

12 Recommendations

The present study on ‘the socio-economic scope of youth work in Europe’ represents a first, crucial step in an effort to systematise and disseminate data on youth work and youth work structures, youth workers and youth work participants across Europe.

The central result of the present study can be summarised as follows: whereas it is possible to represent large sectors of local-level youth work in quantitative terms, generating this data at national level is possible only in a few of the European countries surveyed. The main reason for this situation is the application of the subsidiarity principle and the subordinate position of youth work within the scope of political action. This means that national management of this field is perceived as largely unnecessary, and as a result most of the countries surveyed see little need for national documentation and analysis of youth work data.

Beyond this main result, the study has led to a number of further discoveries at various levels of the issue:

- The main fields of action of youth work have been identified and defined;
- A first set of basic indicators have been established for comparative national reporting;
- Light has been shed on the reasons for the absence of data at national level; and
- Indicators have been developed and applied to reflect youth work at local level.

An expert meeting to discuss the central points and results of the present study was held in Strasbourg on 18 June; it yielded valuable ideas and proposals for recommendations.

Because of the different national historical contexts and as a result of its orientation to the various life situations of its target groups, youth work is a complex and diverse field suffering from a lack of basic definitions and indicators that could serve as a basis for common reporting. There is therefore a need for

- working more intensely on defining and systematising the relevant concepts,
- establishing central indicators
- clarifying the basis for systematising the documentation of youth work from a European perspective, and

- further strengthening the existing national and European networks on youth knowledge and intensifying the cooperation between them⁹⁸.

Recommendation 1

We therefore recommend:

- increased exchanges between experts in the field to intensify and bundle shared knowledge, particularly with regard to the central concepts of youth work; for this purpose it is recommended to set up national networks on youth knowledge where they don't exist and to further strengthen the existing networks on European level
- intensified debate among experts to explore how useful data might be gathered on the condition of the field of youth work and its socio-economic effects, and agreement on relevant indicators needed for this purpose

Because youth work is basically a local issue, and because there is therefore little need for management and data collection at national level, youth work continues to be poorly documented at national level. There is therefore a need for

- increased coordination with regard to information management between local, state, national and European or international levels.

Recommendation 2

As a result, we recommend:

- increased exchanges with the competent, in some cases newly established national ministries to prepare for the creation of a European reporting system on youth work, and
- in this context ensuring that local levels are involved, adequately visible and represented,
- support the data collection of the national correspondents to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy; for this purpose it is recommended to set up national networks on youth knowledge composed by researchers, policy makers and practitioners

⁹⁸ For the moment three European networks on Youth Knowledge exist: the network of Experts on a Better Knowledge and Youth Research and the Network of Correspondents to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy both coordinated by the Partnership on Youth between the European Commission and the Council of Europe. Since two years the European Commission set up the European Network of Nouth Knowledge (EuNYK). For additional information please view issue 6 of the Partnership Newsletter. Available at:
http://www.youth-knowledge.net/system/galleries/download/portal/newsletter/YP_News_Nov06.pdf

Target group orientation is another reason why youth work is such a highly diverse field distributed among many competencies. While a number of individual fields of activity can be clearly allocated to youth work and identified as such, others, for instance youth sport, youth vocational counselling and certain areas of salutogenesis are not so clear-cut. There is therefore a need for

- more intensive cooperation between fields of activity and stakeholders.

Recommendation 3

As a result, we recommend:

- stronger cooperation among stakeholders, particularly governments, youth associations and perhaps also professional groups to contribute to a common documentation of youth work, and
- more intensive cooperation among the various sectors to identify and document those fields of activity of youth work that, as a result of differences in national traditions, are not sufficiently visible and cannot be clearly allocated to youth work.

The following steps were identified at the expert workshop as being possibly useful towards implementing these requirements:

- encouraging a greater involvement of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy regarding the collection of data the development of respective methods and the dissemination of the results of various investigations and of relevant data;
- promoting a more intensive professional debate on the definition of concepts and the identification of indicators at national, European and international level, and
- completing data collection work so as to obtain the data shown by the present survey to be missing, to expand the existing, for instance with regard to social indicators of users of youth work, and, last but not least, to integrate more countries than those included in the present study in the European documentation of youth work.