Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union

Country Report
Italy
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Edited by European Commission, February 2014  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture  
Working with young people: the value of youth work in the EU  
© European Union, 2014  
NC-04-14-173-EN-N  
doi: 10.2766/7275
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Country report: Italy

This report presents the situation as of February 2013
1 Introduction: tradition, definitions and concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition for youth work</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal definition for youth work</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of youth work tradition</td>
<td>Early 90s, helped by the introduction of EU programmes (in particular by the Youth for Europe Action within the Youth in Action Programme and the Erasmus programme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of formal/professional youth work tradition</td>
<td>No tradition in formal youth work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of relative importance of youth work in supporting young people</td>
<td>Slowly increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main sectors/fields of formal/professional/statutory youth work</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main sectors/fields of non-formal/third sector led youth work</td>
<td>Volunteering, Non-Profit, Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 Definitions

In Italy there is not a definition of youth work and not even a clear definition of “young people”. According to the interviewees the situation described in the report on Socio-Economic Value of Youth Work (2006) is still true today:

“There are no national laws regarding both youth work and young persons. All the laws dealing with this issue, both at national and regional level, have different concepts of what “young people” are. Each of these laws considers different age ranges to identify the target, depending on the issue dealt with. Some define young people as persons between the ages of 15 and 29, others define them as being between 15 and 36, etc.”

As a result interviewees agree that in Italy youth policies have a vast focus, since laws dealing with these issues have different concepts of what young people are. Regarding their focus, Italian youth policies have been oriented towards two main directions: on the one hand, they deal with young people involved in the labour market and, on the other hand, they were oriented towards prevention of crime, delinquency and drug abuse. Since 1997, policies regarding juveniles have paid more attention on the issue of promoting youth sociability and the development of educational and recreational services which actively promote youth sociability nationwide.

Consequently, there is no common agreed definition and translation of the term ‘youth work’ used by public authorities and NGOs. In this respect, the interviewees provided two different translations: “animazione socio-educativa”, which is the translation provided by the European Commission in 2009¹, and “operatore giovanile”², which is the translation provided by the Italian National Youth Council (Forum Nazionale Giovani). These two terms seem to be the ones that match more closely to the definition of youth work adopted in Europe.

¹ European Commission
² Please be aware that the “operatore giovanile” is not an official translation of youth worker. It is a professional profile that can be approximated to the youth worker profile.
According to the interviewees, the organisations that deliver youth work in Italy share broad youth work values which include: youth work should not be seen only as a way to provide instruments for the labour market; youth workers do not have to work only with problematic young people, they have to accompany and support all the young people in exploiting their potential; the youth workers have to support the active participation of youth in the activities carried out at local level.

1.2 Tradition and development of youth work

Since there are no defined boundaries for youth work, youth work has to be seen as a summary of expressions shaped by different traditions and frameworks and is used to cover a wide range of activities. Extremely different organisations are involved in youth work and it is difficult to determine exactly when “youth work” activities were introduced. Interviewees agree that the youth work “tradition” in Italy started in the beginning of the 90’s as a result of EU-funded projects. However it has to be noted that even before that, well established socio-educational and leisure activities were already offered by the church, parishes, scout associations and several other third sector organisations at national, regional and local level.

A key driver of youth work in the past decade has been the EU policy priorities and, in particular, the associated funding programmes that encourage mobility and exchanges. Another important driver has been the creation of a Ministry of Youth and Sport in 2006, for the first time in Italy. In 2006 through the enforcement of the law n. 248 of 4 August 2006, entitled “Urgent measures for economic recovery” was instituted the National Fund for Youth Policies. The fund aimed at supporting among others culture, vocational training and social integration.

Regarding the main trends of youth work during the last decade, the picture is mixed. The vast majority of youth work activities are delivered by the third sector rather than by public institutions. According to the interviewees, the importance of youth work had been growing at institutional level up to 2006 when the Ministry of Youth and Sport was created but youth work is currently less of a government priority, the emphasis being more on employment and education for young people. Furthermore interviewees pointed out that the amount of funds allocated to youth work activities has been dramatically decreasing over the last decade. The main reason is that the government priority is to tackle the emergencies currently faced by young people in the labour market and the problems related to the formal education sector.

Regarding the areas of work that have grown in importance, non-formal education seems to have grown considerably. Given the steady reduction of budgets in the formal education sector, several associations have pointed out that non-formal education paths tend to play a more and more important role for both the education and the support of youth.

1.3 The current situation: the delivery of formal and non-formal youth work

Statutory youth work is almost non-existent in Italy. Conversely, non-formal / non-professional / third sector led youth work is more widespread. In Italy youth work is intended as a non-formal learning process aiming at developing young people in terms of their citizenship, their integration in civil society and increasing solidarity among generations. Hence these activities are always implemented outside of formal education.

In recent years the increased cooperation between formal educational institutions and youth associations has resulted in a common project aimed at promoting a more
holistic approach for education (i.e. education based on a mix of formal, non-formal and informal aspects). The aim is to facilitate the development of transversal skills among young persons. In addition an increasing number of projects based on the collaboration between schools and third sector associations have been presented for national and European programmes such as Comenius Regio and Leonardo. As a result January 2013 the legislative decree 16/2013 number 13\(^3\) was stipulated in order to define a set of rules aiming at enhancing lifelong learning both in a social and occupational perspective. The legislative decree aims at validating formal, non-formal and informal learning within the National System of skills certification.

Despite recent developments the majority of youth workers are delivering youth work through third sector associations. Hence youth work involves a complex network of providers mainly delivering activities at local level.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of coordination of youth work initiatives at national level and its variety is not recorded systematically.

\(^3\) The legislative decree entered into force on March 2013.
2 Legislative context and governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative framework for youth work</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of regulation for youth work</td>
<td>Overall youth work is not regulated at national level in Italy. However some Regions provide laws which regulate aspects of youth work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body(ies) with a responsibility for governing youth work</td>
<td>Department of Youth, Regional and local authorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1 Legal background

Youth work is not regulated in Italy. Currently there is no national law defining youth work. According to the interviewees a key reason is the lack of awareness about youth work among the policy makers at national level and the fact that youth work is not perceived as a policy priority. Furthermore the cultural and historical tradition of the Italian model of social assistance is characterised by a number of extremely different projects led by third sector organisations and strongly connected to local and territorial experiences.

In this context, the third sector has become a pivotal player in the delivery of youth work. In order to support this process, several laws have been indicated by the interviewees that can be considered as having to some extent, supported the development of youth work activities.

The first is the national law 285/1997, entitled “Provision for the promotion of children and adolescents’ rights and opportunities”. This is identified as the first law aimed at the promotion of youth sociability. It provided funds and together with other regional laws has favoured the implementation of projects of great variety. These educational projects are rarely the outcome of exclusively public intervention but more often the result of public-private partnerships, while a relevant role is also played by private and religiously inspired organisations.⁴

Furthermore the national law n. 328/2000 which integrates the functioning of the social services in Italy. This law gave the possibility for Regional laws to define professional profiles in social services. In this respect, a group of Regions such as Emilia Romagna, Piedmont and Lombardy, have stipulated between 2004 and 2008 regional laws that recognise the value of youth work within the implementation of youth policies and the role played by youth workers. A good example is the Regional law implemented in Piedmont in 2004 (i.e. regional law n. 1/2004⁵). This law defines the minimum standards required to be considered a youth worker (animatore socio-culturale), the professional profile and access to the profession.

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⁵ Regional law 8 January 2004, n. 1, art. 32, comma 4 “Norme per la realizzazione del sistema regionale integrato di interventi e servizi sociali e riordino della legislazione di riferimento”, pubblicata nel Bollettino Ufficiale n. 2 del 15/01/2004.
2.2 Governance

Since there is not a definition and the concept has been endorsed in various programmes and policies, competences around youth work are scattered among different ministry departments and other agencies.

At national level the body that used to be responsible for youth policies was the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport. In 2008 after the political election the Ministry of Youth Policies and Sports became Department of Youth meanwhile a new Office for Sports was set up. Since 2008 the Department of Youth within the Presidency of the Council of Ministries is the body that coordinates and defines youth policy in Italy. However since youth policies are a transversal issue, several other ministries have responsibilities in the youth field, such as the Ministry for labour and Social Policies, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and EU Affairs Ministry.

However it has to be noted that the main players in the implementation of youth policies in general and youth work in particular are the regional and local authorities. This is due to the Reform of the Title V- Art. 117 of the Italian Constitution, as modified by the Constitutional Law n. 3/2001, which gives to the Regions legislative and executive powers in all subject matters that are not expressly covered by State legislation, such as youth policies and more generally, social policies.6

In particular, at local level there are Local Departments for Youth Policies in the Municipalities that promote different types of youth work depending on local needs. It is noted once more, that youth work is usually implemented in partnership with third sector organisations.

Furthermore there are two other institutions directly related to the Department: the Italian National Youth Council (Forum nazionale Giovani) and the National Agency for Youth (Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani). The first is the national platform of Italian youth organisations and NGOs7 and its aim is to increase the representation of youth at institutional level while the latter is the agency responsible for the implementation of the EU programme Youth in Action.

Overall, another pivotal player in the implementation of youth policies in general and youth work in particular are the regional and local authorities.

Regarding the amount of funds dedicated to youth work, data are not available. Conversely there are data available regarding the amount of public funding provided by the National Fund for Youth Policies. The initial capital endowment of this Fund integrated for the three year period 2007-2009 was EUR 130 million. In 2010 the amount established by the financial law was EUR 81 million, while in 2011 the financial law reduced the amount to EUR 33 million and in 2012 the National Fund for Youth Policies accounted for EUR 20 million.8

3 Policy and programme framework

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7 The Italian National Youth Council – Forum Nazionale Giovani (FNG) has been recognized by the legislative decree number 311 of the Italian Parliament on the 30th of December 2004. It is composed by 72 different national youth organisations, 3 organisations candidates to join the platform and 4 observers, coming from different fields of youth participation: students organizations, associations working with non-formal education and mobility, youth departments of political parties, trade unions, religious associations, regional youth forums, sportive youth organizations
8 Ibid
### 3.1 Policy commitment

Overall, during the past few years, the Ministry of Youth and Sport has increased the coordination and the number of initiatives for young people through the implementation of several programmes. In this respect the national fund introduced in 2007 has supported national activities for young people. Nonetheless the increased interest on youth issues, a national strategy for youth work in Italy does not exist. Among the guidelines implemented in 2008 to achieve the goals of the youth plan there is one entitled “generational protagonism” which seems to be directly related to the European definition of youth work.

Conversely, policies for the development of youth work seem to be more developed at regional level. In this respect a Framework Programme Agreement was signed between Regions, Local Authorities and the Ministry. This Framework Programme Agreement allows the Regions to access the National Fund for Youth Policies in order to implement specific programmes. However it has to be noted that according to interviewees there is an uneven situation at regional level. In some regions youth work has been implemented in the context of integrated strategies, while in other regions the youth work initiatives tend to be standalone. Good examples of youth work strategies implemented through youth policy programmes and strategies can be found in regions such as Puglia and Piedmont. Conversely in other regions youth work activities and projects tend to be implemented at local level in order to address local needs but without a strategy. Hence according to the interviewees it is important to note that there seems to be a lack of policy coordination between local, regional and national level.

Having said the above, youth work is a priority in the EU funded programmes such as Youth in action.

Regarding the impact of the economic crisis, the interviewees agree that the crisis has affected the funds available for youth work services. In particular the National Fund for Youth policies had an initial capital endowment for the period 2007-2009 of 130 million and dramatically decreased in the last years.

Considering other funds which are related to youth work, the interviewees agreed that the steady reduction of funds available had started before the crisis.

### 4 Youth workers: training, status, population and profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum qualifications standards for youth workers</td>
<td>No (however some Regions do have minimum qualification standards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth worker as a recognised profession / occupation</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of formal, dedicated qualifications for youth workers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education background of the majority of youth workers</td>
<td>(Science Education, psychology sociology but even)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1 Training and qualifications

In Italy there are no minimum qualification standards for youth workers at national level. At regional level the situation is uneven: some regions, such as Piedmont and Lombardia, have stipulated regional laws between 2004 and 2008 that define minimum standard requirements for youth workers. Conversely other regions do not define minimum standard requirements.

Overall, youth workers in Italy tend to have considerably different backgrounds (e.g. social work, psychology, sociology, sport instruction). Furthermore it has to be noted that the vast majority of persons involved as youth workers are voluntary and therefore many of them do not have any formal educational background in youth work activities. According to the interviewees there is a need to increase the professionalisation of the sector.

Regarding the availability of formal qualifications for youth workers, several tertiary education programmes provide such qualifications across the country. In particular, university courses in Educational Sciences provide qualifications for youth workers. The University courses usually last three years for the bachelor degree and 2 years to specialise.

Furthermore there is a broad range of short and longer training courses organised by voluntary organisations. In some cases these can be considered as further training for those starting to work as professionals in local youth policies without having appropriate qualifications. According to the interviewees the quality of these courses varies considerably and therefore they do not always contribute to the professionalisation of youth workers (many of them do not provide a recognised certificate).

4.2 Status of youth worker profession

Youth workers are not a recognised occupation and all the interviewees agree that youth workers have a low professional status. Overall this is due to the lack of recognition of the contribution of youth workers in the achievement of specific social goals. In particular this is noted in the educational sector where youth workers are usually not perceived as important as other professions, such as teachers. Furthermore, very few youth workers have a permanent contract and the salaries are usually low and not attractive.

4.3 Youth worker population

There are no aggregate data on the number of youth workers in Italy. The local tradition of youth work activities together with a lack of coordination in some regions,
results in a lack of responsible institutions able to provide useful information. The estimations provided by the interviewees vary widely and therefore do not allow understanding the scale of the youth work population:

- The National Association of National Educators accounted in 2011 for 25,000 healthcare workers. However they represent only the social healthcare sector and the number includes persons working with adults.
- The Forum Oratori Italiani accounts for more 6,000 places where churches organise activities for children and young persons, such as extended school-type activities. Overall, more than 200,000 volunteers among catechists, educators and youth workers are involved activities such as socio-educational and leisure activities.

Campagnoli (2010) provides a rough estimation of the number of persons working in the social education and touristic sector:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operators working at Informagiovani</th>
<th>Healthcare workers</th>
<th>Social worker</th>
<th>Entertainers</th>
<th>Guides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,200 (approximately 460* volunteering)</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>38,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### 4.4 Profile of youth workers

There is no data available on the profile of youth workers. Overall the vast majority of youth workers tend to be volunteers who are trained through short courses or through the learning-by-doing process. Therefore it can be argued that, since there are no minimum qualification standards at national level, and youth work is mostly delivered among organisations dealing with social services, there is a high number of youth workers who are not qualified or who are learning-by-doing.

In terms of trends, the number of youth workers is increasing along with the increased number of challenges that youth workers have to face. In general the budget cuts that have affected social services are increasing the importance of non-formal education. It seems clear that currently, youth workers are facing two different kinds of problems which are related: on one hand, the lack of recognition at institutional level and on the other hand the lack of career prospects for the persons currently working as youth workers.

### 5 The role and value of youth work

As mentioned above, the vast majority of youth work activities are led by third sector organisation at local level. Hence the absence of an adequate coordination and reporting structure at national level seems to be the main reason for the invisibility of youth work in Italy. In this context it has to be noted that the Italian National Youth Council programme 2012-2015 is planning to implement regional and local youth work.

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councils in order to increase the effectiveness of their action and to involve a greater number of young persons.

According to the interviewees there is no record of good practises at national level. The initiatives identified below are the result of desk research and interviews carried out with persons working in the field of youth work and promoting youth sociability. Hence the policies and initiatives listed below should be interpreted as interesting initiatives rather than as good practices.

5.1 Education and training

Youth work in Italy, as the interviewees agree, is mainly related with non-formal education opportunities to young people. In this respect, the importance of non-formal education has increased in the last decade as a result of the budget cuts occurring in formal education. The cuts resulted in a lack of activities and services that the non-formal education has been able to cover.

Overall, these activities are mainly carried out by NGOs and religious associations. There are several examples of the effective co-operation between formal and non-formal education such as the agreement signed in 2009 between the Ministry of Education and the Forum degli Oratori Italiani. The agreement was promoted by this religious association as a result of specific needs identified at local level. The activities carried out are mainly extended school activities which consist of both studying, leisure and cultural activities. The main objectives, planned by an executive committee, are: education, culture of legality and integration.

5.2 Employment and entrepreneurship

In Italy, the role of youth work in relation to youth employment and entrepreneurship is increasingly growing as a result of the outstanding level of youth unemployment at national level. Concerning youth employment, services are mainly developed at local level to provide career advice. Two good examples are: the established youth information centres entitled Informagiovani, spaces where young people can have free access to information and services related to all aspects of youth life and in particular educational and professional orientation; and Campus Mentis an organic action of career guidance dedicated to the best graduates of Italy, part of the package "Right to the Future" of the Youth Department - Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It is intended to assist the younger generations on issues of labour, housing, training and self-employment. The project involves the provision of a range of services and activities with high added value to young people under 30, graduates and undergraduates.

Regarding youth entrepreneurship, Giovane Impresa is a portal that provides an information path to accompany the young at key stages of the business life, from birth to subsequent development of the enterprise. The initiative has been promoted by the Youth Department. Another example is one of the most relevant bottom-up approaches identified at national level: the ItaliaCamp initiative which aims at promoting social innovation.

5.3 Health and well-being

There are a few examples of youth work initiatives directly related to health and well-being of young people in Italy. One of these initiatives is a summer camp organised, in 2012, by the Youth Department together with the Italian Red Cross Association which aims at introducing young people to health and well-being related issues. There are 40
courses activated all over Italy, which address the daily challenges faced by the Red Cross volunteers.

5.4 Participation

According to the interviewees, the relevance of youth work in terms of promoting the participation of young people is increasing during the current crisis. The main reason is that young people are one of the groups most affected by the crisis. In this context, the most relevant initiative to increase young people’s participation to community and political life in Italy is the Italian National Youth Council. It is a national platform recognised by the Law of 30 December 2004, n. 311 by the Italian Parliament, which aims to increase the importance of young people in the social and political debate.

Another interesting initiative carried out at regional level is "Active ingredients" (Principi attivi) which is an initiative promoted within the regional youth policy programme in the Region Puglia. The aim is to promote the participation of young persons in the territory. The initiative is implemented through projects presented and carried out by young persons on several topics, such as cultural and environmental heritage, new technologies and social inclusion.

5.5 Voluntary activities / volunteering

The interviewees agree that the most relevant initiative at national level is the Voluntary Civil Service which has been implemented in Italy with the National law 64/2001. This initiative is managed by the Department of Youth and Civil Service and aims at increasing social cohesion. The key stakeholders are young people between 18 and 28 years old. They can apply for a 12-month project submitted by Government bodies, NGOs or Non-Profit organisations within several areas such as cultural promotion, civil protection, environment, education and heritage. The civil service activates a special relationship with the young volunteers and, after 12 months of service, they generally tend to maintain collaborative contacts with the organisations. Due to budget cuts, the number of volunteers has dramatically decreased during the past decade: while in 2001 there were 40 000 people participating in the initiative, in 2012 the number of participants had dropped to 20 000.

Overall, in Italy, volunteering is widespread within young people associations, religious and scouting associations, sport and other non-profit organisations.

5.6 Social inclusion

The role of youth work in reducing social exclusion among young people is uneven across Italy. Interviewees highlighted that sport and leisure activities are an important instrument for the social inclusion of young people. In particular these initiatives have been implemented in degraded areas.

5.7 Youth and the world

According to the interviewees the value of youth work is important in the promotion of the participation and awareness among young people on international and global issues.

In this context, a good example are the initiatives implemented since 2005 by the NGOs Arci and Arci Culture and Development that have launched an intensive program of field work on the basis of experiences already taken by some local committees. The
initiatives carried out were designed to meet the need to promote contact and relations between peoples and cultures. Field projects are organised in 20 countries all over the world and in collaboration with local organisations. Besides the international camps, Arci organises together with the union trust CGIL and in cooperation with Liberia, camps and workshops on land confiscated from the mafia in Sicily, Calabria, Campania and Puglia. The project aims at promoting social justice thanks to active and responsible citizenship.

Another interesting example is the initiative implemented by the Italian National Youth Council both at European and international level. On the one hand, it is member of the European Youth Forum, where it works in partnership with other National Youth Councils and International NGOs on capacity building activities and advocacy processes related to youth rights and youth participation. On the other hand the Italian National Youth Council it is also active at international and global level, such as in the Euro-Arab and Mediterranean youth cooperation process and the Euro-African Youth Cooperation process, where it organises activities of capacity building for youth workers and youth leaders in partnership with international institutions, such as Council of Europe, League of the Arab States, UN, European Commission, World Bank, national institutions.

5.8 Creativity and culture
Youth work has played a significant role in the context of increasing creativity and cultural participation among young people in Italy. In this respect, activities are mainly implemented at local level.

An example of an interesting initiative at regional level is “Urban Laboratories” (Laboratori Urbani), which is one of the main actions carried out within the regional youth policy programme in Puglia. The initiative aims at outsourcing the use of abandoned public buildings across the Region to associations or companies which aim to organise cultural activities for young people, exhibitions but even for employment services and young entrepreneurship. Until now more than 150 buildings have been restructured.

Another interesting experience has been the “Do the writing” initiative, implemented by the Department of youth together with street artists, dedicated to the development of urban creativity on Italy through new forms of aggregation called Association for Urban Creativity. These associations are specifically dedicated to street art and graffiti and aim to create relationships with institutions.

6 Outcomes and impact of youth work

6.1 Target and reach

6.1.1 Target groups
As mentioned before there is no clear a definition of both youth work and young people in Italy. Furthermore the current crisis has increased the scope of youth activities to cover a wider target group. As a result, the target group for youth work now seems to be between 14 and 35 years of age.

It is difficult to determine sector trends at national level since the vast majority of activities are carried out at local level. However, NGOs officials were able to identify an increased number of activities in the fields of non-formal education, employment and
entrepreneurship orientation. This is mainly due to the need to address the current challenges caused by the crisis and the consequent budget cuts occurring in the past years.

6.1.2 Reach

There is currently no literature or data available on estimates on the number of young people reached by youth work. However it is possible to roughly estimate the number of persons reached by youth workers considering the number of persons involved in specific organisations.

The Forum Oratori Nazionali estimates that approximately 1,000,000 persons younger than eighteen years are reached on a more or less continuous basis through their activities. Furthermore the NGO ARCI counts 1.2 million members (however it has to be noted that this figure does not refers exclusively to young persons and it does not consider only youth work related activities). However it is difficult to determine the exact number of persons reached by youth work activities.

Overall it is difficult to estimate the exact number of persons reached by youth work activities. The Italian National Youth Council estimates that the total number of young people reached through its member organisations is more than 4,000,000.

6.2 Outcomes and impact

In the absence of a definition, the range of activities that can be considered as youth work in Italy is wide. According to the literature the vast majority of the interventions implemented at local level are managed directly by third sector or religious associations. This means that little evidence is available on the overall outcomes and impact of youth work. The information should be collected within each individual institution or association in order to understand such impact. There is evidence that confirms the importance of these associations in delivering youth interventions: 75% of funds provided by the national law 285/97 were allocated to interventions that were implemented through some kind of partnership between the local administration and a third sector organisation.

Regarding the key strengths of youth workers in supporting the lives of young people, it has been pointed out that compared to other professionals such as teachers they have the opportunity to be more effective because of the “peer-to-peer” relationship with the young persons. In particular it was pointed out that the young persons do not feel to be judged by youth workers.

Another important feature of youth workers highlighted by several interviewees is that they are able to create links and connections between young persons and environments that are not likely to involve them, such as local institutions.


6.3 SWOT

Table 6.1 Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the youth work sector in Italy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Even if not recognised at national level, the role of youth work is recognised in different Regions.</td>
<td>■ Programmes and local interventions tend to respond faster to the challenges faced by young people compared to a more regulated sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Increased attention for youth policies and the initial implementation of national networks might have a positive effect on the youth work sector.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ The vast majority of youth work activities are carried out by third sector organisations. These organisations are usually committed to each locality and are able to better understand the specific needs of each place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Long tradition of socio-educational and leisure activities implemented by third sector organisations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Youth workers have high levels of motivation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Lack of coordination and lack of information at national level.</td>
<td>■ Fragility of the whole system which has to largely rely on volunteers to deliver youth work in the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Youth work is not a policy priority at national level.</td>
<td>■ The budget cuts tend to give more and more responsibility for the delivery of social services to the third sector but at the same time, the amount of funds allocated for these services is considerably decreasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Inadequate recognition of the youth work profession together with an absence of possible career paths for youth workers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Lack of coordination among the different activities implemented at local or regional level. For instance good practices on youth work activities have never been collected at national level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Inadequate recognition of non-formal education by the formal education sector(^{13}).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendations to national authorities

Two key issues related to youth work in Italy are highlighted by the interviewees: lack of recognition of youth work and the lack of coordination of youth work initiatives. The first has a negative impact on the level and development of competences on the sector. As a result the career path is not clear and there is a lack of professionalisation of youth workers. Hence the recommendation to the national authorities would be to

\(^{13}\) It has to be noted that in the legislative decree number 13 of the 16 January 2013 is making step forward in this direction.
introduce rules aiming at recognising the skills and the professional profile of youth workers and to develop minimum standards of qualification. It has to be noted that some steps ahead in this direction have been done in the beginning of 2013. Overall, it is important that the introduction of basic qualification does not result in a crowding-out effect on the considerable number of volunteers participating in the sector. The lack of coordination has led to a considerable number of youth work activities carried out at local level. However this has been in contrast with the definition of a comprehensive strategy at national level. In 2004 the Italian National Youth Council has been set up (i.e. the first national network among associations and NGOs across the country dealing with young people). This network should be further developed and connected with the local and territorial associations. In this respect the recommendation to national authorities would be to present clear guidelines to develop the youth work sector and to support coordination activities using a bottom-up approach.

Overall, the report was able to identify that a great number of youth work related activities are taking place at local level. However, there is still no systematic recording of all that work. Therefore a recommendation to national authorities would be to start mapping youth work more systematically in order to help recognise and valorise it and make the availability of youth work services and benefits more widely known. Finally, keeping in mind the problems faced by young people in Italy, youth policies should be considered a priority in the political agenda. As a result the importance of youth and youth work activities should be recognised through adequate funds, given that according to the interviewees the funding has been reducing over the last decade.

**Recommendations to the EU**

In Italy there is still not a good practise catalogue regarding youth work services and activities. Furthermore the financial constraints due to the crisis have reduced the ability of local associations to implement effective activities. The recommendation to the EU is to continue supporting activities aimed at raising awareness and disseminating information through the promotion of good practices. In addition, given the budget constraints faced by Italy because of the crisis, the EU is recommended to continue to provide funding to NGOs and other associations dealing with youth worker. However it is important that the EU is perceived as an important player for the overall promotion and support of young people and not only as a funding organisation. In this respect National Agency for Youth highlighted the pivotal contribution of EU wide programmes, such as Youth for Europe Action within the Youth in Action Programme and the Erasmus, to strengthen and develop youth policies and to increase the mobility of students across Europe.14

**Recommendations to youth NGOs**:

The main recommendation to youth NGO and to youth workers is to support the development of networking activities between them. There is currently a national network which needs to be further developed. In this respect the efforts of the Italian National Youth Council to implement regional and local platforms might increase the information and communication process. This process should be strongly supported by local NGOs and youth association delivering services at local level. Filling this gap might be the first step for a better recognition the importance of youth work in Italy, which may result in increasing the professionalisation of the sector.

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14 This opinion is shared by other interviewees.
8 Sources

8.1 Interviewees

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8.2 Bibliography


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