

# NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EU IN GEORGIA

## Development of Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Georgia

Marina Zhvania

PROJECT PARTNER: SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION  
IMPLEMENTING PARTNER: THE LEVAN MIKELADZE FOUNDATION  
DONOR ORGANISATION: SLOVAKAID AND FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG  
PROJECT DURATION: FEBRUARY 2021 – AUGUST 2022



წიგნის მემორიალი ლევან მიკელაძის ფონდში  
THE LEVAN MIKELADZE FOUNDATION



**SFPFA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT  
STIFTUNG**



წიგნის მფლობელი: ლევან მიქელაძის ფონდი  
THE LEVAN MIKELADZE FOUNDATION



**SFPA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Brief Summary .....	3
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in European Countries.....	3
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Ireland .....	4
National Quality Standards Framework.....	4
National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups .....	5
North/South Education and Training Standards (NSETS).....	6
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	6
Quality assurance of youth work in Northern Ireland .....	6
Quality Assurance Framework for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland .....	8
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	8
Quality assurance of Youth Work in Wales.....	8
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	9
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in the Czech Republic .....	9
Youth work quality self-assessment tools for youth NGOs and youth centers, OLINA .....	9
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	10
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Estonia .....	10
Competences of youth workers .....	10
Quality assessment model for local municipalities .....	11
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	11
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Lithuania.....	11
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	12
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Finland .....	13
Research and evidence supporting Youth Work .....	14
Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Slovakia.....	14
State of Play of the Youth Work Quality Assurance System in Georgia.....	15
Recommendations .....	15
References.....	17

## Introduction

The importance of youth work within the national and European policy is constantly growing, and new policy papers, at the European as well as national level, are continuously assigning new roles and tasks to youth work: Youth work is expected to improve social inclusion, build civil society, enhance employability, prevent health risks, and more.

At the same time, there is a strong motivation for further improvement within the sector itself, and there are a lot of significant efforts being made throughout Europe, at the national, regional and local levels, to enhance the quality and recognition of youth work. Standards and indicators, as well as methods and manuals, are being developed in order to support the development of quality, making it possible for youth work to both improve and prove its impact on and value to the lives of young people and society.

The background and reason for all these efforts is a rising awareness of the fact that the present resources and support available for youth work does not meet the steadily growing expectations for both quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Even though it often takes place in the context of leisure, youth work is basically an arena for non-formal and informal learning, and, as such, it generally gets very limited support relative to other actors in the field of education. In line with this, and often mentioned, is the need for enhanced recognition of youth work in general, and subsequently the need to move from the measuring of purely quantitative outputs to making the qualitative effects visible too.

## Brief Summary

The document describes quality assurance systems of youth work on the examples of a number of European countries. The current situation in Georgia in terms of ensuring the quality of youth work is reviewed. The document also includes recommendations for developing the quality of youth work in Georgia.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in European Countries

One of the general objectives of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 is to support youth work as a catalyst for the empowerment of young people. Youth work is recognized as a powerful means for equipping youth with key personal, professional and entrepreneurial competences and skills, and as a bridge into education, training or work, thus preventing exclusion.

The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 encourages EU Member States to support the development of quality youth work. In general terms, quality in youth work relates to how well it contributes to the personal and social development of the participants. More specifically, youth work should respond to the needs and interests of young people, uphold their rights, have a clear learning perspective, and pursue objectives that are relevant to the participants.

National policies have established various mechanisms for ensuring quality in youth work. Some countries have established occupational standards for youth workers, who are required to acquire specific competences and obtain qualifications in order to conduct youth work activities.

In a second group of countries, quality assurance takes place during the selection of projects to be awarded public funding. Public authorities evaluate project proposals against pre-established quality criteria. Projects that fulfil those criteria are eligible for support.

A third method of quality assurance consists of reviewing youth work activities in consideration of (non-compulsory) recommendations and guidelines. While this method is widespread, in some countries, it is the only one in place. In these countries, youth organizations, in cooperation with public authorities, agree on quality standards and indicators, and a shared assessment of the project outcomes determines the aspects to be improved (for example, providing training to youth workers or making participation more inclusive). Sweden is one of the countries following this approach.

This document explores and considers the measures established by national authorities in selected European countries to oversee and enhance the quality of youth work in each country and which encourages innovation in its practices.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Ireland

### National Quality Standards Framework

The National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) for Youth Work is the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's (DCEDIY's) Professional standard for youth work. It was published in 2010 and introduced in January 2011. The NQS applies to all staff-led youth work organizations, services, projects and programs which are funded under the following schemes:

- Youth Service Grant Scheme
- Special projects for youth
- Young People's Facilities and Services Funds 1 and 2
- Youth information centers.

The NQS is a developmental process which allows youth work organizations to assess service provision and to identify areas for development. It also provides an opportunity to carry out youth work through the development of a common language within a structured framework. The NQS aims to:

- provide a support and development tool for youth work organizations providing services to young people;
- establish standards in the practice and provision of youth work;
- provide an enhanced evidence base for youth work;
- ensure resources are used effectively in the youth work sector;
- provide a basis for 'complete organizational assessment'.

The NQS identifies key criteria which quality youth work should meet:

- Young person-centered;

## Development of Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Georgia

- Based on partnership and cooperation;
- Solution-focused;
- Challenging and developmental;
- Realistic and clear;
- Focused on the benefits.

The NQSF also includes a detailed ten-step process for engagement.

Support and guidance on the NQSF are provided to local youth work services by the local Education and Training Boards Youth/Liaison Officer, and to national youth organizations by the DCEDIY.

Evaluation of youth work is based on self-assessment and some external assessment that is used to ensure that the self-assessment process is correct. For self-assessment, the youth organization must complete a scale of attainment. External assessment is performed by Youth/Liaison Officers for local youth work services or by the NQSF Standards Officer for national youth work organizations. The external evaluation includes observations on practice. This provides the opportunity for more practical examples of quality youth work and may inform the ongoing development of the NQSF. The views of stakeholders, including staff, management, young people and volunteers, must be considered. Following the external assessment process, the Implementation Team and the Youth/Liaison Officer or the NQSF Standards Officer review the youth work organization's self-assessed scale of attainment. The two parties should discuss if this is an accurate reflection and either agree or adjust the position on the scale. This position should be used as a baseline for a Continuous Improvement Plan, to inform the completion of the annual Progress Report.

If the assessment identifies an issue that needs immediate action, addressing these concerns is part of a separate process outside of the NQSF. In such instances, the management within the organization or the managing organization and funding body will be informed and will assume their responsibility for ensuring effective youth work provision and practice within the organization.

### National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups

National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups is a set of standards that apply to volunteer-led youth activity and youth work groups. Groups funded under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA's) Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and related schemes operating in Dublin and Waterford cities are required to engage with the standards. Other youth groups are not required to adhere to these standards but are encouraged to do so.

These standards require that each participating organization should complete an Annual Plan and Progress Report. This is based on a model of 'Plan, Act and Review.' The form should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and used to inform the work of, and processes within, the youth group. During this process, organizations should consult or liaise with the Regional Youth/Development Officer of their parent organization, or with a Youth/Liaison Officer from their local Education and Training Board. The Officer completes a section within the Progress Report that gives feedback to the organization.

There are no sanctions associated with this process. For example, public funding is not awarded or withheld if projects or programs do not meet the established quality criteria.

### North/South Education and Training Standards (NSETS)

The North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) works to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and training of youth workers, through an endorsement process based on a rigorous assessment of all aspects of program content and delivery. The NSETS professional endorsement represents a formal recognition by the youth work sector that programs of study in youth work have met the required criteria and are fit-for-purpose.

NSETS was established in an all-Ireland basis in 2006, by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland's Youth Affairs Unit of the Department of Education and Science (now DCEDIY).

Institutions apply to the NSETs for professional endorsement. A panel of experts looks at each application based on set criteria. The panel then visits the institution and holds a series of interviews with the management, program developers, tutors, students, practice teachers and other stakeholders to determine if the program and infrastructure supporting the institution meet the NSET standards. This panel may also collect documentary and observational data.

Endorsement may be conditional on specified improvements or amendments to programs. The endorsed programs are then subject to annual monitoring and to a full re-endorsement exercise every five years.

NSETS is supported by the DCEDIY and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, through providing funding to employ a part-time Development Officer, who is contracted by the National Youth Council of Ireland.

### Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

The DCEDIY has a research panel to which researchers, both academic and independent researchers, can apply to be part of. The DCEDIY sends requests for tenders for research projects to approved members of the DCEDIY Research Panel, who can then apply to conduct the research. In the past, the DCEDIY has funded research Masters and PhDs in the area of child and youth issues.

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) also carries out research related to youth work in Ireland. The NYCI collects and publishes resources, including examples of best practices, and organizes seminars and conferences to discuss youth work outcomes.

## Quality assurance of youth work in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's vision for Youth Work is set out in Priorities for Youth to support and encourage children and young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. Effective youth work helps young people to identify their personal and social development



ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԲՈՒՅՏՆԵՐԻ ԿԱՐԳԻՆ ԳՐԱԿԱՆՈՒՄԻ  
THE LEVIAN MIKELADZE FOUNDATION



**SFPFA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT  
STIFTUNG**

## Development of Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Georgia

needs and involves them in shaping the services designed to meet those needs, so as to improve their own skills and life chances and to create a better future for themselves and their communities. Unlike school, participation is voluntary.

Priorities for Youth highlights the need for robust and proportionate quality assurance systems, and in this respect there is scope to cross-reference the Framework of outcomes with the quality assurance strand of 'Developing youth work practice'. This strand of quality assurance provides a process for: identifying the needs of young people, a youth work development strategy that reflects the needs identified, and measuring progress in personal and social development to inform program development.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for visiting and assessing both formal and non-formal education services, including the provision offered by schools and youth organizations. They publish various inspection reports regarding youth work, such as youth forums, youth centers, and outreach initiatives, in order to provide evidence on young people's achievements and standards, the quality of provision, and the quality of leadership and management, including the processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement.

In 2015, the ETI published *Together Towards Improvement: A Process for Self-Evaluation of the Youth Sector*, a resource intended to support youth organizations to evaluate and improve the services they provide. The criteria for judging their provision are divided into three main categories and mention the needs of socially excluded or marginalized young people, as follows:

- the quality of achievements and standards, including the extent to which young people: acquire skills; develop an understanding of themselves and society; demonstrate motivation and enjoyment; identify barriers to their learning and achieve positive outcomes; demonstrate collaborative learning; are given opportunities to meet and work with individuals from a range of diverse groups; and demonstrate involvement in a range of volunteering roles.
- the quality of provision for learning, including the extent to which the organization and staff: plan programs focusing on the needs of young people; plan for the development of knowledge and skills; develop purposeful relationships with young people; provide innovative and challenging programs; target and meet the needs of young people who are vulnerable, disaffected or marginalized; provide effective outreach and detached youth work programs; and provide a broad and balanced curriculum.
- the quality of leadership and management, including the extent to which the leadership: demonstrates continuous improvement; engages young people in the management of the organization; has a clear vision for the organization; uses the views of young people when improving the organization; and works effectively with partners to add value to the experiences of young people.

The document provides a framework for the inspection process, supporting organizations to identify their strengths and address areas needing improvement.

ETI also carries out regular, formal inspections of each youth organization, based on the three categories mentioned above. Depending on the outcome of this, providers are tasked with a list of actions for improvement.

## Quality Assurance Framework for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is the culmination of a collaborative approach by the youth sector to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people. It provides a support and development tool that enables youth work organizations to articulate, assess and improve their work within a structured framework. The framework has four stages – understanding the context, discuss and assess evidence, create an action plan, and review the Action Plan.

## Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

There are various sources of research and evidence that support the development of youth work in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education has their own in-house statistics and research team that conducts reports on a wide range of statements, consultations, and assessments regarding the youth development sector, including youth work.

The ETI also publishes various surveys and evaluations regarding the effectiveness of initiatives, targeting areas that require further improvement. Furthermore, they publish various inspection reports regarding youth work, such as on youth forums, youth centers, and outreach initiatives, in order to provide evidence on young people's achievements and standards, the quality of provision, and the quality of leadership and management, including the processes for self-evaluation to promote research-based improvement initiatives.

## Quality assurance of Youth Work in Wales

The Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales provides a robust, independent, external assessment of the quality and performance of organizations that deliver youth work.

The Quality Mark can be used for self-assessment, to plan for improvement, and to gain the nationally recognized Quality Mark. It consists of two distinct elements:

1. Quality Standards for Youth Work - a set of Indicators and Quality Standards that organizations can use to self-assess the quality and impact of their work with young people and develop plans for improvement.
2. A Quality Mark - a nationally recognized quality mark that organizations can apply for by developing a self-assessment and portfolio of evidence which is externally assessed.

The Quality Mark consists of:

- three levels - Bronze, Silver and Gold;
- four Quality Standards within each level;
- quality standards comprising three associated indicators.

The Quality Mark is suitable for any organization that carries out youth work.

### Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

The National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee conducts research on a variety of youth services, including youth work.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in the Czech Republic

The title "**NGO recognized by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for providing quality youth work**" is awarded within the sub-program of Grant Schemes by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for supporting youth work in NGOs. It is awarded by the minister responsible for youth upon the decision of the Selection Committee.

Holders of the title are obliged to submit a completed annual Year Report to the Youth Unit of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The Youth Unit submits audit controls on a random basis.

### Youth work quality self-assessment tools for youth NGOs and youth centers, OLINA

The OLINA tool is one of the final products of the ESF national project "Keys for Life - Developing Key Competences in Leisure-Time and Non-Formal Education". It is an online system for the management of youth work quality systems for youth non-formal education settings (leisure-time centers, youth clubs, youth NGOs) and serves as a tool for introducing the principles of PDCA (plan-do-check-apply) to leisure-time centers, youth clubs and youth NGOs.

The OLINA tool is based on three modules:

1. self-evaluation;
2. competence-building;
3. training.

The OLINA tool is used for the self-evaluation of competencies of youth leaders, and afterwards for the development of their competencies in e-learning programs. At the same time, the on-going evaluating processes in non-formal settings can be assessed. The ESF national project "Keys for Life" has created and piloted training programs aimed at raising the quality of youth work. These training programs reinforce the skills and competencies of youth leaders and workers for setting objectives, and their continuous evaluation.

A set of youth work quality self-assessment tools for youth NGOs and youth clubs are integrated on an interactive online platform which offers three modules:

1. **Assessment Module:** This facilitates the youth work quality self-assessment of youth NGOs and youth centers, and provides a set of self-assessment tools applicable to different types of youth work settings- enabling users in an interactive form to carry out self-assessment and compare the results of the self-assessment periodically. The system provides its users a chance to undergo a process analysis by defining the main, supportive and controlling processes. At the next step, it offers the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or modified Internal Audit as tools for finishing the phase of

assessment of different processes and on-going activities. In addition, users can benefit from consultations and methodological support provided by experts from the National Institute of Further Education.

**2. Competence Module:** This facilitates self-assessment of the 30 key competencies crucial for youth work at the level of youth workers and youth leaders. Two tests providing feedback to the individual user about the level of their key competencies related to youth work quality. In addition, a multi-source external assessment tool enables the user to be assessed by their supervisors, colleagues, external partners, young people etc., and improve their personal and professional development. The methodology for developing 15 soft competencies is provided.

**3. E-learning Module:** This provides eight innovative e-learning training programs aimed at developing and improving eight selected key competencies for youth leaders (effective communication and presentation, planning, project management, problem-solving, human resources management, strategic management, leadership, fundraising). The performance resulting from the training courses is recorded in the users' personal profiles and enables said users to improve their performance if desired.

It is possible to work further with the results at any time (for instance, to compare the results achieved in different periods throughout the year when using the tools repeatedly or to measure the progress made in the field of youth work quality system in youth NGOs and youth centers, as well as key competences of youth leaders). The online application tool enables leaders and managers of the target groups to document the development of their quality youth work competencies and create their own "Personal Competency Portfolio" based on self-evaluation. In addition, the tool enables the users at the level of youth NGOs and youth clubs to elaborate their own Remedial Action Plan and document progress made in closing weaknesses and making observations.

## Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

At the end of 2016, The Czech Council of Children and Youth (National Youth Council, a non-governmental structure) started to operate an Analytical Center as a small unit dealing with information, data and knowledge about youth work, youth policy and youth, in cooperation with universities, researchers, and private as well as public institutions and organizations.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Estonia

The quality of youth work is assessed depending on the exact mechanism and context, project or program, local or state level, etc. In the following, two examples are highlighted to illustrate some approaches to quality assurance in the youth sector in Estonia.

### Competences of youth workers

The occupational standard of youth workers exists for levels 4, 6 and 7, integrating a diverse set of competences that vary slightly at the different levels. For example, the focus at level 4 is on organizing



წიგნის ფონდის ფონდის ფონდის ფონდის  
THE LEVAN MIKELADZE FOUNDATION



**SFPFA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



## Development of Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Georgia

youth work, interacting and cooperation with the public, providing a safe environment, and other tasks related to the practical organization of youth work and its services. At levels 6 and 7, additional competences like management, youth field development, etc. are integrated.

Until 31.07.2020, the structure responsible for awarding youth worker professional certificates was the Estonian Youth Work Center. On 01.08.2020, the Estonian Youth Work Center was reorganized into an organization called the 'Education and Youth Board,' which has taken over the responsibilities related to awarding professional occupational certificates in the youth sector.

In order to apply for a professional occupational standard certificate, youth workers have to go through a self-assessment process by filling in a portfolio based on the occupational standard. After that, an interview is conducted with an expert panel, which is the basis for the decision if the qualification can be awarded or not (in justified cases). Besides a professional qualification for youth workers, there is also a partial qualification certificate for youth personnel, which is mandatory for working in a youth camp. Such competences are assessed through a written exam. At the end of 2020, there were more than 300 valid youth worker certificates and more than 2600 partial professional certificates awarded for camp counselors or camp directors.

### Quality assessment model for local municipalities

A specific tool has been developed for local municipalities to support them in mapping the strengths and weaknesses of youth work at the local level as a basis for planning future developments. There are four main indicators that have sub-indicators:

1. versatile possibilities exist for non-formal learning for young people;
2. possibilities exist for gaining participation experience;
3. conditions exist for the receiving of information, prevention and counseling activities;
4. the environment needed for quality youth work has been created.

First, the local municipality conducts a self-assessment, after which an external evaluation is carried out. During the assessments, different youth work stakeholders have to be involved. The outcomes are based on self- and external assessment results and shows the municipality their weak and strong points. After that, the municipality can plan future developments in order to reach their goals. The assessment process is not mandatory for local municipalities but helps the municipality to improve the quality of youth work done in their area.

### Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

Support toward better knowledge and understanding of youth and measuring the effectiveness of related services is one of the priorities in the youth sector in Estonia. The national youth strategy, the Youth Field Development Plan 2021-2035, sets out that a broad-based knowledge, based on the outcomes of analyses and scientific research, as well as the practical knowhow acquired in daily work and the input and contribution of young people as the experts of their lives, forms an important focus for the development and implementation of youth sector activities. It emphasizes that comprehensive

and reliable knowledge must form the basis of decision-making at all levels and in all areas of the youth sector, highlighting the important parts of the youth monitoring and analysis system, such as:

- data management of the sector, i.e. data creation and collection, data availability and analysis of the status of young people and the services provided to them;
- monitoring the execution of youth services and activities, analysis of quality, outcomes and impact;
- youth sector research and development activity for the development of youth-oriented services and policies.

Such a systematic approach is operated through a variety of implementation measures.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Lithuania

The principles of youth work are described in the of Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania on 'The Recommendations for Quality Assurance in Open Youth Centers and Open Youth Spaces'. According to these recommendations, operational planning is based on qualitative and quantitative outcomes to be achieved. The results to be achieved must be clearly measurable and the activities are planned for a three year duration.

The main principle states that a self-assessment of the current situation of the Open Youth Center / Space must performed prior to external evaluation. The self-assessment identifies the current status and progress of the organization, analyzes key performance indicators (presented below), analyzes feedback from visitors and their parents, and notes aspects that need improvement. The external evaluation discusses the self-assessment carried out by the Center / Space and the agreed objectives and purpose with the Municipal Youth Coordinator.

The main purpose of the Center / Space Evaluation is to improve the Center / Space and open-ended youth work and to ensure that Center / Space evaluation is transparent, open and self-critical. It is not used to predict Center / Space funding. Taking into account the assessment of the current situation of the Center / Space, a Center / Space activity plan must be drawn up in accordance with the form provided. The Action Plan sets out the results to be achieved, the achievement targets and their values at the end of each calendar year, the actions to be taken to achieve the results, the deadline for implementing the actions, and the human and financial resources required. The Center / Space director coordinates the Action Plan with the Municipal Youth Coordinator.

At the end of each year, an Annual Activity Report is prepared, which evaluates the implementation of the Action Plan and the achievement of its outputs, and reviews the Center / Space Key Performance and Indicators. The revised Action Plan is revised as necessary. After reviewing the Action Plan, the plan and any changes to it must be agreed with the Municipal Youth Coordinator, who provides methodological assistance in planning the activity. Regular meetings of the Center / Space youth staff, supervisors, etc., are held to discuss emerging challenges and to plan activities at least once a month.

The "Recommendations for Quality Assurance in Open Youth Centers and Open Youth Spaces" also include recommended (not compulsory) performance indicators, such as total number of visitors, number of unique visitors, number of visitors with fewer opportunities (eg. number of visitors at social

## Development of Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Georgia

risk, number of disadvantaged visitors, etc.), number of individual visitor consultations, number of visitors by age (age group) and gender, number of meetings with parents, number of activities initiated / organized by the youth, the total number of educational activities carried out, number of non-formal education programs, the number of publicity activities (publications, promotions, articles) organized, number of projects implemented with youth, number of projects completed, youth work methods, the amount and sources of funds raised, the number of young people recruited, etc.

### Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

National authorities support better knowledge and understanding of youth work to ensure that it is relevant and responsive to the needs of young people. A Youth Research Network was established, a national advisory group made up of higher education institutions, researchers, young people, youth policy practitioners, youth NGOs, and representatives of the authorities responsible for implementing youth policy. The aim of the Youth Research Network is to cooperate with youth policy-making and implementing institutions in Lithuania at a national level to provide evidence-based and knowledge-based suggestions to youth policy makers.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Finland

In Finland, youth work is a statutory service which is regulated by a law entitled the “Youth Act.” Based on that act, the responsibility for youth work rests with the local government (in Finland these local self-governing entities are called municipalities). They are, with due consideration to local conditions, obligated to create the necessary preconditions for local youth work and activities by providing services and premises for young people and by supporting their civic engagement. The Local Government Act, on the other hand, says that municipalities should perform functions that they choose for themselves by virtue of their self-governing status, and should arrange the functions provided for them separately by law. What can be seen as a first step of quality assurance for local youth work, is that youth work, just like any other service, must have some specific targets relevant to the nature of the work. Moreover, the Local Government Act stipulates that the ‘municipality’s operating and financial targets shall be approved in the budget and financial plan.’

The local body responsible for assessing the extent to which the operating and financial targets set by the local council have been achieved in the municipality works under the council and is referred to as the Local Authority Audit Committee. Both the Youth Act and the Local Government Act also recognize the active role the (young) citizen ought to have in service planning, but still, young people are quite seldom heard in setting targets for youth work or in evaluations. This fact is also highlighted in the latest report (2020) of yearly realized nationwide evaluations of basic services by the Regional State Administrative Agencies. Based on the Government Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy, the regional state administrative agencies are responsible for assessing the adequacy, quality and accessibility of the services intended for young people. Because youth work is a statutory service, the youth work services are also evaluated by the regional agencies of the state. The main idea of these evaluations is to measure whether a Finnish citizen can have equal services regardless of where the person is living. The evaluations also monitor how and to what extent the municipalities are fulfilling their obligations (regarding youth work), as stated in the Youth Act, for example. The agencies choose

which aspect of the evaluation they will concentrate on each year, while the latest report deals with the adequacy of the services.

In the latest report of the Regional State Administrative Agencies, the adequacy of youth work services open to all young people were evaluated as being at “quite a good level,” as were the services of outreach youth work and youth workshops. Results from the assessment of open youth work services for 18 years old and above indicate that there aren’t enough such services, while the report also provides area-specific details, indicating which areas have adequate services, as well as which areas are in need of improvement. Municipal level information is available. The results of the evaluation of the basic services is part of the basic public services program procedure, which in turn belongs to the negotiation process between the central and local government and is part of the central government’s budget preparations. The results of the evaluation also have an impact on service planning at the local level within the municipalities, which is supported by the personnel of Regional State Administrative Agencies, who provide information guidance, and who also administer the state funding for youth work quality development projects at the local and regional level.

Although Finland does a lot when it comes to youth work quality assurance, still, there is a need for further development related to open youth work, such as a nationwide quality evaluation model and a key-figures documentation system. Further development of those is one of the tasks the Ministry of Education and Culture has listed to be fulfilled by the new Youth Work Centers of Expertise.

### Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

There is a remarkable number of activities aimed at expanding the data base available that the youth policy related decision-making can rely on. When it comes to youth work especially, Finnish Youth Work statistics is a portal with national statistics on municipal youth work (the so-called “open youth work”), youth workshops and outreach youth work. One of offices of the Regional State Administrative Agencies administers the portal. The portal has been developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Moreover, the bodies referred to as Youth Work Centers of Expertise have a strong role in creating the database for youth work, since their role is to ‘produce and deliver the necessary information to the Ministry of Education and Culture’, as described in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Program for the years 2020-2023.

At the local level, according to the Youth Act, the coordinating body for cross-sectoral cooperation set by the local government is required to gather information on young people’s growth and living conditions, and to distribute this information to decision-makers in order to broaden the database the decision-making processes are based on.

Finnish higher education is comprised of universities and universities of applied sciences, many of which offer youth work related scientific studies. As such, there have been many youth work-related theses over the years, even at a doctoral level. There are also two strong research institutions in the field, namely a scientific association called the Finnish Youth Research Society and Youth Research Network, and Juvenia – Youth Research and Development Center, located in the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.

## Quality Assurance of Youth Work in Slovakia

One of the forms of quality assurance in Slovakia is the accreditation of non-formal education programs in youth work by the Accreditation Commission (AC) in the field of youth work. AC was established by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (MESRS). The Accreditation Commission evaluates applications for the quality label.

In 2018, a working group for the final definition of quality standards was set up by MESRS.

A quality label was included in the amendment of Act No. 282/2008 on Support of Youth Work. MESRS also introduced a new institute of the quality brand – *the Modern Youth Center*. The quality label “*Modern Youth Center*” can be awarded by the MESRS based on applications evaluated by the Accreditation Commission in the field of youth work.

## State of Play of the Youth Work Quality Assurance System in Georgia

Supporting the development of quality youth work implies the effective implementation of a youth policy. A legal framework for youth policy development has been developed within the “Georgian National Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030”. The document defines the key areas, objectives, measures and indicators aimed at improving the lives of young people. It builds on and is in line with the EU 's Youth Strategy for 2019-2027.

Youth work providers play important roles in the development process of young people, as well as society as a whole. They create an efficient platform to advocate significant issues for youth, assist the development of key skills in young people, distribute information, encourage active citizenship and participation, and ensure the provision of youth work and non-formal educational services. Through youth organizations, young people have the opportunity to establish wide and diverse social connections and partnership relations with various organizations and groups, which ultimately helps develop the welfare of young people.

The sustainability of youth organizations, in line with other factors, depends on their institutional development and the working system. Youth organizations in Georgia face different challenges with regard to planning, as well as to issues of organizational development and sustainability. The majority of youth work providers do not have the mechanisms in place for systemic monitoring and evaluation. The organizations often carry out monitoring and evaluation when a donor requires it within the frame of a specific project. Among the main components of the sustainable development of an organization is its having a strategy and action plan. The majority of organizations do not have such plans, which dramatically hinders the development of youth organizations, creating obstacles to the enhancement of civil motivation in young people and the involvement of youth in organizational groups. It also has a negative influence on the quality of organizational activity.

There is no national system of quality assurance established by national authorities in Georgia, nor is there legal regulation for the status of “youth worker.”

The development of systems and practices to improve the quality of national youth policy management at the central and municipality levels is envisioned in “The Georgian National Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030.” It is an important topic in the current debate on the legal recognition of youth work.

In order to have a functioning youth policy, it needs to be research-driven. The Youth Agency has created a municipal youth policy development program that supports the development of research-driven youth policy documents, but there is a need to develop a more structural approach for thematic analysis.

## Recommendations on Enhancement of the Quality of Youth Work in Georgia

It is recommended to develop a quality assurance system in the youth sector, which allows youth work organizations to assess service provision; to identify areas for development; to provide an opportunity to express youth work through the development of a common language within a structured framework; to establish standards in the practice and provision of youth work; to provide an enhanced evidence base for youth work; to ensure resources are used effectively in the youth work sector; and to provide a basis for full organizational assessment and development of a quality culture.

The following steps need to be taken:

- Develop the stakeholders map, with needs and expectations
- Negotiate and agree the policy with the main stakeholders
- Establish a cross sectoral steering committee on the quality of youth work
- Create a working group to develop the National Quality Assurance Framework
- Develop National Quality Assurance Framework for Youth Work
- Develop Guidelines for Youth work service providers for self-evaluation
- Develop Guidelines for regulatory body for external evaluation
- Develop training materials for all involved bodies
- Capacity building of youth providers and all involved bodies
- Revision and amendment of legislative framework
- Develop a digital portal for Quality Assurance management

## References

- Georgian National Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030
- EU 's Youth Strategy for 2019-2027
- The Situation of Youth Organizations in Georgia, Research Report 2021
- Europe encyclopedia of National Youth Policies: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>