

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE YOUTH POLICY ADVISORY MISSION TO LATVIA  
MAY 2024**

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE**



**CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE**

Final report of the Council of Europe youth policy advisory mission delegation <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this report are the responsibility of the advisory mission delegation and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe or its member states.



## Acknowledgements

The Council of Europe Youth Policy Advisory Mission Delegation (hereafter: the Advisory Mission Delegation) would like to thank the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia for requesting and organising a [Council of Europe Youth Policy Advisory Mission](#). We give particular thanks to the Senior Desk Officer Dāvids Garšva, Deputy Director Randa Keņģe, Project Manager Renāte Mencendorfa, to the Agency for International Youth Programmes Director Līga Lejiņa and Department Director Nils Mosejonoks, as well as to Trainer, Researcher and Project Manager Sintija Lase.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its intergovernmental cooperation programme, the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) decided to support Latvia through a youth policy advisory mission, following a request of the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia in September 2023. A delegation including Martti Martinson (member in respect of Estonia of the CDEJ), Nadia Tismănaru (Advisory Council on Youth), Dr. Tomi Kilakoski (Scientific Expert, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Society), Dr. Hilary Tierney (Scientific Expert, Associate professor at Maynooth University), Clementina Barbaro (Council of Europe, Head of the Youth Policy Division), Marius Schlageter (Council of Europe, Policy Advisor) visited Riga on May 2-3, 2024. An additional Zoom meeting on June 3, 2024, provided further insights into university education and internships in Latvia.

The key objectives of the mission included assessing the design of youth workers' occupational standards, evaluating the youth work professionalisation concept in Latvia, and providing counsel on lifelong learning and professional development pathways.

The contents of the discussions during the mission included youth work policy in Latvia, support mechanisms for youth workers' professional development and current approaches to youth worker education and training. The group was presented with the current version of youth worker's professional standards and was given contextual information about the policy use of professional standards and about the process of creating the current version. The delegation discussed on the lifelong learning of youth workers, professional pathways of youth workers and possible ways forward. During the mission, initial recommendations were provided.

One of the developmental goals of the Latvian youth work policy is promoting the professionalisation of youth work. In youth policy, two processes have already been initiated to achieve this goal. First, defining the professional standards for youth workers helps clarify what youth work entails. It also provides an official status for youth workers and aids in developing a degree program in youth work. Secondly, once the professional standards are established, it is possible to create an educational program that will soon provide Latvian society with trained youth workers. The delegation assessed the newly developed professional standards for youth workers in Latvia, which align with European documents and aim to provide a robust framework for the profession. These standards are comprehensive, detailing six core competencies: youth work implementation, youth initiatives promotion, competence acquisition facilitation, leisure activities provision, youth participation promotion, and youth project implementation. There are two potential pathways for integrating youth work education within existing university programs—social work or teacher education. Each pathway offers distinct advantages, but both lack youth work-specific content.

## Main recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the youth policy advisory mission, the delegation puts forward the following recommendations to the Latvian authorities.

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conduct a mapping study of the current youth work workforce across the sector. This study should gather data on numbers, qualifications, length of service, roles, job titles, and contract types of youth workers in municipalities and NGOs.
2. While resource allocation may not be determinable at this stage of professionalisation, careful consideration of resource implications is necessary. There's a risk that lower-paid positions with less favourable employment terms in youth work may deter graduates from pursuing careers in this field.
3. Professionalisation aims to elevate quality, implying that current standards may be inadequate. It's crucial for the Latvian youth work community to feel ownership of this process and avoid exclusion. Collaboration with youth workers' associations will be essential for success.
4. The role and contribution of NGOs to the Latvian Youth Work system can be assessed more comprehensively. It's essential to establish a knowledge base about their contributions and integrate their perspectives into the professionalisation process to avoid creating divides between different types of youth work.
5. Clarify the role of youth participation in the professionalisation process. While it's appropriate for adult experts to shape youth work structures, establishing structures that involve the "golden triangle" (youth policy experts, youth researchers, youth work practitioners) and co-management with young people is essential.

### RECOMMENDATIONS ON YOUTH WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING

6. Ensure the university program includes specific content on youth work, focusing on professional formation and development (both personal and communal) and youth work theory.
7. Integrate a specific youth-work related module/content with practical internships to embed the youth work community of practice into the program. For instance, teaching youth sociology without youth work context may lack professional development and formative issues. Therefore, early engagement with the youth work community is crucial.
8. Decide on the program level (e.g., BA, Master, short BA), credits, mode (part-time/full-time), and duration, as these factors will affect the time required for program development, design, and validation/accreditation within the university system.
9. Consider adding a youth work strand to an existing program as a potentially quicker route to accreditation/validation, as it may be viewed as an amendment rather than a new program.
10. Develop a continuous professional development framework to support ongoing skill enhancement for youth workers currently in the field.
11. Ensure diverse training offerings to accommodate various interests within the youth work community of practice, including individual and policy interests at micro, meso, and macro levels. Offer training on occupational standards and current topics, potentially making some training mandatory if deemed necessary.
12. Evaluate the development of the education and training system from the perspective of its

impact on all stakeholders in the youth work community of practice, including municipalities, NGOs, paid and unpaid youth workers.

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In addition to the above-mentioned recommendations, the Council of Europe delegation provided recommendations on youth workers' occupational standards shortly after its visit in May, which are listed hereafter. These recommendations were discussed with the national authorities in June, who agreed to integrate them in the final version of such standards.

At the moment of discussion of the provisional version of the report on the 7th of August, the delegation was informed that the occupational standards had been approved and published, and that the recommendations had been integrated to final version of the national standards.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

13. The professional standards describe well what youth workers should be able to do and that they need to know. However, the academic traditions or disciplines connected to youth work could be more explicitly described. It would be worth being more specific about naming the following in the knowledge stand: Sociological Theories, Youth studies/youth cultures, Sociology of the professions, Equality and human rights theory, Education for Sustainable development, Learning/pedagogical theories, Values and principles of youth work practice, Ethical theory and codes of ethical practice.
14. It is common to emphasize the importance of group activities for youth work practice. The Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work states that youth work “should focus on young people and create spaces for association and bridges to support transition to adulthood and autonomy.” The metaphor of creating spaces emphasizes peer learning perspectives and group dynamics. While it is understood that the document implicitly includes group perspectives, this could be made more explicit.
15. While the value perspectives are implicitly mentioned in the document, emphasizing their importance more explicitly would be useful. Sections such as 4.5.1 – 4.5.6 would benefit from highlighting the value dimension. Additionally, making values more explicit in other parts of the document would inform curriculum design.
16. Emphasizing the importance of both general policymaking and the youth policy context in Latvia and Europe would be beneficial.

## 1. Background and objective of the mission

One of the main objectives of intergovernmental cooperation in the Council of Europe's Youth Department is to promote and support the development of member states' youth field based on the values and standards of the Council of Europe. Public institutions and governmental authorities responsible for youth receive expert assistance to address youth policy issues and challenges, depending on the needs and contexts of the requesting states.

Within this framework of assistance measures, the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia requested assistance for youth policy development from the Council of Europe's Youth Department to support the professionalisation of youth work and the development of higher education and a lifelong learning system on youth work.

The objectives of the youth policy advisory mission were to:

- conformity assessment of tasks, duties and competences included in the youth workers occupational standard, according to the needs of the youth field;
- provide support on validation / supplementation of the concept developed by the working group for the professionalisation of youth workers in Latvia;
- counsel on lifelong learning /professional development of youth workers – possible pathways and best approaches.

## 2. Summary of the mission

The Advisory Mission Delegation was composed of Martti Martinson (member in respect of Estonia of the European Steering Committee for Youth), Nadia Tismănaru (Advisory Council on Youth), Dr. Tomi Kiilakoski (Scientific Expert, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Society), Dr. Hilary Tierney (Scientific Expert, Associate professor at Maynooth University), Clementina Barbaro (Council of Europe, Head of the Youth Policy Division), Marius Schlageter (Council of Europe, Policy Advisor).

The mission took place on the 2nd and 3rd of May 2024 in Riga. On the first day, the team learnt about youth work policy in Latvia, on the existing support mechanisms for youth workers professional development and current approaches to youth worker education and training. The group was presented with the current version of youth worker's professional standards, and was given contextual information about the policy use of professional standards and about the process of creating a current version. On the second day of the program, the delegation was given information on the lifelong learning of youth workers, on professional pathways of youth workers and possible ways forward. The day two ended with the initial recommendations of the group.

To further understand the context of university education in Latvia, an added meeting was organised through Zoom on the 3rd of June. The team was explained how internships are organised in Latvia, and how professional learning in general is organised. The delegation provided recommendations about professional standards in May 2024, and gave initial recommendations on the 3rd of June.

The provisional version of the report was delivered on the 7th of August. On this occasion the delegation was informed that the occupational standards have been approved and published and that the recommendations were integrated to final version of the national standards. This report provides a summary of the discussions and sets out the advice and recommendations of the Council of Europe delegation.

### 3. Youth Work Conditions in Latvia

#### 3.1. Youth Work in Latvia and the Need for Professionalisation

The provision of youth work in Latvia falls under the mandate of local governments. There are currently 43 local governments, each with autonomy in deciding how to support youth work in Latvia. According to data from local governments, in 2023, there were 90 full-time and 24 part-time youth affairs specialists. Additionally, there were 88 full-time youth workers and 74 part-time youth workers working in different municipalities. The number of youth workers employed by NGOs is not known, nor is the number of volunteers involved in local youth work.

The direction and goals of youth policy in Latvia are defined by the Guidelines for Children, Youth, and Family Development 2022 – 2027. According to these guidelines, there are two distinct professions in the field of youth: youth affairs specialists and youth workers. The two professions are defined as follows:

- **Youth affairs specialist:** A person who plans, performs, and coordinates youth work. A youth specialist cooperates with stakeholders involved in the implementation of youth policy, develops proposals for the improvement of youth policy, implements and coordinates information and educational events, projects, and programs within the field of youth policy, promotes civic education of young people, encourages volunteering among young people and their participation in decision-making processes and social life, and advises young people regarding youth policy, including the development and implementation of various events, projects, and programs, as well as fostering personal development of young people.
- **Youth worker:** A person who performs youth work by involving young people in the implementation and evaluation of youth work; provides activities and leisure opportunities for young people at the local level; participates in international events and projects; advises young people on relevant topics; and ensures the availability and dissemination of information on youth policy issues.

According to presentations, the role of the youth worker is less clear than the role of the youth affairs specialist. While youth work is recognized in Latvian society, there are some perceived challenges. There are no educational programs leading to a degree designed specifically for youth workers. The educational background for youth work varies, and it is not possible to guarantee that all youth workers follow the same principles

One of the developmental goals of the Latvian youth work policy is promoting the professionalisation of youth work. In youth policy, two processes have already been initiated to achieve this goal. First, defining the professional standards for youth workers helps clarify what youth work entails. It also provides an official status for youth workers and aids in developing a degree program in youth work. Secondly, once the professional standards are established, it is possible to create an educational program that will soon provide Latvian society with trained youth workers.

Latvian youth work policy can be analysed using a framework of youth work practice architectures. Supporting structures of youth work can be divided into three categories. Firstly, there needs to be a legislative basis for youth work that describes what youth work is, the methods used, and preferably the contributions youth work offers to society. This is connected to the broader question of developing a robust knowledge base for youth work.

Secondly, there needs to be educational pathways enabling youth workers to develop both individually and collectively. Educational pathways should be connected to sustainable career paths, allowing for the long-term development of the youth work community. Thirdly, youth work needs to build relationships within the community of youth workers and with broader society (Kiilakoski 2020)<sup>2</sup>. In Latvia, there are already 'building blocks' at all these levels. The proposed vision for professionalisation strengthens the youth work practice architectures at all these levels.

### 3.2. Developing the Professional Standards for Youth Work

When the delegation visited Latvia, the professional standards were already being developed. The work began in 2023, and the standards were due to be accepted in June 2024. This allowed the delegation to familiarize themselves with the well-developed document. The delegation was informed about the powerful role professional standards could play in giving youth work a stronger foundation. Once approved, the professional standards will start to influence Latvian society.

As mentioned earlier in the report, at the time of the discussion of the provisional report prepared by the Council of Europe delegation on the 7th of August, the delegation was informed that the occupational standards have been approved and published. Besides expressing youth work principles, methods, and values, and the competencies of youth workers, it will give youth work a more robust standing in society. Importantly, it serves as a basis for designing a professional program in higher education.

The professional standards were developed together with the Latvian youth work community. According to the document, youth work is comparable to the professions of social workers and teachers. The document itself offers a vision for youth work, clearly informed and influenced by European discussions. The document highlights key issues of European youth work policy, including the promotion of non-formal and informal learning, youth participation, competence development, and ensuring leisure time activities. The vision for youth work in the version of the document the delegation received is stated as follows:

“A youth worker shall implement direct work with young people, promote youth initiatives, ensure opportunities for acquisition of the competences necessary for the life of young people, ensure useful leisure activities, promote participation of young people and implement projects in the youth field.

The youth worker promotes non-formal and informal learning in order to improve the quality of life of young people, promote youth initiatives, participation in decision-making and public life, and support the development and quality of youth work. Youth worker supports and advises young people with a focus on their personal and social development.

A youth worker could work in different State and local government institutions (including educational institutions, youth clubs, day centres, children's and youth centres, places of imprisonment), in associations, foundations, social enterprises as paid worker, volunteer or as a self-employed person.

A youth worker shall perform professional activities in co-operation with a youth specialist, social workers, educators, career counsellors and other youth policy decision makers and practitioners.”

The professional standards follow the general pattern used in Latvian society. The competencies described are divided into professional competencies and general competencies. General competencies refer to general working life skills, including language skills and the ability to work in teams. The professional competencies consist of six different categories:

1. Implementation of youth work.
2. Promotion of youth initiatives.
3. Provision of opportunities for the acquisition of competencies necessary for the life of young people.
4. Providing useful leisure facilities for young people.
5. Promotion of youth participation.
6. Implementation of projects in the field of youth work.

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<sup>2</sup> Kiilakoski, T. (2020a) “Diversity of practice architectures: education and career paths”, in Taru M., Krzaklewska E, & Basarab, T. (eds.) *Youth worker education in Europe: Policies, structures, practices. Youth Knowledge #26*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, pp. 149-68.



These competencies are further divided into tasks, skills, professional knowledge, and competencies. The level of detail in the document is very high, as each of the above professional competencies is divided into six categories. The model aims to analyse different competencies without considering competence levels, such as beginner/expert or volunteer youth worker/paid youth worker.

### 3.3. Developing Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Pathways in Latvia

Once the professional standards in Latvia are in place, it is possible to start designing a higher education program for youth work. Two main alternatives are considered for this: either integrating the youth work program into social work or teacher education. In the long term, this will enable building quality youth work in Latvia. According to the Mapping Report on Study Programmes Related to the Professionalisation of Youth Workers, both programs share similarities with youth work. However, both programs lack important youth work- related issues, such as programs explicitly addressing youth health issues, a youth policy framework, and a communication framework specifically targeted at youth audiences. Additionally, courses on project management that would include supporting youth initiatives, youth mobility, and opportunities for international cooperation are lacking, as is in-depth study in non-formal education.

Currently, the education and training of youth workers are not regulated, while there is a regulation determining the training of youth work specialists. The current regulations for youth work specialists have existed since 2009. The identified problems in Latvia include insufficient information on the background of youth workers, the possibility that not all youth workers accept youth work principles and values, and that youth workers might lack the education necessary to meet job requirements. To provide quality youth work, university education needs to be supplemented with measures enabling youth workers to learn at different phases of their careers.

## 4 Recommendations

### 4.1 Vision for the Professionalisation of Youth Work

European countries exhibit varied youth work structures, ranging from volunteer-based activities to recognized professions. Currently, youth work in Latvia is categorized as an occupation. Latvia has already established supportive structures for youth work, such as inclusion in the Guidelines for Children, Youth, and Family Development 2022-2027, the Youth Act governing youth work, and employing part-time and full-time youth workers in municipalities. Establishing structures for professionalisation is a crucial step towards gaining increased recognition. Professionalisation typically involves societal recognition of an occupation's value and the distinct skills possessed by its practitioners.

The delegation agrees that professionalisation has the potential to enhance the quality of youth work in Latvia. Latvia's approach focuses on setting professional standards for youth work and developing corresponding educational pathways. This approach aligns with the Council of Europe's recommendation to establish "a coherent and flexible competency- based framework"<sup>3</sup> for youth work. The delegation emphasizes that this framework should also support volunteers in the youth work field.

Promoting youth work professionalisation should involve setting both short-term and long- term goals. Societal aspects of professionalisation can be categorized into the following, with some being long-term goals:

- Legislation and state recognition of the profession, linked with adequate financing (short-term necessity, though resource allocation may take time).
- High-level education grounded in scientific knowledge of the field (short-term goal, though building scientific knowledge will require significant time).

- Independence from other fields (long-term goal).
- Acknowledgement of the profession's societal benefits through image-building and public recognition (long-term goal).
- Professional autonomy and advocacy, enabling influence on societal matters related to the profession (long-term goal).

While professionalisation is expected to benefit youth work in Latvia, it's essential to consider critical perspectives. Critics argue that professionalisation might lead to increased evaluation and standardisation, potentially creating an exclusive group with entry determined by educated experts (Nuggehalli, 2018, p. 80)<sup>4</sup>. Balancing the integration of newly trained and existing youth workers is crucial, as is considering the roles of civil society and NGOs in youth work to prevent tensions within the field.

Based on these observations, the following recommendations are made:

1. Conduct a comprehensive mapping study of the current youth work workforce across the sector. This study should gather data on numbers, qualifications, length of service, roles, job titles, and contract types of youth workers in municipalities and NGOs. The adoption of the occupational standards sets out the principles, values and approaches of youth work, which will improve the quality of youth work practice into the future. Until that happens, it is not possible to guarantee that youth workers operate from the same principles, values and understandings. The mapping exercise proposed above will go some way to establishing the occupational and educational profile of Latvian youth workers and help to establish the most effective way forward in terms of youth worker education and training.
2. While resource allocation may not be determinable at this stage of professionalisation, careful consideration of resource implications is necessary. There's a risk that lower-paid positions with less favourable employment terms in youth work may deter graduates from pursuing careers in this field.
3. Professionalisation aims to elevate quality, implying that current standards may be inadequate. It's crucial for the Latvian youth work community to feel ownership of this process and avoid exclusion. Collaboration with youth workers' associations will be essential for success.
4. The role and contribution of NGOs to the Latvian Youth Work system can be assessed more comprehensively. It's essential to establish a knowledge base about their contributions and integrate their perspectives into the professionalisation process to avoid creating divides between different types of youth work.
5. Clarify the role of youth participation in the professionalisation process. While it's appropriate for adult experts to shape youth work structures, establishing structures that involve the "golden triangle" (youth policy experts, youth researchers, youth work practitioners) and co-management with young people is essential.

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<sup>3</sup> Committee of Ministers (2017), Recommendation CM/Rec(2017) on youth work <https://rm.coe.int/cmrec-2017-4-and-explanatory-memorandum-youth-work-web/16808ff0d1>, accessed 22 April 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Nuggehalli, R.K. (2018), "Let Principles Drive Practice: Reclaiming Youth Work in India". In P. Allfred, F. Cullen, K. Edwards & D. Fusco (Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Youth Work*, London: Sage, pp. 73-84.

## 4.2. The professional standards of youth work

The proposed standards are closely aligned with professional standards in other contexts, and there are no significant gaps. Competence models of youth workers typically involve working with young people both as individuals and in groups. They emphasize pedagogical competencies or skills. Most competence frameworks include organizational issues and may include working with projects. Supporting participation is commonly addressed. Promoting the health and well-being of young people is mentioned in most models. All these elements are integrated into the Latvian professional standards.

The summary (No. 3) of the professional duties and tasks is comprehensive and addresses the key areas of youth work. Main elements of key European documents, such as the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth work, are integrated into the summary and the professional standards. Core themes of promoting social inclusion and young people's personal and social development through informal and non-formal learning to enable their participation in public and social life are strong throughout. The recognition of the need for standards of ethical practice, professionalism, and professional development provides a robust basis for the establishment and development of the profession.

The delegation believes that the proposed professional standards are of high quality. However, there are three major areas that could be better reflected in the document. These remarks should be seen as supplementary to an already extensive document.

### ***The Knowledge Basis of Youth Workers***

6. The professional standards describe well what youth workers should be able to do and what they need to know. However, the academic traditions or disciplines connected to youth work could be more explicitly described. This perspective is relevant when considering how the standards document might inform a curriculum for youth worker education and training. While any professional education and training curriculum in higher education will focus on skills and competence development, it is also accompanied by a specific focus on underpinning knowledge. To that end, it would be worth being more specific about 'naming' the following in the knowledge stand:
  - Sociological theories (broad knowledge of society generally)
  - Youth studies/youth culture
  - Sociology of the professions
  - Equality and human rights theory
  - Education for Sustainable Development
  - Learning/pedagogical theories
  - Values and principles of youth work practice
  - Ethical theory and codes of ethical practice

For example, section 4.12 (Summarize the needs of different youth target groups) describes that youth workers should be able to conduct surveys and critically analyse research data. It could be argued that this requires knowing the most relevant traditions for youth work as described above. Additionally, sections mentioning knowledge required to counsel young people (4.14., 4.3.2.) would benefit from references to social sciences and philosophy in addition to the psychology of contact and social pedagogy. Section 4.3.1 would also benefit from adopting social sciences perspectives.

### **7. The Importance of Peer Learning and Group Dynamics**

It is common to emphasize the importance of group activities for youth work practice. The Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work states that youth work "should focus on young people and create spaces for association and bridges to support transition to adulthood and autonomy". The

metaphor of creating spaces emphasizes peer learning perspectives and group dynamics. While it is understood that the document implicitly includes group perspectives, this could be made more explicit.

Highlighting group dynamics, peer learning, or social psychological perspectives would align the document more closely with other documents, such as the European youth work portfolio. The European youth work portfolio emphasizes that one of the competencies of youth workers is creating safe, motivating, and inclusive learning environments for individuals and groups. Making peer learning perspectives more explicit, for example in sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5, would inform curriculum design about the importance of these perspectives in youth work.

#### 8. Youth Work Values

Youth work is a value-based practice that relies on democracy, human rights, and the active participation of young people. While the value perspectives are implicitly mentioned in the document, emphasizing their importance more explicitly would be useful. Sections such as 4.5.1 – 4.5.6 would benefit from highlighting the value dimension. Additionally, making values more explicit in other parts of the document would inform curriculum design.

9. In addition to these three main remarks, emphasizing the importance of both general policymaking and the youth policy context in Latvia and Europe would be beneficial.

As an overall evaluation, the Council of Europe delegation thought that the professional standards reflect both European youth work policies and the national context of youth work in Latvia. This is a credit to all members of the youth work community of practice who contributed to developing the document. The qualification level of the standards is appropriate to related professions in other contexts.

### 4.3. Developing Lifelong Learning Opportunities for Youth Work

A pivotal decision ahead involves designing the curriculum for youth work within the context of either social work or teacher education. According to a mapping study by Sintija Lase and Rudīte Muraševa, both existing programs lack key aspects outlined in the professional standards of youth work. Therefore, achieving a balance between existing frameworks and establishing robust, youth-work-specific content will be essential. Both social work and teacher education are relevant frameworks for youth work. Despite the dominant perspective of youth work as educational in European discourse, it historically aligns with both educational and social work traditions. "Though often cast as a quintessentially non-formal educational practice, youth work's history can also be strongly attached to traditions of social work" (Williamson, 2017, p. 18<sup>5</sup>).

The delegation stresses that this decision will shape future pathways: an educational perspective will likely connect youth work with learning, youth development, and growth, while a social work perspective will emphasize working with marginalized youth, addressing social issues, and integrating youth work into social and health services.

Different time perspectives must be considered:

- **Short-term practical:** Establishing a program and designing the curriculum will require collaboration with sympathetic allies within universities who possess the expertise and commitment to develop a high-quality youth work program. The role of community of practice of youth work should be made clear, including the public and private sector, paid and unpaid workers and employers.
- **Long-term theoretical:** Choosing between social work or education programs will define the essence of youth work and determine which knowledge is most valuable to Latvian youth workers. This knowledge will influence approaches to youth issues and the concepts employed in the field.

- **Long-term practical:** Once established, the program will shape how Latvian youth workers conduct their work in the future, setting path dependencies. This choice will also define the methodologies and values adopted by youth workers.

Regardless of whether social work or education is chosen, safeguarding specific content for youth work is crucial. This choice will establish a tradition of theorizing and practicing youth work. The delegation highlights several challenges, risks and opportunities:

## Challenges

- Assessing the knowledge and skill set of current university staff: Are there individuals with youth work experience?
- Valuing the contributions of experienced youth work practitioners to academic programs.
- Youth work being perceived as a less prestigious discipline compared to more established fields.
- If curriculum of youth work education is designed based on current academic traditions, crucial youth work perspectives such as the focus on group work or promoting participation and equality through informal and non-formal methodologies might be compromised in both program options.

## Opportunities

- Established solutions in Europe where youth work is integrated with pedagogy or social work.
- Shared theoretical dimensions and a focus on professional practice in both frameworks.
- Potential for graduates to work in fields beyond youth work depending on program design.

Discussions in Riga underscored the need for a lifelong learning education and training system for youth workers in Latvia. This system should recognize various career phases, include recognition of prior learning, and take into account existing educational backgrounds of current youth workers.

The delegation recommends considering the following perspectives:

10. Ensure the university program includes specific content on youth work, focusing on professional formation and development (both personal and communal) and youth work theory.
11. Integrate a specific youth-work related module/content with practical internships to embed the youth work community of practice into the program. For instance, teaching youth sociology without youth work context may lack professional development and formative issues. Therefore, early engagement with the youth work community is crucial.
12. Decide on the program level (e.g., BA, Master, short BA), credits, mode (part- time/full-time), and duration, as these factors will affect the time required for program development, design, and validation/accreditation within the university system.
13. Consider adding a youth work strand to an existing program as a potentially quicker route to accreditation/validation, as it may be viewed as an amendment rather than a new program.
14. Develop a continuous professional development framework to support ongoing skill enhancement for youth workers currently in the field.
15. Ensure diverse training offerings to accommodate various interests within the youth work community of practice, including individual and policy interests at micro, meso, and macro levels. Offer training on occupational standards and current topics, potentially making some training mandatory if deemed necessary for securing the quality of youth work provision

16. Evaluate the development of the education and training system from the perspective of its impact on all stakeholders in the youth work community of practice, including municipalities, NGOs, paid and unpaid youth workers.

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<sup>5</sup> Williamson, H. (2017), "Winning space, building bridges – What youth work is all about". In H. Schildt, N. Connolly,, F. Labadie, J. Vanhee & H. Williamson (Eds.) *Thinking Seriously about Youth Work*. Youth Knowledge #20, Council of Europe and European Commission, pp. 15-26.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE ADVISORY MISSION**

The Council of Europe delegation comprised the following six members:

Martti Martinson	(European Steering Committee for Youth)
Nadia Tismănaru	(Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth)
Dr. Tomi Kiilakoski	(Scientific Expert, Senior Researcher, Finnish Youth Research Society)
Dr. Hilary Tierney	(Scientific Expert, Associate professor at Maynooth University)
Clementina Barbaro	(Council of Europe Youth Department)
Marius Schlageter	(Council of Europe Youth Department)

## APPENDIX 2

### PROGRAMME OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MISSION TO LATVIA

	1. May	2. May	3. May
09:00	Arrivals	Opening and introduction	<b>Lifelong learning, professional development for Youth workers</b>
			Lifelong learning, professional development for Youth workers, possible pathways – <i>Ministry of Education and Science, Agency for international youth programmes</i>
		<b>Youth work in Latvia</b>	
09:30		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth work in Latvia (<i>R.Keņģe - Ministry of Education and Science</i>)</li> <li>Current approach on Youth workers education and existing support mechanisms for youth workers professional development – <i>Ministry of Education and Science, Agency for international youth programmes</i></li> </ul>	Round table, discussion on possible pathways for professional development of Youth workers
10:00			
10:30			<b>Coffee break</b>
11:00		<b>Coffee break</b>	Main findings, first recommendations from experts
		<b>Youth workers occupational standard</b>	
11:30		Diversity of practice architectures in Youth Work (examples from Member States)	
12:00		Youth worker occupational standard in Latvia ( <i>R.Mencendorfa - Ministry of Education and Science, Agency for international youth programmes</i> )	
12:30		Round table, discussion on occupational standard with Youth work stakeholders	Conclusions, Closing of the mission
13:00		<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
13:30			
14:00		<b>Higher education in Youth work</b>	Departures
14:30		Higher education in Youth work in Europe ( <i>M.Martinson, H.Tierney, T.Kiilakoski</i> )	
15:00		Higher education in Youth work in Latvia ( <i>Ministry of Education and Science, Agency for international youth programmes, Youth Work</i> )	
15:30			
16:00		<b>Coffee break</b>	
16:30		Round table, discussion on Higher education in Youth work with main	
17:00			
19:00	Dinner at 19:30	Dinner	