INTRODUCTION

At present, Italy and its partner countries lack specific legislation on the recognition and regulation of youth workers.
This Toolkit was developed as part of the Erasmus+ KA210 project "Support the Youth," funded by the Italian National Youth Agency, and is intended for youth sector operators to assess the skills of youth workers or candidates for such positions.
The Toolkit provides an analysis of the current situation and the development of a system shared among the project partners for the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal skills for youth workers.

The Toolkit is divided into three parts:

- PART 1: research and comparison of existing youth worker training courses in the countries involved in the project
- PART 2: research and comparison of validation and certification systems for LOs working as youth workers in the countries involved
- PART 3: practical tools and forms for the validation of LOs/skills acquired by the final beneficiaries of the KA210 Support the Youth project

PART 1
ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF TRAINING COURSES FOR QUALIFICATION AS A YOUTH WORKER IN ITALY, SPAIN, SLOVENIA, AND THE NETHERLANDS

Italy

General context

- In Italy, there is still no uniform national law defining and regulating the role of youth worker with a state-recognized qualification.
- Some regions or autonomous provinces (e.g., the province of Bolzano) have recently approved a course/qualification for "youth workers" that will start in the 2024/25 school year.
- The 'YouthWiki' website of the Department of Youth Policies reports that training for youth workers is still in its infancy and that training is often entrusted to third sector organizations, associations, and European programs, but is not standardized. Youth Policies.

Available training courses

- There are training courses for youth leaders (e.g., for international youth exchanges) promoted by national agencies, such as a 15-hour course for youth exchange leaders run by the National Youth Agency.
- Local/association courses: for example, the Oragiovane Onlus organization offers "residential" or "on-site" training for leaders (oratories, summer camps, etc.) with an active and workshop-based approach.
- Confirmation: in Italy, 16 regions have recognized professional figures in the field of extracurricular education, but there is still no uniform national legislation.

Qualification and recognition

- In many cases, there is still no national professional title for "youth worker" recognized as a standard professional qualification.

- In some regions, qualifications are being introduced (e.g., Bolzano) that include: one-year duration, alternating classroom lessons + internships/work placements in the area.
- The recognition of skills acquired in non-formal/informal contexts is cited as an area that is evolving but not systematic.

Strengths and weaknesses
Strenghts
- Widespread presence of associations, volunteer organizations, and youth activities already in operation, thus providing practical contexts.
- Training is often very practical and workshop-based, with a focus on tools for activities, groups, and participation.

Critical issues
- The lack of a single/nationally recognized qualification makes the "level" of the program and professional mobility unclear.
- Significant variability between regions.
- Possible lack of standardization of the skills required.

Spain

General context
- In Spain, youth work is not defined at national level as a uniformly regulated profession.
- Competencies/roles vary by autonomous region; national legislation (e.g., Real Decreto 1224/2009) provides for the recognition of competencies acquired through work or non-formal training, but not specifically for youth work.

Available training courses
- There is a training course (Vocational Training – "Higher Level") entitled Higher Technician in Sociocultural and Tourist Animation, which lasts approximately 2,000 hours.
- This qualification allows graduates to work as "Sociocultural Animators," "Educational Leisure Coordinators for Children and Young People," "Youth Informants," etc.
- Admission requires a high school diploma or equivalent.

Qualification and recognition
- The above qualification allows you to work professionally in socio-cultural activities with young people.
- However, recognition of "youth work" as a specific profession still varies and, as mentioned, depends greatly on the autonomous region.

Strengths and weaknesses
Strenghts
- There is a formal educational pathway (advanced vocational training) specifically geared towards socio-cultural animation, which provides a structured educational and professional foundation.
- Relatively high clarity regarding the qualification and expected skills.

Critical issues
- Not all "youth worker" roles correspond exactly to the title: legislation and regulations vary between regions.
- International mobility can be complicated due to the specificity of the title and its designation.

Slovenia

General context

- In Slovenia, the role of "youth worker" is not regulated by a formal training program specifically accredited for youth workers (source: Council of Europe).
- The catalog of public functions (in the youth sector) includes various roles (Youth Worker II, Youth Worker I, Coordinator, etc.) but does not include a standardized training program.

Available training courses

- Many youth workers in Slovenia have training in other professions (social education, social services, etc.).
- The university (e.g., University of Ljubljana – Faculty of Social Work) offers a course on "youth work methods" as part of broader studies.

Qualification and recognition

- There are no accredited courses specifically for youth work that are mandatory for the role.
- Recognition is more linked to experience, training in other areas, and voluntary/professional commitment.

Strengths and weaknesses
Strenghts

- Flexibility: the figure may come from different backgrounds, which can promote multidisciplinary approaches.
- Ease of entry into the role (fewer formal barriers)

Critical issues
Punti di forza e criticità

- Lack of standardization leads to difficulties in defining common skills, professional recognition, and mobility.
- Possible variability in the quality of training and experience.

The Netherlands

General context

- The training or qualification system for youth workers does not appear to be a highly regulated profession at the national level in a uniform manner.
- There are training programs in the social/educational sector (e.g., social and cultural worker/youth worker) at the vocational or university level, but with varying requirements.

Available training courses

- OECD/EU documentation indicates that professional training courses are required for the profession of "youth worker" in the Netherlands: e.g., approximately 3,000 hours of theoretical and practical training for "youth workers/social and cultural workers" in the past.
- There are "Training for Trainers" courses and micro-credentials for youth workers (including international ones) in the Netherlands that provide badges and specific skills.

Qualification and recognition

- Although there are training courses, it is unclear whether there is a universally recognized mandatory national qualification exclusively for "youth workers."

- The language and national context (Dutch) may represent barriers to entry for international operators.

Strengths and weaknesses
Strenghts

- Vocational training structured around vocational education systems, frequent practical learning.
- Extensive focus on skills and European equivalence (micro-credentials, badges).

Critical issues

- Foreign operators may find it difficult to navigate the system, especially if they do not speak Dutch.
- Less clarity on the "single national qualification" for youth workers.

Comparison and key elements

Here are some key elements to compare:

Country	Existence of specific qualification/training as a "youth worker"	Quality/formalization of the pathway	Professional recognition/mobility
Italy	Partially (regional, association-based)	Practical training, various forms	Low uniformity, limited mobility
Spain	Yes: advanced vocational training course in "Sociocultural and Tourism Animation"	Firmly structured	Greater clarity, but regional/title-related
Slovenia	No specific national title	High flexibility, but low standardization	Reduced mobility and recognition
Nedtherlands	Training available in the professional system	Good educational quality, but title not always clear	Mobility is possible, but language/context may limit it

Some reflections

- Spain is among the most "advanced" countries in terms of having a formalized training program for socio-cultural animation with young people.
- Italy has strong associative roots and a wealth of practical experience, but still lacks national regulations and a uniformly recognized qualification.
- Slovenia offers great flexibility but lacks clarity in terms of qualifications; this can be an advantage (accessibility) or a disadvantage (recognition).
- The Netherlands offers good-quality vocational training, but the role of "youth worker" does not, at least from the evidence I have found, have a strongly codified and standardized national identification as in Spanish vocational training courses.

Implications for a project (or European certification/qualification)
If the goal is to compare or harmonize pathways between countries, the following must be considered:

- the level of education required (secondary, vocational, university)
- whether the pathway includes internships/real-world practical experience
- the duration and workload (some examples: Spain ~2,000 hours for upper secondary education)
- whether or not the qualification/profession is formally recognized
- international mobility: how widely the qualification is recognized abroad, how comparable the skills are
- language and national context: in the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch language can be a barrier
- volunteering or non-formal experience as part of the pathway (very common in Italy and Slovenia)

Final conclusions

- If you wanted to develop a "model" training course for youth workers that would be valid/include several countries, you could start from a minimum common level: e.g.
  - A basic module (animation methodologies, youth groups, activity planning, non-formal training), followed by
  - an advanced module (project management, team coordination, monitoring/evaluation)
  - finally, an internship/practical experience.
- In addition, consideration should be given to how to link and recognize European transversal skills (e.g., those defined by the Council of Europe for Youth Workers) in order to promote mobility and recognition.
- Monitor the introduction of new national qualifications/rules (e.g., Italy with the qualification in South Tyrol or Tuscany) to take account of regulatory developments.
- Take linguistic and cultural differences into account, especially if the pathway is designed to be 'transnational'.

PART 2
ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THOSE WORKING AS YOUTH WORKERS IN ITALY, SPAIN, SLOVENIA, AND THE NETHERLANDS

Here is a comparative analysis of the main systems for validating and certifying non-formal/informal learning (LO = learning outcomes) and recognizing the skills of those working as youth workers in four countries: Italy, Spain, Slovenia, and the Netherlands. For each country, I report on: the status of the validation/recognition system, specific examples related to the youth/animation sector, strengths, and critical issues. At the end, there is a comparison table and some reflections.

Italy

Validation and certification system

- Italy has defined a national framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) with Legislative Decree 13/2013 implementing Law 92/2012.
- However, implementation is fragmented: the regions and the various competent authorities define guidelines, tools, and operating procedures in an inconsistent manner.

- In the field of youth work, the YouthWiki page notes that the tools of the SNCC (National Skills Certification System) are in theory applicable to youth social and educational workers, but there are no systematic data on their use in this sector.
- There are European and local projects (e.g., VALLEY) that have experimented with methods of assessing learning acquired through volunteering, youth work, and non-formal pathways.

Specific examples

- The Citizen's Booklet was trialed (between 2006-07) in some regions to record skills not certified by formal education.
- The "DiaLOG IN Youth Work" project highlights how Italian operators recognize the lack of a well-defined path for the recognition/validation of youth work.

Strenghts

- Basic regulatory framework that allows, at least in theory, for the validation of non-formal/informal learning (VNFIL).
- A wealth of experience in the field in the third sector, youth work, and volunteering, which generates practical skills and non-formal competences.

Critical issues

- Lack of a well-defined national professional/regulated career path for youth workers, resulting in difficulties in systematic recognition.
- Regional fragmentation: tools, methods, and recognition differ between regions and competent authorities.
- Poor documented use of the validation system for youth workers: there is little data available on the number of workers who have used the SNCC or similar tools to validate skills in the field of youth work.

Spain

Validation and certification system

- In Spain, the system for validating skills acquired through work experience or non-formal and informal learning is regulated at the national level by Royal Decree 1224/2009 (amended by Royal Decree 659/2023), which allows for the assessment and recognition of units of competence from the National Catalog.
- The autonomous communities are responsible for the territorial implementation of the validation mechanism.
- According to the data, validation is systematic for education and the labor market; in the youth and voluntary sectors, specific tools exist but inclusion is partial.

Specific examples for animation/young people

- There is a "Certificado de Profesionalidad en Dinamización de Actividades de Tiempo Libre Infantil y Juvenil" (Certificate of Professionalism in Leisure Activities for Children and Young People) which serves as an officially recognized qualification for educational leisure and entertainment activities.

- The Reconoce project aims to recognize non-formal learning in the youth sector through a network of collaborating organizations and certification in 12 skills (negotiation, teamwork, interpersonal communication, organization & planning) for volunteers/young workers in the sector.

Strenghts

- A well-structured national regulatory system that allows for the validation of non-formal/informal skills and access to formal qualifications (certificates, diplomas) through these mechanisms.
- Inclusion of the possibility of validating units of competence without having to repeat the entire training course: e.g., partial accreditations.
- Existence of qualifications geared towards youth work/educational leisure activities that facilitate professionalization (e.g., Certificado de Profesionalidad).

Critical issues

- There is no single national legislation that regulates the profession of "youth worker" in a uniform manner: it depends on the autonomous region.
- In the youth/volunteering sector, validation exists but may not always be used by all operators.
- The relevance and recognition of the title "youth worker" may vary between regions, and professional mobility may be less fluid if qualifications are not uniform.

Slovenia

Validation and certification system

- Slovenia has implemented a national vocational qualifications system (NVQ) that allows for the certification of skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.
- In the published catalog, the qualification "Mladinski delavec/mladinska delavka" (Youth worker) is included as a professional qualification (SOK level 5 / EQF 4) through the NVQ system.
- The validation process involves the preparation of a portfolio by the candidate (proof of skills, experience, documentation) and verification by an authorized commission.

Specific examples

- For "Youth worker," access requires at least one year of documented experience in youth work as a reference. Competence is assessed by means of a "written product + oral presentation" or "practical verification + oral presentation" depending on the component.
- The Andragoški centar Republike Slovenije (Slovenian Adult Education Center) coordinates tools and procedures for the validation of non-formal/informal skills in adult education.

Strenghts

- Existence of a specific and recognized pathway for youth workers within the national qualifications system (NVQ).
- The system provides structured assessment methods that allow for the recognition of professional experience and skills acquired in non-formal/informal contexts.

- Good transparency of the procedure: clear occupational standards, verification methods, EQF level indicated.

Critical issues

- The system may require significant prior experience (e.g., at least one year) and the preparation of a portfolio, which can be burdensome for some operators.
- Although formalized, the dissemination and use of the pathway by all youth operators is not always uniformly documented.
- As in other countries, international mobility may be limited if qualifications are not well known outside the national context.

Netherlands

Validation and certification system

- In the Netherlands, there is a mechanism for evaluating qualifications obtained abroad (credential evaluation) through the Informatiecentrum Diploma Waardering (IDW).
- For non-formal/informal skills in the youth sector, I have not found a specific national "youth worker" pathway that is as widely described as in Slovenia or Spain (at least in the documents I have found).
- However, there is a professional registration system for youth care and assistance workers (e.g., Stichting Kwaliteitsregister Jeugd (SKJ)), which verifies skills and experience, including through EVC certificates ("Eerder Verworven Competenties" = previously acquired skills). Recently, concerns have been raised about abuse/fraud in these tools.

Specific examples

- Badge training projects for youth workers: for example, a Training Course For Youth Workers on Networking and Advocating offered in the Netherlands, which provides an international micro-credential/badge. youthworkpathways.net
- The EVC system is used to convert work experience/skills acquired informally into a formal qualification or recognition; however, the issue of credibility/control has arisen.

Strenghts

- Existence of tools for recognizing informally acquired skills (EVC) in certain sectors related to working with young people/youth.
- Possibility of obtaining micro-credentials, badges, and modular training for youth workers, which promote flexibility.

Critical issues

- Lack of a clearly defined and widely recognized system for "youth workers" with a nationally recognized qualification.
- The EVC system has come under pressure due to cases of fraud/forgery, which may undermine trust and credibility.
- For international operators, language and knowledge of the Dutch system may represent barriers.

Comparison table

Country	Certification validation system	Recognition for youth leaders/young workers	Key strengths	Main critical issues
Italy	National VNFIL + SNCC system, but fragmented implementation	Also applicable to youth work, but limited use and poorly defined standards.	Regulatory framework initiated; strong membership/volunteer base	Lack of uniformity, little specific recognition of youth work
Spain	Well-developed national validation system (RD 1224/2009 → RD 659/2023)	There are professional certificates for animation/leisure and youth-specific tools (Reconoce)	Formal pathways for youth work; good integration and validation	Regional variation; inconsistent professional definition of youth work
Slovenia	NVQ system that includes the "Youth worker" qualification.	Recognized specific youth worker qualification (EQF 4)	Clear and recognized career path for this role	Potential limitation in dissemination; experience required
Netherlands	External evaluation system, use of EVC/professional registers but less focused solely on youth work	Tools and micro-credentials available, but national youth worker qualification less codified	Flexibility, innovative badges/micro-credentials	Lack of standardized national title; credibility issues with some instruments

Reflections and implications for the topic of "youth workers"

- If we consider the role of youth worker, the most advanced system in terms of formal recognition appears to be that of Slovenia (with the NVQ qualification "youth worker") and Spain (with professional certificates and a well-defined validation system).

- In Italy, validation is theoretically provided for, but its specific application to the youth work sector is still weak: there is no clear regulatory framework, widely shared professional standards, or data on the use of the system.

- In the Netherlands, there is innovation (micro-credentials, badges, EVC) but no defined role of 'youth worker' with a single national title, and the system has weaknesses (e.g. cases of fraud).

- For a transnational project or to promote the mobility of operators, a number of recommendations emerge:

    - Establish clear and transparent methods for validating/recognizing skills acquired in non-formal/informal contexts (volunteering, youth work, youth mobility) that are recognized by operators/organizations.

- Link these methods to European frameworks (e.g., EQF, ECVET) and promote international transferability.
- Ensure that practical experience and non-formal training can be part of the youth worker's skills portfolio, with assessment methods (portfolio, evidence, observation, reflection) as in Slovenia.
- Promote digital/modular tools (badges, micro-credentials) that promote accessibility, especially in voluntary or non-traditional work contexts.
- Ensure that there are visible recognition pathways (title, certificate, registration) that can increase the professional credibility of youth workers in the labor market and in European contexts.

PART 3
PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR THE DETECTION, EVALUATION, AND RECOGNITION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Below are practical tools for assessing and recognizing the transferable, basic, and technical-specialist skills of youth workers.
Tools for assessing the skills of youth workers, or those who aspire to become youth workers, are a fundamental element in professional and personal growth. They can be used in different contexts and at different stages of the training process: at the end of a formal training course (such as courses recognized by educational bodies or institutions) or non-formal training (laboratories, workshops, experiential activities). Furthermore, these tools can be applied both locally, within youth or community organizations, and internationally, in cooperation programs or European networks dedicated to non-formal education.

Another area of application is learning mobility experiences, such as training courses or youth exchanges, where participants can develop and consolidate key skills through intercultural learning and collaboration in international contexts. In these cases, assessment tools not only allow for the recognition and documentation of acquired skills, but also encourage personal and collective reflection on the results of the experience, promoting greater awareness of one's own growth path and role as a youth worker.

Self-assessment questionnaire on skills and level of self-perception of improvement in skills upon completion

Filling-in link:
https://forms.gle/vBdxstnrf2H1WyXaA

Editing link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1boiVxnGt4GPMEvU5P1eJ-HY8KtDjUiqA_ypN3cXc9Xc/edit

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Introduction to the use of the Youth Worker Skills Assessment Form

The Youth Worker Skills Assessment Form is a tool designed to support the evaluation and enhancement of the skills acquired by operators working in the field of socio-educational activities for young people. It is primarily intended for experienced operators in the sector who perform coordination, mentoring, or professional support roles, as well as for evaluators with specific expertise in human resources (HR), education, and training.

The aim of the form is to promote a structured and objective assessment of youth workers' skills, with particular attention to both technical and methodological aspects and the interpersonal and transferable skills that characterize educational work with young people.

The form can be used in various contexts:

- at the end of a training course, to verify the achievement of learning objectives;
- during the course, as a monitoring and self-assessment tool;
- during the selection or career guidance phase, to identify the strengths and areas for improvement of the candidate or operator.

The assessor must analyze the evidence gathered during the youth worker's professional or training experience (direct observations, testimonials, portfolios, project results, etc.) and compare it with the descriptors listed in the form.
The assessment must be expressed in a transparent, consistent, and reasoned manner, based on predefined criteria and concrete observations.
It is advisable to use a graded assessment scale (e.g., from “beginner” to “advanced”) accompanied by qualitative comments describing the level of mastery of the competence.
The assessor should also encourage dialogue with the youth worker, promoting a participatory and reflective approach, in which the assessment becomes not only a moment of verification but also an opportunity for learning and professional growth.

Link to editable file (skills matrix)
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uf1ICQJoetVdsXEuUiZHlvMG1Q5loc5I/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110223515734257144718&rtpof=true&sd=true

Device for certifying the skills of youth workers

Link to editable certificate
https://www.canva.com/design/DAG3FxqEeEw/wRpgmCmnbhWItUt_8aIxjQ/edit?utm_content=DAG3FxqEeEw&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton

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CERTIFICATE

OF COMPETENCES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

This certificate is issued to

Name Surname

who participated in the Erasmus+ project
"START the YOUTH ORG"
KA210-YOU - Small-scale partnerships in youth
2023-1-IT03-KA210-YOU-000162272

participation in the project from ____ to ____
participation in the pilot training course in ___ from___ to ___
participation in the mobility in ___ from ___ to ____

Acquired skills

HARD SKILLS	
1. Communication in youth and peer contexts 2. Facilitation of youth policy interventions 3. Guidance information and management of integrated documentation systems 4. Evaluation and monitoring of youth interventions and policies	

SOFT SKILLS	
1. Interpersonal communication skills 2. Team working skills 3. Public speaking skills 4. Problem solving skills 5. Critical thinking skills	