



# COM – Communities Organising Movements Information Report

Analysis of the youth workers practices and the challenges  
in the communities of the partner countries



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# 1. Project COM -Communities Organising Movements

The “Com-Communities Organising Movements” project is a small-scale partnership between four European organisations from four different partner countries: Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Italy. The project is co-funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme.

The Project COM- Communities Organising Movement, from now on denominated as COM, has been created to support the recognition of the figure of the youth worker via a set of digital and transversal competencies to:

- Develop opportunities for young people and youth workers
- Empower youth with practical tools and help them be capable to understand the dynamics of the place they live
- Foster their development as individuals and as citizens

The project is also aimed at including young people in need and people who might live remotely from their communities, facing social exclusion. Thus, one of the main objectives of this project is to enable cross-countries recognition of youth work and youth workers. To do so, tools and methodologies in each partner’s country have been analyzed to guarantee the knowledge of digital tools and non-formal learning practices that might help youth workers guarantee a deeper engagement for young people.

COM project is aimed at youth workers, youth social workers and social educators working in teams in associations, spaces, youth centers, with a committed professional background and qualified staff.

## 1.1 Participating Organizations

The participating organizations of the consortium are:

- **Fundación Plan B Educación Social** from Spain (coordinator)
- **INTERMEDIKT Interactive Media Knowledge Transfer** from Greece
- **ASSOCIACAO CHECK-IN – Cooperacao e desenvolvimento** from Portugal
- **Accademia IRSEI APS, Istituto di Ricerca per lo Sviluppo, Economia e Innovazione** from Italy

## 2. Introduction

This analysis starts from the awareness of the importance of the role of youth workers in Europe for the dissemination of non-formal education addressed to young people and the awareness that often this role does not yet receive the same recognition among the various countries.

The non-formal education provided through training courses, think tanks, or participatory activities is vital for the active comprehension and diffusion of common European values among the new generations. This is why the role of educators, volunteers, and professors working with youth is essential. The task of the youth worker, be it a volunteer or a professional, has however undergone changes due to the advent of the pandemic Covid-19 in 2020, so it is important to analyze approaches to young people to better understand how to continue improving.

The following analysis considers the national situation of the four partner countries, namely Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Italy regarding the national recognition of the figure of the youth worker and the challenges of this role in their communities.

The study aims at promoting and recognizing the role of youth workers all across Europe. To understand the national situation of each partner country a brief description of the situation of young people has been prepared, especially linked to the advent of Covid-19 and the consequences in their lives. After that, two youth organizations and a public body for each nation are analyzed, indicating their best practices and how these are working for the promotion of respect for common EU values, participatory citizenship and supporting youth funding work. This research aims to give value and recognize the work of youth workers by understanding common challenges and issues in order to cooperate and find possible common solutions.

## 3. National contexts about youth workers

### 3.1 Greece

The term and the constitution of a Youth Worker vary among the countries of Europe. The main core though for all countries is the continued development of the individual which leads to a better society. Even though in many EU countries it has been institutionalized and recognized as a profession, still in Greece is at an early stage. That's the reason why only NGOs are actively involved and promote Youth Work. It should be mentioned that the last few years multiple discussions have been happening in the Ministry of Education regarding the need of the recognition of Youth Work as a profession. The current situation demands a series of initiatives such as the formulation of a comprehensive institutional framework for youth work, setting up national standards and the development of a professionally accredited youth worker training scheme and the promotion of research on youth work issues through a closer dialogue and contact between policy makers and Greek academia/youth researchers. In addition to this the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on youth work raised more challenges but opportunities as well. There has been a decrease in available employment but on the other hand, since everybody need to adapt in this new reality, different and innovative ways of putting in action Youth workers were created. In a Conference about Youth employment and non-formal education that took place in Athens on the 5th of October 2022 it was marked how important is non-formal education, youth-friendly services and safe digital spaces that help young people make healthier choices and develop healthy relationships. In conclusion many changes and actions need to be made since this subject is still at a state of formation.

#### **Youth Organizations**

##### **United Societies of Balkans**

The organization was created as a response to the pressure of constant changes in the Balkan and Eastern European regions and under the need for the creation of a better social environment. Key areas of the organization's activities concern the defense of human rights, the organization of youth exchanges and training courses, which will bring young people from Balkans and Europe together, the organization of local educational seminars and multimedia production, as well as promotion of volunteerism at local and international level.

Some of the objectives of the organization are:

- a) Identifying the needs of young people and implementing actions and activities in cooperation with them

- b) Supporting, empowering and activating young people in order to take part in decision-making process and initiatives
  - c) Promoting the idea of voluntarism, the values and principles of active citizenship and democracy
  - d) Promoting and respecting human rights, social integration, solidarity and diversity, through the use of new media and non-formal education activities
  - e) Stimulating youth to adopt social skills and healthy attitudes to combat unemployment through entrepreneurship
  - f) Recognizing the values of non-formal education and the services of the youth worker.
- For more information: <https://www.usbngo.gr/en>

### **Youth Center of Epirus**

The Youth Center of Epirus (YC Epirus) is a non-profit organisation located in Ioannina, in the heart of the Epirus region, Greece. It hosts departments of young adult non-formal education and asylum seeker integration. The organisation is internationally certified for Support Services for the Improvement of Citizen's Lives and the Upgrading of General Living Conditions, by the International Organization for Standardization and has received Certification as a provider of Primary Social Care services of a non-profit nature from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

For more information: <https://www.yce.gr/en/about-us/>

### **Network of Youth Engagement**

The Network of Youth Engagement is a youth organization founded in 2018 based in Katerini. Their aim is to enhance youth participation in the local community through projects which will aspire to implement. Members of the association can be any young person 18-30 years old living or has origin from Pieria region.

The goals are:

- a. Organizing actions aimed at raising young people's awareness of political socialization, reflection and participation in the structures of civil society (Youth Working).
- b. Enhancing youth mobility through the provision of opportunities to the young people of the region.
- c. The creation of a strong community, who is consisted of young citizens that live or have origin from the region, in order to encourage them to take action and to remind them their common origin and the common problems that they are facing.
- d. The creation of a youth independent think tank - a platform of youth initiatives.
- e. The research of region's problems (deficiencies, faux pas) in the fields of education, culture, sport, sustainability, infrastructure, tourism, politics, equal access for people to social goods, social and economic activity of young people.

g. The research and documentation of proposals which try to confront the topics mentioned above from a youth perspective and their promotion to the relevant bodies.

For more information: <https://diktyo-katerini.gr/en/the-network-en/about-us-en.html>

## Public Body

### Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation

The “Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation” prides on its long and rich history, originating from the National Youth Foundation (founded in 1947). Its current name and state came about from the merging of the Institute for Continuing Adult Education and the Institute for Youth. The foundation’s mission is to

- 1) implement lifelong learning programs/projects
- 2) implement youth programs/projects, emphasizing youth innovation, mobility, transitions and career growth
- 3) manage all issues regarding student care services, catering and accommodation facilities (educational welfare). It has a great variety of programs and actions regarding Youth work such as:
  - a) Vocational training for young people/ graduates (Public Vocational Training Institutes, Entrepreneurship, Training, Trainers’ Courses)
  - b) General adult education (Lifelong Learning Centers, Support for vulnerable social groups)
  - c) Youth support actions (Programs to stimulate youth employment and volunteerism, projects for youth innovation, mobility and career growth)

For more information: <https://www.inedivim.gr/en>



## 3.2 Portugal

Today the daily thought of most young workers is the fear of not finding a job, at the same time, of not being able to obtain a work contract with rights, the fear of never being able to leave the parental home, the fear of having no salary in the middle of the month.

The advent of the Covid19 pandemic has highlighted the result of years and years of devaluation of labor and workers in the Portuguese market as well as in the European one. Many youth workers face various challenges. Given the low salary level, in large urban centers many young people share a house with 3 or even 4 other people, as it is not possible to rent a house.

What are the main challenges young people face?

### **Lack of experience**

Without a doubt, lack of experience is the main challenge for young people to enter the labor market. It is quite common for most employers to apply for this requirement, even for simpler positions that don't require that much technical knowledge and / or knowledge of various languages.

One solution to get around this problem is volunteering. Young people can start collaborating with some NGOs, associations and charities, for example, to increase their experience and their network.

### **Generational conflict in the workplace**

Among the challenges of young people in the labor market there is also the generation gap, which leads to very different behavioral profiles in the same work environment.

Today's young people were born and raised in a highly technological environment. This has caused profound cultural changes in the way people think and act

### **Great competition for job vacancies**

Unemployment rates have risen dramatically all over the world as a response to the health and economic crisis the world is experiencing.

This has increased competition for job opportunities. After all, there are many unemployed people looking for work. To remedy this, an idea could be to take free online courses to develop the skills required by the market.

### **Lack of voice and respect in organizations**



While this has changed a lot in recent years, many companies still live in a culture that values "white hair" a lot. That is, older people always seem to be right, even if they are less qualified or have studied less than a young person.

This type of situation is very complicated! There are cases where young people learn new and interesting theories in college but fail to put them into practice in companies, for example.

## Youth Organization

### Jovem Cascais

Jovem Cascais is a reality that aims to promote and support youth workers by offering various services and opportunities to become part of the world of work, creating future opportunities for collaboration.

The organization involves young people in society through programs and projects that promote their social participation and active citizenship, in many fields such as sport and culture.

It connects youth with the community through volunteering, non-formal education and intercultural learning, also empowering young people and youth workers to express their potential and achieve their dreams.

## Public Body and Policy Maker

### IPDJ (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude) - Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth

The mission of the Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth is to implement an integrated and decentralized policy for the sports and youth sectors, in close cooperation with public and private bodies, in particular with sports bodies, youth and student associations and local authorities .

The IPDJ intervenes in the definition, execution and evaluation of public policies in the field of sport, promoting the generalization of sport, as well as supporting regular and high-performance sports, through the provision of technical, human and financial resources. Another objective of the IPDJ is to strengthen support for youth associations, volunteering and the promotion of citizenship, leisure, non-formal education, information and geographical mobility of young people in Portugal and abroad.

Another objective is to revive youth tourism, in particular as regards the network of youth hostels and the Youth Charter, in order to increase mobility, with efficiency and economic gains and continuously generate opportunities for collaboration and work for many youth worker

### 3.3 Spain

Spain is one of the countries with the latest emancipation of young people in Europe (the average age of emancipation in the European Union is 26.2 years, while in Spain it is 29.5) and the situation threatens to worsen with the COVID: after the pandemic, the percentage of young people is increasing. In general, 75% of young people do not emancipate due to a lack of income stability or sufficiency. The labour market has also been affected, deepening pre-existing problems such as job insecurity and instability and lowering expectations among young people. More than half of employed young people have temporary contracts, a temporary nature. However, almost 38% would like to work more hours than they currently do. At the same time, young people believe that, after the pandemic, their employment and economic opportunities will be worse than those of previous generations within the country.

The percentage of young people who think that "by participating in politics they can contribute to improving the society in which they live" is growing, but they feel dissatisfied with the political class. Young Spaniards consider that climate change is Spain's main problem and that environmental protection should be a priority, and they also focus on gender equality, considering that inequalities still exist.

In relation to their focus of attention, they use social networks to socialize, and the value of friendship decreases, which is conceived from a critical and vigilant spirit, as well as being concerned about the image they project on them.

#### Youth Organization

In collaboration with the youth associative movement, in this case, through the Spanish Youth Council. This is a platform of youth organizations, made up of the Youth Councils of the Autonomous Communities and youth organizations at national level. To promote the participation of young people in the political, social, economic and cultural development of Spain in a global environment. At present, 60 youth organizations are part of this common project. It is considered a space for coordination, dialogue, training and cooperation of the entities and organizations that make up the youth associative movement. It offers spaces for reflection, joint work, training, dialogue with public authorities and state institutions, systematization of the experience of the organized youth movement and opening up new channels and ways of action for young people.

Fundación Plan B Educación Social is a Spanish Non-profit private foundation, formally organized, and with the capacity for institutional self-control. The mission is to create a social change to improve the lives of children and youth by giving them a chance for personal, social and educational growth. This is achieved by setting clear objectives that as a guide to mark the path of the foundation work: Develop a transformative participation,

investigate, intervene, and integrally promote educational level as a tool for change and empower the community, promote a quality democracy, and develop the environment.

### **Public body and policy maker**

The Youth Institute is a public body, attached to the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, whose main activity is aimed at promoting actions for the benefit of young people. Among its objectives are to promote equal opportunities for young people, participation in the political, social, economic and cultural development of Spain and to promote collaboration between ministerial departments and other public administrations that are relevant to young people. In the development of these objectives, collaboration with the different Ministries, with the youth bodies of the Autonomous Communities and with the local councils, through the FEMP, is of special relevance, for which there are specific working mechanisms.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Economy developed and promoted a youth unemployment shock programme to facilitate labour insertion, build a stable working life and strengthen the education and training of young people, which is one of the cross-cutting and priority elements of the recovery plan.

"Youth Employment" has three programmes aimed at young people aged between 16 and 29, and prioritizes the areas of ecological transition and green economy, digitalisation of services, social cohesion, the fight against depopulation and local rural development:

- The "TandEM" programme is a work-linked training project modelled on workshop schools but applied to projects of public and social interest. It will provide training in alternation with employment to young people aged 16-29 in projects inspired by public workshop schools, focusing on the skills needed for the double transition, social assistance and territorial cohesion. The grants will be received by state public sector entities in charge of implementation.
- First work experience in public administrations, a scheme of first experiences in employment within the services provided by public administrations, which will benefit young unemployed persons whose educational stage has been completed and accredited. It will provide unemployed young people who have completed formal education with their first work experience in public administration (general and regional). It will acquire non-technical skills and interpersonal skills through jobs related to dual transition, social assistance and territorial cohesion. Grants are distributed to the public bodies of the Directorate of State and Local Government responsible for implementation.
- "Investigo" programme: employment scheme for young researchers and technologists in public research organizations, public universities, technology centres, science and technology parks and public entities subject to private law, together with

companies that invest in research and innovation and present a research project and private non-profit entities such as foundations. It will cover the employment of young researchers in public research organizations, public universities, technology centres and other public and private entities involved in research projects.

### 3.4 Italy

Italian youths are in the same situation as most European youths. The consequences of Covid-19 highlighted an already difficult situation: the lack of jobs and, consequently, the inability to become independent for young people. This situation marks a group of young people, with the absence of adequate educational qualifications, especially in the ICT sector, or with no experience. The Italian ICT sector is affected by several problems, from the lack of skilled workers to the high gender gap.

Covid-19 also increased the differences between young people with economic possibilities and the ones with no access to digital tools. Individuals, schools, industries and public services suffered the negative consequences of the pandemic, they had to reorganize their ICT sectors to deal with this new work-at-home modality. In schools, for example, the only way to study was with online teaching, so both teachers and students had to learn how to work with online platforms. It wasn't easy, because Italy has serious problems with internet connections, online platforms and the knowledge of computer systems.

These problems are mainly present in the southern regions, but in recent years the country has begun to face it by starting a digital transformation despite the great problems still present. Especially, with the financial aid coming from post-covid recovery plans (PNRR) the country has started a phase of development and growth, particularly in the digital sector. To reach the European average of basic digitalization, Italy still has a lot of work to do, for example in schools and universities it has included new computer science programs within the educational programs and the aim is to encourage young people to enter in ICT courses.

Public institutions have developed their public digital services, for example, in healthcare and administration, and its aim is to reach at least the European average.

In Italy the term used at the European level “youth worker” has not been specifically translated, but these workers are simply defined as “socio-educational youth workers” . However, at the local level, regions have started to define more precisely a work or voluntary activity carried out for young people in youth centers. Although the term is not yet recognized at a national legislative level it is possible to include the work carried out within youth centers to help young people and young adults, the orientation centers which aim to provide training in various fields, as work and social assistance, and the work carried out by the National youth agency which in Italy is responsible for promoting the active citizenship of young people.

The goal of the country is to get closer to European countries by expanding the term and recognizing the work done for young people.

### Public body

#### **ANPAL (Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive del Lavoro) – National Agency for Labour Active Policies**

The work of this national agency starts with helping people ending their studies, connecting young workers with labor market and improving their professional skills. In order to improve the digital skills of young workers the agency creates different programs in several fields including digitalization, entrepreneurship and training. These programs are aimed to young unemployed people between 15 and 29 years of age, but in the regions of the south, which are characterized by a greater lack of work, the age limit is extended to 34 years to help them enter the labor market by providing vocational courses or internships.

<https://www.anpal.gov.it/garanzia-giovani>

### Youth Organization

#### **CEIPES (Centro Internazionale per la Promozione dell'Educazione e lo Sviluppo) – International centre for the promotion of education and development.**

CEIPES is an Italian Ngo that works at local and European level with the aim of improving methodologies and technologies in the field of education. Thanks to European programs creates and develops projects on different topics, like respect for human and civil rights, integration and respect for people with disability or migrants, use of art and creativity for training courses, innovation, and technology. CEIPES works with different organizations, and public and private bodies in order to promote cooperation at the local level and to facilitate access to European opportunities, such as learning mobilities and European cooperation.

In the field of technology, the organization wants to establish innovative and qualitative training methods useful for strengthening digital skills and preparing students and adults for practical experience, essential to enter the world of ICT.

For more information: <https://ceipes.org/>



## 4. Conclusions

As analyzed, the four partner countries Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy face the same key issues when approaching the topic of young workers' difficulties in entering the work market. Undoubtedly, the general difficulties in finding work and in specializing a set of skills through both formal and non-formal education have rapidly worsened in Europe in the last few years. Indeed, the difficulties of young Europeans in seeking work and in general social integration have been exacerbated by the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic with its consequent generation of lack of opportunities for young people. Another shared problem is the lack of national recognition of the figure of the youth worker, despite this, there are not a few who work (as professionals or volunteers) as youth workers. Those who work as youth workers in these countries also have the opportunity to see how the consequences of the pandemic have impacted the social and occupational integration of young people. Nevertheless, among the young people of the four countries analyzed, there is an increase in interest in European policies, on social and environmental impact issues, interests that often combine with the skill sets offered by educational centers and associations in which youth workers work closely with young people to help them better cope with the transition to work or to provide technical or social skill sets.

Although the figure of the youth worker is often not yet institutionalized, there are in the four nations various examples both at the public and associative level of development centers, NGOs, and youth centers that work in support of the individual development of young people and also deal with providing skills sets and soft skills not only working but also social. Through the national centers and voluntary associations, the youth workers of the four countries in analysis, demonstrate the importance of non-formal education in the civic growth of young people. Developing transversal skills and competencies in young people such as a sense of citizenship, inclusiveness, and common European values is a concrete solution that can provide skills and security to young Europeans, as well as the creation of a network of youth active participation or independent think tanks. Increasing the visibility of the work of national agencies as well as providing adequate skills to both young people and youth workers is undoubtedly a possible solution, as well as allowing to address youth, professional and social issues, at best.

Increasing the digital skills of young people, through professional training courses, European projects, internships, and participatory dialogue remains the main goal and solution to the problem generally faced by the four nations.

Giving visibility to youth workers remains essential to increase initiatives among the actors involved in the youth sector, this is possible only with the collaboration and support and the continuous work of the youth workers of NGOs, youth bodies of various communities, local Councils, and national volunteering associations.



Unfortunately, the figure of the youth worker is still poorly regulated at the national level, but despite this, in all partner countries, it was found that the figure corresponds to someone who works in contact with young people, such as an educator, or even a volunteer who gives his or her time to support the development of young people in various fields, e.g. scouts. This work is usually carried out within organizations, NGOs and local associations.

In spite of the strong impact that this figure can have on young people, youth workers recognize several shortcomings that represent barriers to carrying out their work.

The main barriers in the work of youth workers are related to the lack of professional recognition and qualifications resulting from the poor legislative definition in the partner countries analysed.

In order to better understand the figure and the work performed by youth workers, the partners submitted questionnaires to youth workers in order to detect the main elements of their work. What emerged is that formal education, training and seminars, and activities carried out within Erasmus+ projects are the main learning methods used by youth workers to improve their skills.

From the questionnaires, it emerges that the work carried out with young people is closely linked to the use of digital tools and social networks, which are mainly used for the publication of posts or stories to reach young people and stimulate their interest in the proposed activities. It is therefore thanks to these that workers/volunteers can spread their work, promoting activities and increasing their network. In order to measure the impact created by their work youth workers rely on direct contact with young people, through this and the feedback also coming from the family and the associations with which they work youth workers can understand whether the work they do arouses interest and co-involvement in those directly concerned.

In order to increase their digital and working skills in this area, youth workers prefer to participate in webinars/seminars/training and to exchange information with colleagues in order to share knowledge, material and tools useful for working with young people.

It is therefore clear that the work performed by youth workers is of fundamental importance within associations, organisations or institutions that provide training or support to young people, despite the lack of recognition at national level.