



① WHY THIS HANDBOOK? KEY QUESTIONS AND NEEDS

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1. RECOGNITION OF LEARNING IN EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK

¹ Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-website-declaration>.

The final Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention¹ in 2015 states that “Youth work is not a luxury but an existential necessity if Europe is to effectively address its concerns about social inclusion, cohesion and equal opportunities, and commitment to values of democracy and human rights.” Furthermore, as non-formal and informal learning is one of the key principles of youth work, it is no surprise that the Declaration also calls for greater “recognition and validation of the learning and achievement that takes place through youth work in non-formal and informal learning environments”.

This plea for better recognition of the value of youth work and non-formal learning is not new; rather, it is yet another milestone in a long process that began back in 1998. The Final Declaration of the Council of Europe's 5th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth in Bucharest in April 1998 similarly invited Member States to recognise the abilities young people acquire from non-formal education.² Although progress seems slow overall, there have been many improvements regarding validation of non-formal learning in both the education and youth fields.³ In December 2012, the European Council issued a Recommendation⁴ asking Member States to establish strategies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. In the youth field, thanks to the launch of the Youthpass scheme in 2007, the educational value and focus of European youth work has gained greater visibility, and its impact on the learning achievements of young people across the continent is now much more tangible.

The project "Research-based analysis and monitoring of Youth in Action" (RAY) highlighted that participation in EU Youth in Action (YiA) projects contributes to the development of all key competences for lifelong learning.⁵ It states that "While the most distinct development is reported for interpersonal, social and intercultural competences as well as for communication in a foreign language, a significant development is also stated for sense of entrepreneurship, civic competence, cultural awareness and expression, and learning competence ('learning to learn')."⁶ A special "inclusion analysis" of the RAY data shows that the impact of international youth work on competence development is even stronger for young people with fewer opportunities.⁷ When the opportunities are given and proper support is provided, this target group appears to benefit more from participation than their "better-off" peers. Another RAY study between October 2015 and April 2016 also highlighted that participation in Erasmus+ projects has a strong impact on the development of key competences for lifelong learning.⁸

² Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. [Getting there...](#) (2013)

³ Darko Marković and Gülesin Nemetlu-Ünal. [Unlocking Doors to Recognition](#) (SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre, 2011). [Overview of recognition developments](#) (SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre, 2016)

⁴ Council [Recommendation on the validation on non-formal and informal learning](#) (2012)

⁵ Key competences for lifelong learning: https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/key-competences-for-lifelong-learning_en

⁶ RAY. [Youth in Action makes a difference](#) (2013)

⁷ SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre and RAY [Impact of mobility on young people with fewer opportunities](#).

⁸ RAY (2015-2016): <https://www.researchyouth.eu/factsheet-key-competences>

EFFECTS ON KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING*

The majority of respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that through their participation in a Erasmus+ Youth in Action project they improved their ability...

KC1 COMMUNICATING IN A MOTHER TONGUE

... to say what I think with conviction in discussions. 88%

KC2 COMMUNICATING IN A FOREIGN TONGUE

... to communicate with people who speak another language. 93%

KC3 MATHEMATICAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCES

... to think logically and draw conclusions. 79%

KC5 LEARNING TO LEARN

... to plan and carry out my learning independently. 73%

KC6 SOCIAL AND CIVIC COMPETENCES

... to get along with people who have different viewpoints. 95%

... to negotiate joint solutions when there are different viewpoints. 90%

... to achieve something in the interest of the community or society. 88%

KC7 SENSE OF INITIATIVE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

... to identify opportunities for my personal or professional development. 86%

... to develop an idea and put it into practice. 85%

KC8 CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION

... to express myself creatively or artistically. 80%

N = 16.373 participants, survey conducted in October 2015 - April 2016.

Source: RAY research factsheet

Since learning in the youth field relates not only to lifelong learning but also to civil society, it both impacts on individuals' personal and social development and improves their employability. A study by the European Youth Forum⁹ in 2013 in 40 European countries clearly showed that there is a match between the skills demanded by employers and those developed by taking part in youth work projects. Specifically, the report states that "out of the top 6 skills and competences most often mentioned as demanded by employers (...) five are also amongst those developed to a greater extent through involvement in youth organisations (...) communication skills, organisational/planning skills, decision-making skills, team-working skills, confidence/autonomy (...)". Another study, which focused exclusively on the development of competences in European Voluntary Service projects,¹⁰ also found a significant match between the competences valued by employers and those developed by the EVS volunteers.

In terms of its impact on formal education, youth work has a positive influence on student achievements by fostering non-cognitive skills such as persistence, motivation, interpersonal skills and self-efficacy¹¹ (Shernoff and Lowe Vandell, 2007, 2008). Research also suggest that it is the quality of youth work that matters; the quality of youth work experiences may be a stronger and more positive predictor of academic performance than the quantity of experience in youth work programmes (Shernoff, 2010). Moreover, youth work plays an important role in providing alternative pathways for young people who drop out of education and training.¹² These pathways may lead individuals back to formal education or simply to acquiring new competences (and/or new qualifications) through non-formal and informal learning.

It seems that today, there is ample evidence that youth work has a significant impact on young people's competence development,¹³ which is also confirmed in the growing body of national research.^{14 15} However, what is often missing are ways and tools to "translate" these competences to other fields – primarily to education and employment. Perhaps after youth workers and young people have reached a certain level of self-recognition, there is a need to find ways to ensure both "conceptual transferability" (ensuring that the same meaning is assigned to the same words) and "practical transferability" of competences developed in the youth field through their application in other social contexts. It is our hope that this Handbook will provide some new doors and routes for Youthpass users to achieve such recognition.

⁹ Manuel Souto-Otero, Daniela Ulicna, Loraine Schaepekens, Viktoria Bogнар: [Study on the impact of Non-Formal Education in youth organisations on young people's employability](#) (European Youth Forum, 2013)

¹⁰ Özgehan Senyuva: [EVS Competences for Employment](#) (2014), EVS Competences for Employment Full Survey Report (SALTO Inclusion and SALTO South-East Europe Resource centres)

¹¹ Shernoff and Lowe Vandell: [Youth Engagement in After-School Programs: A Perspective from Experience Sampling](#) (2007, 2008), David J. Shernoff (2010)

¹² Allison Dunne, Daniela Ulicna, Ilona Murphy, Maria Golubeva: [Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union](#) (European Commission, 2014) p. 145

¹³ *ibid* , p. 139-140

¹⁴ Hidden competences – Study results: [Developing Competences Through Work and International Mobility](#) (2013), accessible here: https://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Sari-Turunen-Zwinger_Hidden-Competences-Study-Results.pdf.

¹⁵ Sever Džigurski and Darko Marković: [Study of the impact of NFE in youth work](#) (NAPOR, 2014)

2. A NOTE ON EMPLOYABILITY AND THE “INSTRUMENTALISATION” OF YOUTH WORK

The call for better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning is not only relevant to employability. It must be clear that youth work and non-formal learning have a value in and of themselves while playing an incredibly important role in supporting young people's inclusion, wellbeing, holistic development, and ultimately empowerment. These are important arenas of educational practice that have deserved their proper social recognition both in terms of their status and in terms of financial investments.

However, when youth unemployment started to skyrocket across Europe, employability as a topic moved rapidly up the political agenda. Solutions have been sought in various domains, including youth work. It is important to underline that youth work itself cannot and should not be the sole solution for youth unemployment, since the scarcity of jobs needs a systemic solution to which other policy arenas need to make a greater contribution. That said, it is true that young people's participation in (local and international) youth work activities develop important competences that can be beneficial for them in the labour market, in entrepreneurship or perhaps in formal education.

If you are a youth worker, it is entirely up to you to develop a position in relation to these questions and to consider what that position means for your role. While you do not need to become a job counsellor or career coach, it may be useful to keep this bigger picture in mind and acquire a knowledge and awareness of employment-related issues. And no, this Handbook does not intend to “instrumentalise” youth work – rather, it is designed to assist youth workers in responding effectively to the needs of the young people they work with.

3. YOUTHPASS SO FAR

Youthpass was introduced in 2007 under the EU Youth in Action (YiA) programme as an instrument for recognising learning outcomes obtained in the activities supported by the programme. Participants use the Youthpass certificates to describe what they learnt during

their project. In this manner, not only does Youthpass support participants in reflecting on their personal learning process, it also contributes to the social recognition of youth work and improves the employability of young people because they are able to document their acquired competences. Between its introduction in 2007 and October 2019, more than one million Youthpass certificates were issued.

In 2012-2013 the European Commission carried out its Youthpass Impact Study¹⁶ to assess the impact of the scheme on the participants of the EU YiA programme, the work of the organisations participating in the programme, and the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning. The study demonstrated that young people and youth work organisations hold the self-assessment dimension of Youthpass in high regard. The contribution of Youthpass towards raising awareness of one's learning achievements and communicating one's competences was also confirmed by the results of the RAY monitoring survey,¹⁷ in which 83% of the participants involved in the reflection or self-assessment connected to Youthpass said it helped to raise their awareness of their development and learning throughout their project. When asked 2-11 months after the end of the project, 30% of Youthpass holders stated they had used it in some context, and 69% thought that the certificate had been useful for that purpose. The impact study also highlighted that for many young people, writing down the outcomes of their self-assessment is a challenge for which they need support. Youth workers also requested support and guidance so they can assist young people in completing their self-assessment.

The objective of this publication is to give youth workers, mentors and trainers ideas, resources and tools to help participants express their learning outcomes in such a way that they are adequately communicated to other people. This is a process that does not start at the end of a project; rather, it requires participants to keep track of and reflect on their learning as it evolves. Note-taking during reflection phases can be very helpful in reminding participants what they have learned after the project ends. Nevertheless, learning outcomes still need to be articulated in such a way that they are understood by people outside the international youth work community.

That said, it is not only for the purpose of filling in the Youthpass certificate that young people need to find the right words to describe their learning outcomes and competences. Today - and even more so in the future - the ability to describe one's competences is an important skill, one that is sometimes more valuable than a certificate when looking for a job or starting a business. So let's find the right language to describe our competences!

¹⁶Youthpass Impact Study: <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/about-youthpass/youthpass-impact-study/>

¹⁷Exploring Erasmus+: Youth in Action. Effects and outcomes of the ERASMUS+ Youth in Action Programme from the perspective of project participants and project leaders (2017), accessible here: <http://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action>