectively recognised. It acclaims that Youth in Action provides an important contribution to the quality of youth work, the development of competences and the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work. It invites the Commission to enhance the quality of youth work, the capacity and competence development of youth workers and youth leaders and the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work. It also invites to develop and support the development of user-friendly European tools (e.g. Youthpass) for independent assessment and self-assessment, as well as instruments for the documentation of competences of youth workers and youth leaders which would help to recognise and evaluate the quality of youth work in Europe.

### **A.4. EU Agenda 2020, Youth on the Move**

Within the [Communication from the Commission, COM \(2010\) 477](#) and here in particular within the [Youth on the Move](#) flagship initiative of the [EU Agenda 2020](#), the European Commission aims "... to expand career and life-enhancing learning opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities and/or at risk of social exclusion. In particular, these young people should benefit from the expansion of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and from strengthened provisions for the recognition and validation of such learning within national qualifications frameworks. This can help to open the doors to further learning on their part". The key actions are:

- Propose a draft Council Recommendation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning to step up Member State action to promote recognition of skills acquired through these learning activities.
- Develop a Youth on the Move card to facilitate mobility for all young people (i.e. students, pupils, apprentices, trainees, researchers and volunteers), helping to make the integration process of mobile learners smoother.
- Propose a European Skills Passport, based on existing elements of Europass, to record in a transparent and comparable way the competences acquired by people throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings, including e-skills and informal and non-formal learning. This should facilitate mobility by easing the recognition of skills across countries.

The Council Recommendation from June 28, 2011: "[Youth on the move – promoting the learning mobility of young people](#)" encourages the Member States to use the full potential of the existing EU and Bologna instruments to facilitate mobility, including Europass and Youthpass. The proposal recommends that Member States:

- Promote the implementation and use of EU instruments which facilitate the transfer and validation of the learning outcomes of mobility experiences between Member States. These instruments should also be better publicised, especially among employers.
- Improve procedures and guidelines for the validation and recognition of both informal and non-formal learning in order to facilitate more mobility, for example in voluntary activities and youth work.
- Address the issue of validation and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences (such as foreign language skills) acquired during mobility periods abroad.
- Establish visible contact points where individuals can have their qualifications recognised and certified after their return from abroad.

It also suggests to:

- Encourage the use of 'multipliers' such as teachers, trainers, families, youth workers and young people to inspire and motivate young people to become mobile. Encourage employers in the field of education to recognise and value teachers', trainers' and youth workers' commitment to learning mobility.
- Promote and support opportunities for learning mobility as a component in the initial training and continuous professional development of heads of educational institutions, teachers, trainers, administrative staff and youth workers.

### **A.5. EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering**

Within the [EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering \(2010-2018\)](#) the EU Member States set themselves and for the Commission the following objectives and activities, among others:

- Complementary to formal education, non-formal education for young people should be supported to contribute to Lifelong Learning in Europe, by developing its quality, recognising its outcomes, and integrating it better with formal education;
  - Fully use the range of tools established at EU level for the validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications;
  - Make available good quality guidance and counselling services for young people;
  - The Commission will further develop the self-assessment function of Europass, in particular for skills developed in non-formal settings and provide certificates such as Youthpass.

- Support youth volunteering, by developing more voluntary opportunities for young people, making it easier to volunteer by removing obstacles, raising awareness on the value of volunteering, recognising volunteering as an important form of non-formal education and reinforcing cross-border mobility of young volunteers;
  - Enhance skills recognition through Europass and Youthpass;
  - Recognise contributions of youth organisations and non-structured forms of volunteering.
- Youth work should be supported, recognised for its economic and social contribution, and professionalised;
  - Equip youth workers with professional skills and promote their validation through the appropriate European instruments (Europass, EQF, ECVET);
  - Promote youth work through, inter alia, Structural Funds;
  - Develop mobility of youth workers as indicated in the EC Treaty;
  - Develop innovative services, pedagogies and practice of youth work;
  - The Commission will develop its analysis of the economic and social impact of youth work.

### The EU Youth Report

The [EU Youth Report](#), adopted in Nov 2012 as a Joint Council–Commission Report, calls for youth employment, social inclusion, health and the well-being of young people to be top priorities in the next 3-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2013-2015). The report includes a summary of how the EU Youth Strategy has been implemented at national and EU level since 2010, and an analysis of the situation faced by young people.

The report concludes that the EU Youth Strategy has served as a lasting and flexible framework for a whole range of actions, including employment & entrepreneurship, education & training, and social inclusion, and developing multi-faceted solutions in support of young people. It proposes that the Youth Strategy "needs to step up its focus on participation in democratic and societal activities, as well as build on youth work in developing young people's life skills, their overall personal development and a sense of belonging to the society in which they live."

### A.6. Rethinking Education

At the end of November 2012, the European Commission launched a strategy called [Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes](#), to encourage Member States to take immediate action to ensure that young people develop the skills and competences needed by the labour market and to achieve their targets for growth and jobs. The emphasis of the strategy is on the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by

students (learning outcomes) through the learning process, rather than on completing a specific stage or on time spent in school.

The strategy includes, among other aspects:

- A much stronger focus on transversal skills and basic skills, especially entrepreneurial and IT skills;
- New benchmarks by the COM on foreign language learning;
- Need for improvement of the recognition of qualifications and skills, including those gained outside of the formal education and training system;
- Importance of a partnership approach.

### **A.7. Youth in Action and the new programme generation**

In April 2011, the results of the [interim evaluation of Youth in Action programme](#) were published. The evaluators came to very positive conclusions on a number of aspects regarding the relevance, complementarity and added value of YiA, its effectiveness and its efficiency. Participating in YiA is seen as a strong learning experience, this learning experience in a non-formal setting can create bridges to formal education and training. Among the recommendations for the future developments, suggestions were made to increase the focus on employability and to further promote Youthpass.

The new programme generation proposed by the European Commission unites the programmes for education, youth, and sports. The Commission's proposal for the programme "[Erasmus for All](#)" has been negotiated in the Council of the EU, resulting in May 2012 in a [further developed proposal with a distinct youth chapter](#). The current discussions in the European Parliament suggest a future programme called "[YES Europe](#)" and including separate sub-programmes based on existing brands (Grundtvig, Leonardo, Youth in Action). The final agreement between the Council of the EU, the Parliament, and the European Commission, is expected to be reached by summer 2013. A more complete overview of the process can be read [here](#).

#### **European Training Strategy**

The [European Training Strategy](#) (ETS) of Youth in Action, adopted in December 2010, builds a frame for the more effective realisation of training activities in Youth in Action. In comparison to the previous training strategy, it includes new fields of action (e.g. Strengthening actions aimed at recognition of youth work) and regards Youthpass as a tool to be developed for meeting the needs for recognition of youth worker and trainer competences. Among the first steps, development of competence profiles for youth workers and trainers has been undertaken.

### **Youthpass as a strategy**

The strategy of validation and recognition of non-formal learning within Youth in Action is embedded in Youthpass developments. The aim of this strategic approach is to raise awareness and support a professional public debate concerning the individual, social, formal, and political dimensions of recognition of non-formal learning and youth work. The implementation of the tool and the strategy is described as a [case study](#) in the last edition of the European Inventory.

### **A.8. The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: AGENDA 2020**

The [Resolution on the youth policy of the Council of Europe](#), adopted in 2008, sets priorities for the Council of Europe youth policy and action for the following years, and describes the approaches, methods and instruments to achieve these. Among other priorities, the following is mentioned: social inclusion of young people, with special emphasis on ensuring young people's access to education, training and working life, particularly through the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning; and supporting young people's transition from education to the labour market. Working with multipliers and supporting the development of quality youth work and its recognition are emphasised as necessary approaches.

## **B. Tools for recognition of non-formal and informal learning**

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### **B.1. European Skills Passport and Europass Experience**

Recently, the European Skills Passport – a document to accompany the CV – has been launched. The other new instrument within the [Europass framework](#) – Europass Experience – will build upon the experiences of the Europass Mobility and aim at recognition of skills and competences that have been acquired outside of formal education settings on local/national level. The tool is expected to be made available at the end of 2012 and be in line with the European Qualification Framework.

A change in the legal basis for Europass is foreseen in 2015, to allow more flexible developments in the framework, e.g. to merge Europass Mobility and Europass Experience.

### **B.2. Youthpass**

Currently, about 205,000 [Youthpass](#) certificates have been generated for the participants of various projects supported by Youth in Action, on the website which is available in 25 languages. Youthpass will consolidate the achievements through continuing support for all



actors and regions involved, provide certificates to all (decentralised) Actions of the Youth in Action programme, and explore possibilities for setting Youthpass forward outside the Youth in Action programme as a good practice recognition tool. Attention will be given to further promotion and visibility of the tool, and to further support for reflections on learning outcomes. The impact survey published in spring 2013 will provide evidence of the experience made.

### **B.3. European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers**

The European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers, a tool developed by the Council of Europe supporting the assessment and description of competences acquired in youth work, exists in 5 or 6 languages (translation into Turkish is foreseen). A revision and update of the portfolio is considered.

### **B.4. Youth on the Move card**

The [Youth on the Move card](#) is to be seen as a label rather than a new card replacing existing ones. It should facilitate mobility and participation of all young people. An online consultation has been carried out in 2011 to explore the possible areas of use and functions of the card. Four areas of focus for the YoM Card initiative can be derived from the [survey results](#): transport, culture, education and employment, social needs (social support network, local information, exchange of experience). In the current presentations of the card initiative, support to pan-European recognition of education and access to education is mentioned, alongside with the potential cooperation with Youthpass and the Europass Skills Passport.

## **C. Recent and upcoming studies**

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### **C.1 Study on Mobility Developments in School Education, Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and Youth exchanges**

The Study on Mobility Developments in School Education, Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and Youth Exchanges ([full report](#) and [executive summary](#)) focuses on learning mobility in mobility schemes outside the European action programmes (LLP and Youth in Action), both outbound and inbound mobility, mainly with the countries participating in the above mentioned programmes. The study also describes recognition practices in these mobility programmes, as well as in what regards it is understood as a pedagogical tool.

## **C.2. European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010**

Since 2004, the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning offers, in regular intervals, an overview of the instruments and methods for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning within the European member states and beyond. Until recently, the policies focused predominantly on the areas of general and vocational training. Since 2007, the third sector is being increasingly taken into account. [The current version of 2010](#) includes 34 country reports, 10 case studies and 4 thematic reports (validation for specific target groups). The youth sector has received particular attention through the [case study of Youthpass](#) that has been included in the inventory.

## **C.3. Study on youth participation in democratic life**

A European Commission study on youth participation in democratic life will analyse the current situation of youth participation in Europe, to explore initiatives to promote youth participation and to provide conclusions on how young people's participation in democratic life in Europe can be further enhanced. This will also include assessing youth participation in civil society organisations and non-formal education settings.

## **C.4. Study on the value of youth work in the EU**

The European Commission study on the value of youth work in the EU will among other issues consider non-formal learning in youth work, and results are expected to be released in September 2013. It aims to improve our understanding of socio-economic relevance and the visibility of the youth work sector in the EU. The study should identify how youth work contributes to achieving EU objectives in the fields of economic or social development (e.g. Social Agenda, Europe 2020 Strategy) and will provide evidence and selected case studies of national, regional and local realities of youth work in the 27 EU Member States.

## **C.5. Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action (RAY)**

[Research-based analysis and monitoring of Youth in Action Programme](#) (YiA) aims at producing reliable and valid documentation and understanding of processes and outcomes of the programme and of the activities supported through the programme.

Main objectives of research-based analysis and monitoring of YiA are:

- to contribute to quality assurance and development in the implementation of YiA;
- to contribute to evidence-based and research-informed youth policy development;
- to develop a better understanding about processes and outcomes of non-formal education activities, in particular in the youth field.

In September 2012 a transnational analysis of the RAY results from 2011 was published: [full report](#) and [executive summary](#).

In autumn 2013, the reports of two surveys will be published that focus on special issues related to YiA. One of the surveys will study which conditions and contexts support learning and the development of key competences in YiA projects and beyond. The other survey specializes on the impact of participation in YiA on educational pathways and employability.

### **C.6. Youthpass impact survey**

The European Commission is implementing a survey to investigate and highlight the impact made with Youthpass as a tool, process and strategy. It will explore the impact on different levels through both quantitative and qualitative research methods and is foreseen to be completed by spring 2013.

### **C.7. Research Study on the Impact of Non-Formal Education in Youth Organisations on Young People's Employability**

Through desk research, consultation with youth organisations, a survey with young people, and focus groups with employers from across Europe, [this research](#) ordered by the European Youth Forum assessed whether the competences and skills obtained through non-formal education in youth organisations contribute to the employability of young people. It concludes that long-lasting and frequent engagement and participation in youth organisations brings high soft-skills development. Amongst the six skills mostly demanded by employers, five are also among those developed through involvement in youth organisations: such as communication, team work, decision-making, organisational skills, and self-confidence. For young people who participated in non-formal education activities abroad, this includes also higher development of language, intercultural and leadership skills.

## **D. Stakeholder events**

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### **D.1. European symposium for the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning**

The partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe within the youth field, in cooperation with SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre and the German National Agency for Youth in Action, carried out a symposium for recognition of youth work and non-formal learning. The symposium took place Nov 14-16, 2011, in Strasbourg. It brought together key actors on the European level and fostered a discussion on the recommendations for action of the *Pathways Paper 2.0* (section [A2](#)).

As a result of the symposium, a [Statement](#) was agreed upon and published on behalf of the participants. The Statement describes 7 main challenges for recognition in Europe: 1) the challenge of making the concept of 'youth work and non-formal learning/education' better understood; 2) of keeping all dimensions of recognition in balance; 3) risking formalisation of non-formal learning/education; 4) assuring quality in youth work and in non-formal learning/education; 5) maintaining and cultivating diversity; 6) building knowledge; 7) being dependent from different other sectors; and 8) the challenge of creating partnerships. It provides recommendations for developments on different levels to deal with the challenges, and includes an even more concrete Plan of Action as an annex to the statement.

## E. Other developments

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### E.1. European and National Qualifications Frameworks

The core of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) concerns eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – the learning outcomes, including those acquired from the non-formal and informal contexts. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8). This linking will enable learners and employers to compare the levels of qualifications awarded at home and in other countries. By mid-2012, 15 countries have referenced their national qualifications to EQF; others are expected to complete this process by 2013.

In the [EQF portal](#), relevant documents including national reports can be downloaded, as well as NQF levels of different countries compared. The CEDEFOP [Briefing note](#) describes the current state of developments and challenges regarding the national qualifications frameworks.

In autumn 2012, a stakeholder consultation on EQF has been carried out to investigate the effectiveness and added value of the initiative.

### E.2. European Skills, Competences and Occupations taxonomy (ESCO)

The European Commission is developing a [European Skills, Competences and Occupations taxonomy](#) (ESCO), which will describe the most relevant competences and qualifications needed for several thousand occupations. A partial classification is already in use in the European job mobility portal EURES, which exists in 25 languages. A crucial input will come from the Dictionary of Skills and Competences (DISCO) which contains around 10.000 skills and competence terms and exists in seven languages. ESCO will build on and link with relevant international classifications and standards, such as the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), will complement existing national and sectorial

occupational and educational classifications and enable exchange of information between them. ESCO will be structured around three main pillars: i) occupations; ii) skills/competences; iii) qualifications (building on the work done in the context of the NQFs related to the EQF) and will link these in a systematic way. Also a link to the EQF/NQF is foreseen.

### **E.3. Key competences for lifelong learning**

Based on "[Key competences for a changing world](#)", the joint progress report of the Council and the Commission, and the independent study "[Key competences in Europe](#)", the [key competences framework](#) is being further developed mainly in regards to its implementation. A [Commission Staff Working Document](#) was recently published in connection with the Rethinking Skills strategy that illustrates assessment practices of key competences and suggests further ways to ensure coherent assessment.

### **E.4. Quality assurance of non-formal learning in youth organisations**

The European Youth Forum has been developing a framework for quality assurance of non-formal education. To review performance and results within youth work, 11 quality indicators have been set up that should be reflected on within each organisation during a first internal step, followed by an external (peer review) step. In the pilot project in 2010, 6 Member Organisations tested out the internal and external Quality Assurance (QA); the process continued in 2011 and 2012 with new youth organisations taking part. On 19th April 2011, the [Network on Quality Assurance in Non-Formal Education](#) was officially launched during a European Youth Forum's conference on the subject. The network aims to increase the quality of Non-Formal Education in Europe and increase the recognition of this quality by supporting the members in assuring the quality of their educational work, while increasing the understanding of it by other actors in society. The network works on three strands: expertise, capacity building and policy. Through continued, structured discussions between NFE providers and institutions, the European Youth Forum aims to have reached its main goal of agreeing on a Quality Assurance Charter for Non-Formal Education by 2015.

State of affairs: December 2012

**Disclaimer:** This document was developed and will be regularly updated by [SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre](#), with the help of members of the Expert Group on Recognition and the Youthpass Advisory Group. The latest version of the document is available at [www.salto-youth.net/recognition](http://www.salto-youth.net/recognition). SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre hopes that the information gives you a good overview on European developments around recognition of non-formal learning and youth work. Please send any updates in initiatives listed already in the document, or information about other relevant European initiatives to [SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre](#).