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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

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

(Version 26 July 2010)

**Working Paper of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, elaborated in co-operation with the Salto Training and Co-operation Resource Centre, the European Youth Forum and the Directorates responsible for youth in the European Commission and the Council of Europe**

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## 0. Introduction and aim of the Pathways 2.0 paper

In February 2004 the Youth Directorates of the Council of Europe and the European Commission published a joint working paper 'Pathways towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training and Learning in the Youth Field'<sup>1</sup>. It highlighted a strong need for social and formal recognition of non-formal and informal education / learning<sup>2</sup> in youth work activities. The paper argued that non-formal learning and education in the youth field is more than a sub-category of education and training since it is contributing to the preparation of young people for the knowledge-based *and* the civil society. It stressed the need to strengthen awareness of key persons, institutions and of young people themselves on the value of youth work and asked for developing effective and flexible ways for validation and recognition. A number of concrete activities and commitments were proposed in the paper, addressed at the European institutions, the member states, the NGO sector, the education and training field and specifically the youth sector.

The Pathways paper encouraged a European wide debate on the meaning and status of non-formal learning in the youth field. Since its publication developments in the field of non formal learning / education (and its recognition) have been dynamic but also very diverse, at European as well as at national level. Major political achievements have been reached and a variety of tools and instruments were developed. Also co-operation and dialogue within the youth field and of the youth sector with other areas, particular education and training has considerably increased.

Now, after six years of publishing the first Pathways paper and more then 10 years after starting the development and implementation of respective strategies to better recognise non-formal education / learning, the partnership team of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth, in cooperation with the European Youth Forum and the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre felt the need to update and re-focus the strategy as outlined in the first paper and to give the strategy for a better recognition of non-formal learning in youth activities, and of youth work in general, a new impetus. The initiative to re-dynamise the efforts on recognition goes also back to the European workshop "Continue the pathways towards recognition..." held in Prague in June 2008 under the Czech EU Presidency; participants invited and encouraged the EU-CoE youth partnership to take the lead in updating the strategy. Both institutions sustaining the EU-CoE youth partnership, European Commission and Council of Europe were closely associated to the redrafting of the paper.

Reflecting the participatory nature of youth policy, the paper was also developed together with youth organisations, the main providers of non-formal education in the youth field, represented by the European Youth Forum. A further number of stakeholders were involved in the reflection when drafting this paper. It is addressed to all those interested in further improving the status and relevance of youth work (and - as part of it - of non-formal learning) and involved in developing and implementing better strategies and instruments for recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> Pathways towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training & Learning in the Youth Field. Working paper by the Youth Unit of the Directorate 'Youth, Civil Society, Communication' in the Directorate General 'Education and Culture' of the European Commission and the Youth Department of the Directorate 'Youth and Sport' in the Directorate General 'Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport' of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg and Brussels, February 2004

<sup>2</sup> This paper - as the first Pathways paper did - uses both terms, non-formal learning *and* education (NFEL) when reflecting on the pedagogical dimension of youth work activities, their methods, tools and approaches and the environment in which they take place. Thus it tries to respect diverse traditions, definitions and understandings existing in European countries

The aim of this Pathways paper 2.0 is to provide a new vision and an outline on how to sustain and to foster the progress made until today and, even more, to go beyond the achievements made so far. This vision is based on the political agendas of the two European institutions, Council of Europe and European Union and the main providers and promoters of non-formal learning / education and of youth work. The political agenda's are documented on the one hand side in "**The future of the Council of Europe's youth policy: Agenda 2020**" and on the other hand in "**A renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)**"<sup>3</sup>.

The recognition of non-formal education / learning - and of youth work in general - is an important aim for the two institutions and its partners in the youth field but it is not an aim in itself, it is part of coherent vision on how to improve the inclusion and well-being of young people in our society and how to empower them to be active citizens. In this respect youth work plays a crucial role as outlined in the political documents and expressed at various occasions with the aim of granting youth work a better place and political recognition in our societies.

At the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the situation of young people in Europe is complex and diverse. Non-formal learning and education – and youth work in general - has the potential to address many of the issues that concern young people. It helps young people in making better educational choices, gives them larger and better possibilities to learn and it helps them showing all potential skills. A better social recognition of non-formal learning outcomes helps to empower young people and can lead to increased participation in our societies and democratic participation.

## **2. Non-formal education and learning in the youth field - characteristics and impact**

Education and learning in the youth field encompasses various types, methods, settings and approaches of learning. Even if it is generally understood to be non-formal education and learning it provides as well many elements of informal learning and sometimes it is very close to formal education and learning.

Some elements of youth work can be considered to be **formal education / learning and training**. In specific cases the youth sector / youth work acts as a substitute, alternative education and training provider (e.g. in second chance schools and similar projects, in special Vocational Education and Training projects), for school drop-outs, early school leavers, disaffected young people or other young people at risk. The learning process is structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time, learning support and it is intentional; the participants get certificates and/or diplomas.

Youth work activities also provide many **informal learning** opportunities as young people learn while simply being active, being a volunteer or just being with their peers. They learn informally in daily life and leisure time, even by hanging around, as they learn informally in school, at work and in family life, just learning by doing; it is typically not structured and not intentional and does not lead to certification. It provides specific learning opportunities, in particular of social, cultural and personal nature, often called "soft" skills.

**Non-formal learning and education**, understood as learning outside institutional contexts (out-of-school) is the key activity, but also the key competence of youth work. Non-formal learning / education in youth work is often structured, based on learning

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<sup>3</sup> Further information see chapter 3.1 (Council of Europe) and 3.2 (European Union)

objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional. It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered, leading to a better recognition of the individual learning outcome.

Learning in the youth field enables young people to acquire essential skills and competences and contributes to their personal development, to social inclusion and to active citizenship, thereby improving their employment prospects. Learning activities within the youth field - and youth work in general - provide a significant added value for society, the economy and young people themselves. Youth work is situated between the social sector, pedagogy and civil society.

Participation in activities in the youth field contributes in various and manifold ways to acquire the 8 key competences as identified in the framework of lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>: to communicate in the mother tongue as well as in a foreign language, mathematical and scientific competence, digital competence, social and civic competences, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

Education and learning activities within the youth field have a participative and learner-centred approach, are carried out on a voluntary basis and are therefore closely linked to young people's needs, aspirations and interests. Important key elements are peer learning, learning environments and the diversity of the approaches and target groups. Formal learning emphasises cognitive learning, non-formal settings often complement cognitive aspects by emotional, social and practical levels of learning.

Learning activities within the youth field are shaped by a specific character of learning which was developed over years and takes into account the specific situation of young people in societies. In particular within the European youth field non-formal and informal learning / education activities provide an intercultural learning dimension which supports the intercultural dialogue between people.

### **3. Stocktaking – the state of affairs at European and national level**

#### **3.1 Recognition of non-formal learning /education in the youth policy of the Council of Europe**

A first reference to recognition of non-formal learning in youth activities can be found in the final declaration of the 5<sup>th</sup> conference of European Ministers responsible for youth meeting in Bucharest in April 1998, inviting the member states to recognise training and skills, acquired in non-formal education<sup>5</sup>.

A working group of the Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) provided a first definition of non-formal education: „Non-formal education may be defined as a planned programme of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competencies, outside but supplementary to the formal educational curriculum. Participation is voluntary and the programmes are carried out by trained leaders in the voluntary and/or public sectors, and should be systematically monitored and evaluated.

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]

<sup>5</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth: Bucharest, 27-29 April 1998 - Final Declaration - Young people: active citizens in a future Europe - Human Rights - Participation - Solidarity

The experiences might also be certificated.”<sup>6</sup>

In the follow-up the Directorate for Youth and Sport organised in fall 2000 a symposium on non-formal learning<sup>7</sup>, in order to define a strategy for the implementation of a work programme in the field of non-formal learning.

Shortly after the symposium the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation on non-formal education<sup>8</sup>, highlighting the need for more investment in education and welfare as an efficient strategy for enhancing active citizenship and the prevention of social exclusion; non-formal education provided by non-governmental youth organisations is considered to play a crucial role, complementing formal education in the concept of lifelong learning. The Assembly recommends to recognise non-formal education as *de facto* partner in the process of lifelong learning and in youth policy and to create effective systems for evaluation.

The final declaration of the 6th conference of European Youth Ministers meeting in Thessaloniki of November 2002<sup>9</sup> highlights the relevance of voluntary engagement of young people and recommends the development of appropriate strategies and tools for a better recognition of experiences and skills acquired in these activities at all levels.

In a Recommendation to its Member States on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education of young people<sup>10</sup> the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe reinforces the debate on non-formal learning by recommending the development of effective standards for the recognition of non-formal education as important part of general education and training. Non-formal education should be a significant element of national youth policies and cooperation at European level should be enhanced.

As a new proposal the Committee asks to develop a European Portfolio as a tool to describe experiences, skills and competences which are acquired in non-formal settings. The European Language Portfolio, developed by the Council of Europe and one out of five instruments of the Europass is seen as an example for such a youth work portfolio.

Consequently the CDEJ decided to invite an expert group to work on the development of the Portfolio. The focus was given to the description of experiences and competences of youth workers and youth leaders. The tool should allow, to identify and to describe progress in non-formal learning. The demand for a better recognition existed at two levels: the political and the individual ones. Competences should be proved in a procedure of self assessment. After a phase of development and testing in 2007 the Portfolio was disseminated largely and translated in various languages. After an in-depth evaluation a revision is foreseen in 2010 - 2011.

In a meeting of Youth Ministers in September 2005 in Budapest on the key priorities of the youth sector for the period 2006-2008<sup>11</sup> the priority of recognition of non-formal education and of youth work was confirmed.

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<sup>6</sup> Cit: Study on the links between formal and non-formal education, prepared by Manuela du Bois-Reymond, Strasbourg, March 2003, page 12

<sup>7</sup> Report on the Symposium on Non-Formal Education, Strasbourg 13-15 October 2000, January 2001

<sup>8</sup> Recommendation 1437 (2000) on Non-formal education

<sup>9</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth: Youth constructing Europe – Final Declaration, Thessaloniki, Greece, 7-9 November 2002

<sup>10</sup> Recommendation Rec(2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people (*Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2003 at the 838th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies*)

<sup>11</sup> 7th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth, Budapest, Hungary, 23-24 September 2005: "Human dignity und social cohesion: youth policy responses to violence" - Resolution on the priorities of the Council of Europe's youth sector for 2006-2008

The next milestone was set with AGENDA 2020 – the future youth policy of the Council of Europe<sup>12</sup>. In a final declaration of youth ministers meeting in October 2008 in Kiev it is stressed that access of young people to education, training and the labour market has to be improved, in particular by promoting and recognising non-formal learning.

In a background document the secretariat of the Directorate for Youth and Sport<sup>13</sup> underlines the need to reinforce the work done so far and especially to continue the activities of the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth by highlighting the particular role of non-formal learning for a better access to the labour market.

A particular relevance to Agenda 2020 was given by the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers in November 2008<sup>14</sup>. It is stated that the social inclusion of young people is one of the key priorities in the youth policy of the Council of Europe and recognition of non-formal learning plays a crucial role in facilitating an easy access to the labour market.

### **3.2 Recognition of non-formal learning / education in the youth policy of the European Union**

Policy strategies in the youth field in the European Union are built on the **White Paper 'A new impetus for European youth'** adopted by the Commission in November 2001<sup>15</sup>. With regard to non-formal and informal learning, it emphasises the need for greater recognition of relevant activities and greater complementarities with formal education and training. Since the launch of the White Paper recognition plays a prominent role in a number of activities, both in regard to policy development and in practical terms.

The Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 23 March 2005 agreed on the **European Youth Pact** as a fully integrated part of the Lisbon Strategy. One objective is to develop closer cooperation between the Member States on transparency and comparability of occupational qualifications as well as to recognise non-formal and informal learning<sup>16</sup>.

The **Council Resolution** of May 2006 on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field invites the Member States and the Commission to "encourage the development of a comparable and transparent youth-specific element within Europass for identifying and recognising the skills and competences acquired by young people through non-formal and informal learning [...], that could be attached to certificates or other recognition tools in order to make it easier [...] to understand what the original certificate means in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by its holder"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Final Declaration of the 8th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, Kiev, Ukraine, 10-11 October 2008.

<sup>13</sup> "The future of the Council of Europe's youth sector: Agenda 2020" – Background document prepared by the secretariat of the Directorate for Youth and Sport, October 2008

<sup>14</sup> Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 25 November 2008 at the 1042nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth. COM(2001) 681 final, 21.11.2001

<sup>16</sup> Communication to the Spring European Council: Working together for growth and jobs. Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005–08). Document adopted by the European Council 17 June 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (2006/C 168/01)

With the new EU-Strategy for Youth-Investing and Empowering<sup>18</sup> for the first time non-formal learning becomes a priority for the policy cooperation in the youth field at European level: "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". This priority was confirmed in the Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018).

As a complement to formal education, non-formal learning for young people should be promoted and recognised, and better links between formal education and non-formal learning should be developed.

Youth-related aims and possible initiatives in the field of education and training at the level of the Member States and the Commission could be, among others the

- development of youth work and other non-formal learning opportunities as a means to address early school leaving;
- use of tools established at EU level for the transparency and validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications;
- promotion of learning mobility of all young people;
- use of formal education and non-formal learning to promote cohesion and understanding across different groups, promote equal opportunities and narrow the gaps in achievement;
- development of participative structures in education as well as cooperation between schools, families and local communities,
- raise of a broader public awareness of the value of non-formal learning outcomes<sup>19</sup>.

The Commission commits itself to further develop Europass as a European instrument for the transparency of skills, including tools for the self-assessment of skills and competences.

The new EU Youth Strategy also highlights the role of youth work as an important means to foster the personal and professional development of young people. Youth workers should be better equipped with professional skills and the validation of their competences be promoted through appropriate European instruments such as Europass, the European Qualifications Framework, the European Credit Transfer System or the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

The European Union's **Youth in Action Programme** makes an important contribution to the acquisition of competences and is therefore a key instrument in providing young people with opportunities for non-formal and informal learning in a European dimension<sup>20</sup>. It contributes to the involvement of young people in experiences

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<sup>18</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities. Brussels, 27.4.2009. COM(2009) 200 final

<sup>19</sup> COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/OJ C 311/01)

<sup>20</sup> Decision No 1719/2006 /EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007 to 2013



characterised by a twofold dimension: the acquisition of skills through non-formal or informal learning and the development of their active citizenship.

To facilitate the validation and recognition of non-formal learning in the Youth in Action programme it was decided to develop a specific tool, the Youthpass. Through the Youthpass certificate the European Commission aims at ensuring the recognition of learning experiences gained through the participation in the various actions of the Youth in Action Programme. After a successful implementation Youthpass will be extended to all relevant YOUTH IN ACTION activities as well as beyond the programme actions where appropriate.

In March 2010 the Commission launched the new EU2020 Strategy<sup>21</sup>. Youth on the Move is one of the flagship initiatives to support the overall strategy. Youth on the Move is expected to support the engagement of young people in society through all levels of education and youth policy, including learning opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. This includes strengthening the structures for volunteering and youth participation, and supporting the acquisition of key skills through non-formal educational activities as a supplement to formal learning or as an incentive to reintegrate back into the formal education system.

A key document in terms of learning mobility is the Council Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the European Union<sup>22</sup>. It asks Member States to increase awareness of the importance of intercultural competences and language learning in order to reduce barriers to the cross-border mobility of young people and to promote appropriate recognition of learning outcomes of voluntary activities. It further encourages the use of instruments at EU level that can facilitate cross-border voluntary activities by ensuring the transparency of qualifications, such as Europass, Youthpass and the European Qualifications Framework.

### **3.3 Developments at national level in the Member States**

Also at national level in member states of both, European Union and Council of Europe recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the youth field has become a more important issue over the last years. Initiatives are either coming from organisations active in the non-formal learning field or from the different governments implementing relevant strategies. A wide range of recognition instruments for non-formal and informal learning already exist on local, regional and national as well as in different sectors of the youth field.

It is in this framework impossible to mention the diverse and manifold initiatives in the field. Information about validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the youth field, is made visible through the 'European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning' (see chapter 3.5 on the links to lifelong learning).

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<sup>21</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION. EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2010) 2020. Brussels, 3.3.2010

<sup>22</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union (2008/OJ C 319/03)

### **3.4 The European Youth Forum and the work of non-formal education providers**

The European Youth Forum as a key stakeholder in the European debate representing both, young people and youth organisations as providers of non-formal education has been working on recognition of non-formal education since 1996 and has declared education as one of its five strategic priorities for 2007-2012. Within this strategic priority the Forum sees the further recognition of non-formal education as a precondition to develop a true lifelong learning reality in Europe.

The European Youth Forum works on different complementary types of recognition, social, individual and political. Through its policy papers of 2005 and 2008, YFJ contributed to the political recognition and advocated for recognition in various processes on European level. This has been complimented by work on social recognition and individual recognition.

In practical terms it organised a yearly dialogue on non-formal education with the aim of bringing providers of education together with institutions, social partners and stakeholders.

In 2008 the European Youth Forum published a sunshine report on non-formal education, presenting best practices from its member organisations with a focus on how non-formal learning contributes to personal development as well as to social inclusion, health and citizenship.

In 2009 the European Youth Forum started working on one of the biggest challenges for non-formal education, quality assurance of non-formal education / learning. It adopted a policy paper proposing a European scheme for quality assurance and a practical working method for youth organisations. This has been followed by a pilot project testing out the proposed methods. An updated method will be presented at the final conference of the pilot project foreseen for November 2010.

### **3.5 Some key events in the past**

This brief overview on the state of affairs would be incomplete without mentioning some key events that contributed to the strategic development of the topic and the implementation of concrete actions. Certainly not all can be mentioned, but some few:

- the Council of Europe organised a symposium on non-formal learning in Strasbourg in 2000,
- a research seminar on the topic in 2004, organised by the EU-CoE youth partnership,
- the conference Bridges for Recognition, 2005 in Leuven, organised by JINT, National Agency for the Youth in Action programme in Flanders
- the event "Continue the Pathways towards recognition" in Prague 2008, hosted by the Czech EU Presidency and
- the youth workers event earlier this year, in March 2010 in Rotterdam, hosted by the Dutch Youth Institute.

### 3.6 The link to the lifelong learning strategy

Non-formal learning and education as an integral part of lifelong learning became a full recognition with the European Year on Life Long Learning in 1996 and gained momentum with the Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000 which defined new strategic objectives to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as an integral part of a knowledge-based economy.

The Communication of the European Commission in 2001 on 'Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality' prepared the shift towards a stronger recognition of learning outcomes and underlined the need to recognise competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings<sup>23</sup>.

During the following years policy cooperation in education and training supported national reforms of education and qualification systems, as well as the development of European instruments promoting quality, transparency of qualifications and mobility in learning. With a number of relevant documents focusing on vocational education and training and lifelong learning<sup>24 25</sup> the member states were encouraged to increase cooperation and implement effective measures to validate learning outcomes, crucial for building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The 2009 Council Conclusions on the new Strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training ("ET 2020")<sup>26</sup> reiterated the equal importance of all different kinds of learning such as formal, non-formal and informal learning to make lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality and to put in place coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies at Member States level.

One of the main challenges and priorities is to ensure that all citizens can acquire transversal key competences according to the recommendation on Key Competences for Life Long Learning<sup>27</sup> agreed upon in 2006.

As a consequence of the changes in the labour market, the focus is put more and more on the development of skills and competences including soft skills, social skills, ICT skills, emotional skills, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit etc. To this end, school and out-of-school education have become complementary. The recognition of learning outcomes is now considered a driver for employability, mobility and social inclusion.

This trend goes together with some crucial developments in the area of recognition and validation of skills and competences:

⇒ The European Qualification framework<sup>28</sup> (EQF) shifts the focus from the 'learning inputs' (length of studies, or type of institution) to the "learning outcomes". It encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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<sup>23</sup> Communication from the Commission: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, COM(2001) 678 final, 21.11.2001

<sup>24</sup> The Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training Communiqué of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, the European Social partners and the European Commission, convened in Helsinki on 5 December 2006 to review the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen Process.

<sup>25</sup> Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning, OJ C 163/1, 9.7.2002

<sup>26</sup> 2941th EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE Council meeting Brussels, 12 May 2009  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> 18 December 2006 - 2006/962/EC -

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01)

- ⇒ Most Member States are developing their own National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and link it into the EQF.
- ⇒ The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) facilitates validation, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes acquired during a stay in another country or in different learning contexts. It aims for better comparability between different VET and qualification systems.
- ⇒ EURES, the European job mobility portal, is being reorganized on the basis of competences.
- ⇒ The European Skills Competencies Occupations Taxonomy (ESCO) is being developed to support the development of educational standards, curricula and programmes and strengthen their relevance to the labour market.

As stressed information about validation of non-formal and informal learning is made visible through the 'European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning'<sup>29</sup> based on the comparative and analytical work done by the European Centre for the development of vocational training, Cedefop.

The 2005 inventory report documents "that, in an increasing number of countries validating non-formal and informal learning has become a permanent feature of education, training, employment and learning policies. It shows that validation systems can no longer be seen as isolated, but that they are connected to other initiatives, notably occupational, educational and assessment standards, modularised and credit-based education and training systems.

The 2007 revised Inventory proposes practical examples of the implementation of the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning<sup>30</sup>. Both documents of 2005 and 2007 include non-formal and informal learning in the youth field. The Inventory is going to be updated again in 2010.

Also at CEDEFOP the Virtual Community on non-formal learning provides a communication platform for the development and implementation of methods and systems for identification and validation of non-formal learning. Established already in 2003, the Virtual Community is intended as a meeting place for everybody interested and involved in the field - policy makers, practitioners, researchers and others<sup>31</sup>.

It is obvious that there are many links between the youth field and lifelong learning. There is however still a challenge to fully connect the work done on recognition in the youth field with the policies in the area of lifelong learning.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory-principles.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> <http://communities.cedefop.europa.eu/nfl>

## 4. Pathways towards a better recognition of non-formal learning / education in the youth field – 11 elements for a renewed strategy

When re-defining a further strategy for a better formal, social and political recognition of non-formal and informal learning of youth work in general, it is important to highlight some principles and sometimes challenges that need to be considered when discussing strategic options.

It is obvious that one can not speak of one single youth work sector. The diversity of the youth field with regard to disciplines, methods, approaches, tools and priorities must be respected and cultivated. It is not about harmonising or streamlining the sector to one monolithic system when aiming at a better recognition of the work done. .

With regard to recognition and certification the concerns of many experts and stakeholders, notably youth NGO's, must nevertheless be taken serious: the risk to (over)formalise learning in youth work activities. Not everything in youth work is measurable and can or should be assessed, recognised and certified.

In this respect any hierarchisation of youth work activities must be avoided, nor can a functionalisation of learning outcomes only for purposes of the labour market, the education system or social system be accepted, particularly when it comes to funding and allocation of financial means. In contrary, it must be made clear, that youth work enriches the other policies only if it keeps its own identity and its strengths; only then other sectors can profit from youth work. Youth work stands for itself, it has its own self-worth and in many cases it's own pertinacity eg the right to have fun and to play.

It is also of importance to make a distinction between different forms of recognition depending on who recognises learning and for what purpose. Forms of recognition are:

- **Formal recognition** means the '**validation**' of learning outcomes and the '**certification**' of a learning process and / or these outcomes by issuing certificates or diplomas, which formally recognise the achievements of an individual,<sup>32</sup>
- **Political recognition** means the recognition of non-formal education in legislation and / or the inclusion of non-formal learning / education in political strategies and the involvement of non-formal learning providers in these strategies,
- **Social recognition** means that social players acknowledge the value of competences acquired in non-formal settings and the work done within these activities including the value of the organizations providing this work,
- **Self Recognition** means the assessment by the individual of learning outcomes and the ability to use these learning outcomes in other fields.

Despite significant progress in some Member States a lack of communication and continuous dialogue between all stakeholders involved in the process has to be stated. This concerns a better communication in the proper youth field on practices, tools and political strategies, as well as an exchange and co-operation between the education and training system, the labour market and the youth field which is currently cumbersome.

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<sup>32</sup> Communication From the Commission: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, p.31e

Finally, it should be stressed that the most efficient learning concept is a holistic one, combining formal, informal and non-formal elements. While formal learning emphasises mainly cognitive learning, non-formal settings complement cognitive aspects by emotional, social and practical levels of learning. Youth work in many facets provides such holistic approaches. The concepts of holistic and blended learning approaches should be further developed and youth work certainly can contribute with its experiences and concepts to such a development. Precondition would be an open dialogue at an equal level with the formal education and training system.

Now, when reflecting on a new, a re-defined strategy to make further progress towards a better formal, social and political recognition of non-formal learning / education and of youth work the following eleven elements have been identified:

### **1) Re-define needs, options and strategies in the youth field**

The youth sector must find a common ground to further define and implement a strategy for recognition of youth work; this concerns the whole sector of youth work and its diverse disciplines, methods and approaches and comprises all forms of learning as well as all forms of recognition, be it formal, social, political. This includes also a common understanding of what should be recognised and how by whom and ranges from concepts of self recognition to measures of making results of youth work visible. It must also be made clear who plays which role in this process and which responsibilities the various groups of actors have to play.

### **2) Reinforce the political process at European level**

If the youth field wants to follow a strong and visible political agenda we need more commitment and a reinforcement of the political process(es). In Education and Training we have the lifelong learning strategy, in Higher Education the Bologna process, in Vocational Education and Training the Copenhagen / Bruges processes. In the Czech EU Presidency event in Prague 2008 the youth sector had tried to launch a Prague process for recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field. But this process did not really take off – it should be re-started and each party involved, European institutions, member states, youth NGO's, trainers, youth workers and youth leaders, researchers should find an active role in this process.

### **3) Improve co-operation within the youth sector**

The youth sector reflects a huge diversity of people active at various levels, in various positions, functions and roles, coming from diverse backgrounds, structures and disciplines. It is not only the triangle of research, policy and practice, it is also the youth work as such that needs a better understanding of its own field. If we look at the diversity of practice we can not only see how necessary it is to precisely know which needs, options and strategies exist with regard to recognition but also to build on good communication cultures and cooperation structures. Therefore we should put some emphasis on closer co-operation, communication and exchange of good practice in order to enhance a common understanding while contributing to a common identity. In the follow-up the setting of common objectives for the further development of the youth work sector could be envisaged, based on clear mandates, time-schedules and planned outputs (e.g. recommendations or handbooks, compendia of examples of best practice).

#### **4) Making visible the role of youth organisations**

Youth organisations and other providers of non-formal learning still can and need to increase efforts to make clearer which kind of learning is taking place in their programmes and make it visible. First of all it remains a challenge for youth organisations in attracting young people as volunteers and participants. Sometimes volunteering is seen as an unnecessary waste of time and there is a low level of awareness on the benefits that volunteering brings to the society and the individual. Further, recognition needs to start in the organisation and with every participant. The role of youth organisations is to increase social and self-recognition and to adapt and provide tools for assessment and recognition. And finally, youth organisations can contribute to enhance political recognition through active advocacy and participation in policy processes.

#### **5) Increase knowledge about non-formal learning in youth work**

The continued conceptual, practical and theoretical development of non-formal learning in youth work is essential for strengthening the capacity and the recognition of non-formal learning; this refers to research and practice. A coordinated strategy should be set up and anchored between research, policy and practice to deliver scientific and experiential knowledge. The strategy should compile existing knowledge, ensure an easy access to it for decision makers and youth organisations, eg in the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC) and identify gaps in knowledge and needs for further research. An inventory on non-formal learning in the youth field could be updated and published regularly and the Youth Report could provide a chapter on non-formal learning.

#### **6) Assure quality and training**

There is still a lack of confidence regarding the effectiveness of non-formal learning and youth work activities, both within the youth field and within society. If non-formal learning / education aims at being positioned in the political debates at a similar level as the formal education and training sector quality assurance can be the missing element. Quality and quality assurance can also be instrumental for the further development of youth work providers which engage consciously in the design of their educational programmes. Another measure to assure high quality and to strengthen the conceptual idea is to provide and establish appropriate training opportunities at different levels. The European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action programme could play a key role in this respect. Further, the process initiated by the European Youth Forum to develop a European Framework for the Quality Assurance of non-formal education by 2015 should be supported.

#### **7) Develop tools further and make them transferable**

Results of learning can and should be used in all different settings and for various purposes, be it in education or employment, civil society or for personal development. While diplomas and qualifications received in formal education serve as transfer documents, certificates of the youth field are lacking credit. Even those instruments for assessing and validating competences acquired in non-formal learning in youth work (see the Youth Worker Portfolio and the YouthPass) which have been developed in recent times at European level, are rarely recognised by formal education or the employment sector. After having successfully developed these tools it is time to evaluate them, to improve them where needed, to disseminate them and to identify needs for further instruments, eg for self assessment, and other accompanying support measures.

## **8) Link youth to the lifelong learning strategy and vice versa**

The communication and co-operation with the lifelong learning, respectively formal education and training sector has to be improved. At European Union level a link should be established between the Open Methods of Coordination on education and in the youth field. Also in the Council of Europe a dialogue with other educational policies eg Higher Education and / or Human Rights and citizenship education should be envisaged. In this co-operation it must be made sure that the education sector recognises learning in youth work as a value in itself and communicates on an equal level as it does with the formal education sector. In the European Union the Youth on the Move initiative can be the overarching policy framework that can bridge the two policy fields. The future European Skills Passport should include skills acquired in youth work and include validation procedures adapted to the needs in the youth field.

## **9) Involve the stakeholders of the employment sector**

The labour market needs work force skilled with a set of key competences out of which soft skills play an increasing role: problem solving, intercultural skills, team spirit, creativity etc. are exactly competences young people acquire in non-formal learning schemes in youth work. While in the political debates a lot of attention is dedicated to 'validation' of non-formal learning outcomes at the work place (and in formal education and training) the impact of learning in youth work activities is constantly undervalued, particularly on side of employers. Furthermore employers do often not demand certificates of those skills acquired in youth work. A common understanding and language should be developed in order to provide the employment sector with appropriate information on the potential of non- and informal learning in youth work. And youth work needs to identify its potential of providing competences for the labour market; but, it must be made clear where the limits of this role are.

## **10) Associate the social sector**

Youth work is positioned between education, civil society and the social sector. Even if the links of some kinds of youth work to the social sector seem to be quite strong the overall relationship is still weak. The same is true for the relationship of youth work in general and youth social work and youth care. The different disciplines of youth work, even if all are part of the same sector, don't know much about each other, nor do they communicate sufficiently. Youth social work is obviously often closer to the social sector than to the youth field. This is proven also when looking at providers of youth social work which often are welfare organisations, in rare cases they are youth organisations. Here we must build at least strategic partnerships and much better information systems between the various fields.

## **11) Involve other stakeholders of civil society**

In the last years the youth sector has steadily grown and represents today a considerable part of the third sector, in terms of resources invested and work force. Thus it is a strong pillar of civil society, together with other stakeholders and NGO's. These players should be seen as borne strategic partners for the youth field. The volunteer sector, cultural and environmental organisations, human rights organisations, information and counselling services, sport organisations etc., all are part of the third sector and share similar interests. The recognition of youth work (and of the work of these neighbouring sectors) can be increased through a closer cooperation between these different fields.



## 5. Conclusions

Non-formal learning in the youth field provides unique learning opportunities to millions of young Europeans every day. This is done through a diversified youth work structure working often on voluntary and participative basis and thereby creating a special educational field which provides an added value for society and individuals. Learning in and from youth work forms the basis for active citizenship, cultural expression, self-development into confident adults, for European civil society, political participation, health and well being, social inclusion...

It is for this reason that the European Institutions, European Union and Council of Europe have decided to bring youth work and its formal, social and political recognition higher on the political agenda, welcomed by all relevant stakeholders in the field.

It is now time to continue the pathways towards a better recognition by implementing concrete steps and developing concrete strategies and tools. Some ideas are mentioned in this paper, others need to be explored, defined and implemented. It should be only not the responsibility of those who worked on this paper to implement its proposed actions; recognition of non-formal learning in the youth field should be the responsibility of all players in youth work, a shared ownership.

The EU-CoE youth partnership is committed to continue the efforts for a better recognition of youth work and has therefore made the "Support and recognition of youth work" to one out of two key priorities for the next years to come. As a next activity it will organise another symposium on recognition of youth work, 11 years after the first one.

Also the European Youth Forum and the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre will continue in implementing its activities as outlined in this paper, particularly on quality assurance and the further development of the Youthpass.

We invite all interested parties to provide feedbacks on this paper and to develop their own ideas and actions for a better recognition of youth work.

## **Annex and accompanying documents**

Further information on recognition of non-formal learning / education and on youth work can be found in the European Knowledge Center for Youth Policy in the feature "Youth Policy topics":

<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/youthpolicy.html>

In the document library you can also find all relevant policy documents mentioned in this paper:

<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/ekcyp/index>

The first Pathways paper can also be found here:

[http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth\\_Policy/docs/Education\\_Training\\_Learning/Policy/2004\\_validation\\_and\\_recognition.pdf](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Education_Training_Learning/Policy/2004_validation_and_recognition.pdf)

Information on existing tools at European level are available here:

The Youth Worker Portfolio

[http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth\\_Policy/docs/Education\\_Training\\_Learning/Policy/European\\_Portfolio.pdf](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Education_Training_Learning/Policy/European_Portfolio.pdf)

The YouthPass:

<http://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the inventory of non-formal learning and European guidelines for validating non-formal learning in CEDEFOP:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/index.aspx>

Information on the European Youth Forum can found here:

<http://www.youthforum.org/>