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Study of the impact of non-formal education in youth work on acquiring competences for better employability of young people

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According to the latest Labour Force Survey¹ in the Republic of Serbia, the unemployment rate of young people (15-24) reached a dramatic 49.1% in 2013. At the same time, research conducted with employers point to the paradoxical situation that "a major part of the reported staffing needs remains unfilled²." According to the employers, young people after leaving the educational system often lack not only expertise but also appropriate "wider competences" including the so-called "soft skills". Among the competencies that employers cite as a very important they state, among other things: communication skills, team work ability, sense of initiative, independence, decision making, organizational skills, willingness to continuously learn, and so on³.

On the other hand, a large number of young people in addition to regular education (or without it) participate in a variety of non-formal education activities conducted by youth organizations and associations for youth and their umbrella associations. To illustrate, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, as part of its measures to implement the National Strategy for Youth, funds an average of 220 projects annually (of which the vast majority have non-formal educational character)⁴. At the same time, youth associations and associations for youth in Serbia, in the period from 2007 to 2012, withdrew € 4,261,832.65 for the implementation of 242 international non-formal educational projects⁵ within the "Youth in Action" programme of the European Union. Although most of these projects do not directly address youth employability (in terms of gaining professional qualifications), non-formal education in the field of youth work enables young people to acquire competencies that contribute not only to their personal development and active participation in society, but also to the increase of their employability. The importance of the competences acquired through the programs of youth work to increase the employability of young people is highlighted in the study by the European Youth Forum, which states that "*there is a significant correlation and overlap between transferable skills and competencies that are required by employers and those which young people gain through youth organizations*⁶." As this study clearly showed, even 5 of the 6 "soft skills" most wanted by the employers are successfully developed through participation in non-formal education for young people: communication skills, decision-making skills, teamwork skills, self-confidence and organizational skills. Unfortunately, due to the lack of appropriate mechanisms for recognizing competencies that young people develop in the field of non-formal education in youth work, in Serbia they most often remain nearly invisible to potential employers.

This problem is not a specific situation in our country, but is significantly recognized at European level, which indicates the need for establishing a "reality of lifelong learning", as well as greater recognition

¹ Republic of Serbia Labour Force Survey, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, number 359 – year LXIII, 30.12.2013.

² Ristić, Z., Pavlović, Lj. (2012): Potrebe tržišta rada i položaj mladih nezaposlenih lica, Unija poslodavaca Srbije, Beograd

³ Analiza tržišta rada i prognoziranje potreba na tržištu rada u Republici Srbiji, Nacionalna služba za zapošljavanje (2012); Istraživanje „Šta poslodavci danas očekuju od mladih stručnjaka i od Univerziteta u Srbiji“, Careers projekat (2012) <http://www.careers.ac.rs/>

⁴ Izveštaj o sprovođenju akcionog plana za sprovođenje nacionalne strategije za mlade tokom 2011. i 2012. Godine, Ministarstvo omladine i sporta, 2013

⁵ Ranković, J., Mitrović, S, i dr. (2013): Mladi u Akciji u Srbiji, Grupa Hajde da..., Beograd, http://www.mladiuakciji.rs/pdf/MuA_Srbija-web_SR.pdf

⁶ Bath University/GHK Consulting (2012): Research Study on the Impact of Non-Formal Education in Youth Organisations on Young People's Employability. European Youth Forum

and validation of competences acquired through all forms of education (formal, non-formal and informal). In the past 15 years significant steps have been made in this area, both at European and at national level in several European countries. By the document "Pathways 2.0"⁷, the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth sets the priorities of "the Strasbourg process" towards better recognition of non-formal education and youth work in Europe. A year later, the recommendation of the European Council on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁸ was adopted, which emphasizes the importance of this issue on the European agenda, but also on the activities that should be undertaken at the national level. In their recommendation, the Ministers responsible for Education invite the EU Member States to establish mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018⁹. Specifically in Serbia, the recognition of non-formal education is foreseen by the Education Strategy in Serbia until 2020.

In line with these European trends, and the needs identified in Serbia, the research (together with complementary Mapping study on EU practices in recognition of competences gained through non-formal learning in youth work for the employability of young people¹⁰) aims to make a step towards better recognition of youth work as significant area for competence development of young people, as well as to point out the value of acquired competencies and improve the chances of young people in the labor market. The research itself should help establishing the "missing link" set the basis for the development of a future mechanism for recognition of competences acquired through participation in non-formal educational youth work programs.

Youth work and non-formal education / learning in Serbia

Youth work is a professional and educational work with young people, which is performed outside the formal education system and exists as an independent practice in many European countries. Thanks to the National Association of Youth Work Practitioners (NAPOR), which consists of more than 90 member organizations, significant steps have been made towards consolidation, promotion and professionalization of youth work in our country. The persons engaged in youth work can be trained volunteers or professionals, and three levels of professional qualifications of the youth worker will be in the future National Qualifications Framework. In the preamble to the Law on Youth¹¹, drafted with active participation by the representatives of NAPOR, we find the following definition:

⁷ *Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe* (2011). Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.

⁸ Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)

⁹ For the full overview of the development of European policy in the field of recognizing of non-formal education in Europe, please see annex: Evrard Marković, G. (2014): Mapping study on EU practices in recognition of competences gained through non-formal learning in youth work for the employability of young people", NAPOR

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Law on Youth of the Republic of Serbia, 2011

"Youth work shall mean such activities organized by and for young people, based on non-formal education, carried out in young people's free time and undertaken with the aim of improving the conditions for personal and social development of young people in accordance with their needs and abilities, in which young people voluntary participate"

When we are talking about non-formal education in the context of this study, we are talking about one of the key pedagogical practices and one of the key principles of youth work. The Youth Law of the Republic of Serbia (which defines young people as aged 15 to 30) we find the following definition:

"Non-formal education of young people shall mean any organized activity, adjusted to young people, outside the formal educational system, based on young people's needs and interests, principles of voluntary and active participation of young people in the learning process and the promotion of democratic values, through which young people acquire competencies necessary for developing their personal potentials, active participation in the society and better employability."

Non-formal education and youth work are related but not identical concepts, which partially overlap like Venn diagram. Therefore, we can also talk about non-formal education outside the youth work.

Although locally the term more frequently used is "non-formal education", sometimes it is more accurate to use the term "non-formal learning", where the emphasis is on *individual learning process* of a person, and focus is on *learning outcomes* (e.g. acquired competences). At the European level, we see a variety of practices in use of these terms, but given that the current legal and policy framework in Serbia recognize the concept of non-formal education, this study will use the term "non-formal education".

Research Methodology

The overall goal of this study is to show the impact of non-formal education in youth work to acquire relevant competences for better employability of young people. Specific objectives of the study included the following aspects:

- To identify the competences acquired through non-formal education programmes in youth work, and contributing to greater employability of young people
- To investigate the factors that affect the greater transferability of competences acquired in youth work in the workplace
- To identify aspects of youth non-formal education activities that ensure competence development
- To investigate the relationship between length and frequency of participation in the programmes of youth work to the level of development of competences for employability
- To explore the attitudes of young people, organizations and employers to develop a mechanism for identifying and validating competences acquired through non-formal education in youth work

In addition, the research should inform the development of the future mechanism for recognition of competences acquired through participation in non-formal education in youth work. The study also aims to develop recommendations for improvement of youth work in the direction of greater impact on the employability of young people.

In line with the above objectives of study, hypotheses were set which are described in detail in the next chapter.

The study was conducted between November 2013 and February of 2014 in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. An appropriate sample of **356 respondents** was included, with the use of quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques.

The **content analysis** of the documents covered the relevant legislation and documents of public policy issues, as well as previous studies in this field carried out in Serbia, or at the European level. In addition, **content analysis** was conducted of **100 job advertisements** posted by various companies operating in Serbia, taken from the internet portal Infostud.

Through **two online surveys** data was collected from a total of **316 persons**. Of these, 141 respondents filled out the *Questionnaire for the organizers of non-formal education programmes in youth work*, while 175 respondents filled out the *Questionnaire for participants of non-formal education programmes in youth work*. Polls were posted on the website Survey Monkey, and the call for participation was distributed through social networks, mailing lists and web sites. Detailed characteristics of these two sub-samples can be found in Appendix 1 and 2

Forty people of the following profiles took part in 37 **in-depth** interviews:

- representatives of organizations and institutions that implement programmes of non-formal education in youth work,
- employees who have prior experience of non-formal education in youth work,
- representatives of employers - those responsible for the selection and development of employees,
- representatives of other relevant institutions and organizations.

The researchers are aware of the fact that it is in the very nature of youth work (which does not belong only to the arena of lifelong learning, but also to the broader context of civil society) to make an impact on the *overall* development of the competences required for the active participation of young people in society, more fulfilling personal development, and to facilitate the transition into the world of work. While not denying the importance of the first two components and without intent to instrumentalize youth work or narrow its purpose, the primary focus in this study has been placed on the competencies that may be of importance for better employability of young people.

Summary

The overall goal of this study is to show the impact of non-formal education in youth work to acquiring relevant competences for better employability of young people. In addition, the study should inform the development of the future mechanism for recognition of competences acquired through participation in non-formal education in youth work. The research also aims to develop recommendations for improvement of youth work in the direction of greater impact on the employability of young people. In line with these objectives, the research team has formulated the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** There is significant match between competences acquired in youth work programs and competences required by employers in the labour market
- **H2:** In the recruitment process, employers positively evaluate the competences acquired in non-formal education
- **H3:** Competences acquired in non-formal educational activities conducted through youth work programmes are transferable into a business environment
- **H4:** It is possible to identify key aspects and features of non-formal educational activities that contribute to the development of competences of young people
- **H5:** The length and frequency of experience in non-formal educational activities conducted through programmes of youth work positively correlates with the degree and extent of acquired competences
- **H6:** Civil society organizations and young people express a positive attitude towards the development of a mechanism for recognition of competences acquired in youth work
- **H7:** Employers would more positively evaluate the mechanism for recognition of competences that include external assessment of competences

Based on the results, we can say that the hypothesis H1 is confirmed, and we can state with a great degree of assurance that non-formal education in youth work contributes significantly to the development of personal, interpersonal and work related competences of young people who participate in these programmes. At the same time these skills largely coincide with the competences that employers look for when hiring, expressed in advertisements or applied in the selection procedures. Therefore, we can **conclude that the competences acquired in non-formal education in youth work are very important for the employability of young people, since these competences (personal, interpersonal and work related) are those that employers look for when hiring. Ten competences from the tested competence framework are important for all jobs, while the other six competences are seen as significant depending on the position one applies for.** Of particular importance for employment, regardless of the position one applies for, are **communication, and learning and development, and then self-management, personal organization, willingness to take responsibility, teamwork, conflict management, entrepreneurship and problem solving.**

We have found also that the list of competences in our framework proved to be very relevant to employability, because it includes as many as **11 of the 15 most sought after competencies in job ads.** Therefore we can take it as a good basis for further work on the creation of a mechanism for recognition of competences for employability of young people.

According to the information communicated by the young people who have been able in and present their experience of non-formal education in youth work in the process of applying for a job, **only 3.3% of employers felt that the experience is "not relevant". Out of the group, 82% of these young people reported a positive attitude of employers towards the experience of non-formal education in youth work (16.4% of employers felt that this experience was "very relevant", while 44.3% of them were "interested to learn more about it").** From interviews with employers, we found that in the process of recruiting **"the experience of non-formal education is very much appreciated, because it speaks about a person's wider scope of interests."** Employers particularly valued volunteer work, participation in student organizations, participation in conferences, seminars, and sports activities, and membership in a scout group, because this kind of engagement indicates **"how proactive a person is."** In addition, the

representatives of the sector of human resources of companies interviewed believe that **young people often inadequately present their competences and indicate that young people often do not mention their youth work experience thinking that it will be irrelevant for the position to which they apply**. At the same time, the employed young people with previous experience of youth work point to the challenges of recognizing the value of so acquired competences after the selection process, or during integration into the work environment. Based on the above, we can conclude that **young people and employers agree in their assessment that in the selection of employees, the experience of non-formal education in youth work is positively evaluated in many cases. For employers, this experience is an indicator of pro-activity of young people. At the same time, the employers indicate that there is a need for greater visibility and better presentation of competences acquired in non-formal education in youth work by young people when applying for a job.**

The results confirm the hypothesis H3 as well, indicating a *significant transferability of competences acquired through non-formal education in youth work into a business environment*. **Over 90% of young people and the organizers of the programs included in online survey consider the competences acquired through non-formal education entirely or largely transferrable in the business environment** (e.g. working in a company). In terms of transferability, the organizers of the programmes are somewhat more positive than participants, where as many as 41.8% believed that the competences acquired in this way can be fully transferred to work in a business context. It has been shown, also, that the young employees, no matter what sector they work in, confirm that **all the competences in the tested framework are applicable and important for success in their business context**. In particular, they cite the importance of: **communication, personal organization, willingness to learn and develop, taking personal responsibility (accountability) and problem-solving ability**. *At the same time, the transferability is not without conditions and a mechanism for recognition ("translating") of competences from one sector to another would certainly be of great help. In this process it is important to work on a larger inter-sectorial understanding and creation of a common conceptual framework (so called conceptual transferability)*. Also, one of the important **preconditions for the transfer** of competences is primarily identified in personal awareness of acquired competences, individual openness and adaptability to the new environment. **The findings of the study, therefore, confirm the transferability of competences acquired through non-formal education in youth work into a business environment. At the same time, the results indicate that, in addition to gaining awareness of acquired competences, it is important to support young people in developing openness and adaptability to the new environment. In terms of "conceptual transferability" it is necessary to create a "common language" of competences in cross-sectorial communication.**

The study results show that the hypothesis H4 is confirmed too, i.e. that it is **possible to identify key qualitative aspects and characteristics of non-formal educational activities that contribute to the development of competencies of youth**. **The insight that the combination of qualitative aspects depends on the type of non-formal educational activities that are carried out, is also interesting**. The survey has highlighted the key aspects of the three most common types of activities: training courses, workshops, and long-term youth work with the group. The results showed that in all three types of activities have "active participation in the learning process" by the participants as the key aspect, and that there are significant differences in terms of educational approach that contributes to the development of competences within training courses, workshops and long-term youth work.

In the study we also identified the **ways in which young people are becoming aware of their newly acquired skills**. According to the results, "the practical application of newly acquired competences"

stands out as the most important aspect that contributes to young people becoming aware of their competences. "Reflecting about the experience after the activity" is in the second place and "self-reflection on learning during the activity" was highly rated as well. These aspects point to the importance of mentoring in the learning process, both during the activity and after its formal conclusion. A significant difference was observed in the attitudes of young people and organizers to the importance of "feedback from other participants" for individual learning, where young people showed more positive attitude than the organizers of the programme. Apparently this is a significant resource for the recognition of acquired competences that should be used more often in youth work.

When it comes to hypothesis H5, based on the study results, we found **a statistically significant positive correlation between length of participation and frequency of participation in non-formal education in youth work on one hand, and the extent and scope of the competences acquired by young people, on the other hand.** The results show that **the length of participation of young people in non-formal education programs in youth work is significantly associated with the acquisition of 10 of the 16 competences from our framework.** This statistically significant association was found for the following competences: self-management, accountability, integrity, leadership, communication, conflict management, entrepreneurship, organizational skills, problem solving and digital competence. **A statistically significant correlation between the frequency of participation in non-formal education programs in the WO and the level of acquiring nine competencies from our working framework,** namely: accountability, leadership, conflict management, intercultural sensitivity, communication in a foreign language, entrepreneurship, organizational skills, problem solving and client focus. Data from the online survey and information obtained through interviews indicate **interdependence between the quantity (length and frequency) and the quality of programmes and their impact on the acquisition of competencies for employability of young people.** With the exception of other contextual aspects that may play a role in the personal development of a person, we believe that the length and frequency of participation of young people in youth work activities, along with qualitative factors can significantly affect the development of competences for youth employability. *Trajectories of young people within the world of youth work are very diverse and usually cover a range of different activities. In this sense, it is hard to tell what types of activities provide a more suitable context for the development of competences, but we can certainly say that the longer-term, more intensive and higher quality programmes of non-formal education in youth work have a better chance to enable young people to develop a higher level and scope of competences than the short-term and part-time programs.*

The collected data support the hypothesis H6 that there is a need to develop an instrument for recognizing competences acquired through the non-formal education in youth work. **As much as 95.7% of the organizers of the programmes and 91.5% of young people expressed a positive attitude towards the development of a national mechanism for recognition of competences for employability of young people, gained through non-formal education in youth work.** In the survey, the organizers of the programmes expressed a more positive attitude than the youth. At the same time we learn that 62.5% of young people in online poll have not used any instrument, as is the case with 59.9% covered organizers of youth work programmes. Volunteer passports are used by 14.1% of organizations and 13.1% of young people, about 13% of young people and organizations have used Youthpass in the "Youth in Action" programme, a small number of them used scouts' instrument "Empower Yourself" and "European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers" of the Council of Europe. Out of the organizations participating in the online survey, **only 5.7% of organizations have developed comprehensive systems for monitoring the development of individual competences of young people,** while 33.6% have the systems partially developed. At the same time, over 50% of organizations do not apply a structured

approach to monitoring competences of young people, which suggests that the resources invested in non-formal education in youth work are not being fully utilized because the competencies that are developed most often remain unrecognized. These practices in CSOs that work on developing competences of young people suggest the need to develop a uniform system that would lead to easier identification and recognition of competences acquired.

Study findings support the hypothesis H7 **that employers would more positively evaluate the mechanism for recognition of competences that includes external assessment**. Moreover, this leads to the inevitable conclusion that this is one of the key prerequisites for acceptance of the mechanism. Employers recognize the importance of self-assessment, but consider that it is necessary to provide and "external, standardized assessment system." This view is also held by **82.9% of young people and 86.3% of organizers who believe that this process should be a combination of self-assessment and external assessment**. The issues of the methodological approach and the profile of those who would be undertaking this assessment remain open, and the answers to them must be found during the consultation process for the development of the mechanism.

Reflections and recommendations for creating a future mechanism

The reflection on the creation of the future mechanism is also presented within the study, and a set of recommendations for the process of development and implementation of the mechanism, for its structure and content, as well as the promotion of youth work towards a greater contribution to the acquisition of competences for employability of young people.

The highlighted **purpose of the mechanism** is its possibility to "*additionally support young people who are already working on self-improvement and use their free time usefully in extracurricular activities*", to encourage personal development, to support the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and increase the motivation of young people for greater participation in the programmes of non-formal education and youth work. Employers would find this mechanism very important because it would provide "*a better and proven insight into competences of young people*." A benefit to civil society is the opportunity to have clear recognition of the contribution of the CSOs to the increase of the employability of young people, which would contribute to "*their positioning as a sector that provides relevant and quality education*."

For the tool to be **empowering for the youth**, the respondents felt that young people should be "*familiarized with the tool at even the younger age to start as soon as possible with the development of competences*." In order for the mechanism to be empowering for the youth from vulnerable groups, the development and implementation process should include those who work with vulnerable group and applying inclusive educational approaches, but also representatives of marginalized youth themselves. In addition, the mechanism should monitor and assess the competences acquired through a variety of processes and settings (e.g. to include correctional facilities to ensure the process of acquiring competences during the stay of beneficiaries in them).

Study findings suggest that it should be a **comprehensive document that shows the cumulative competences acquired through various programmes**. This position is especially strongly held by the representatives of the companies, pointing out that in this way it would be more useful and purposeful in the process of employment of young people, as opposed to collecting piles of certificates from each activity.

Data collected from employers lead us to conclude that the document should show **basic wider competences** that would further be specifically presented **through indicators and examples of coping with specific situations**. The employers find it more essential to have insight into the practical reflection of a competence than just to get a list of competences. In addition to the learning outcomes and specific competences which the young person has, the respondents believe that this document should offer basic information about the activities through which the competences have been gained. For example, *"if it is claimed that the person has the competence to manage projects, it would be important to specify what project has the person implemented, how much it cost, how many people were involved, and so on."*

A significant number of organizers and staff of young people in the interviews suggest that this mechanism should be **in the form of online database** in which the data would be collectively presented, and through which the young person would be able to generate a document to be submitted to the potential employer. This approach would allow the entry of various data, including recommendations, self-reflection, feedback, description of the process of learning, and so on. Some respondents recommend the *"establishment of a social network, like LinkedIn, where young people would open their profile."* However, there is recognition of challenges in the maintenance of this portal, primarily because it would rely on the responsibility of the organizers of the programme to enter information about a young person who is involved in a particular activity.

The mechanism should be assessing and **displaying competences that are sought for by the employers**, and it needs to be matched to their needs. In this regard, the companies that already use competence based management have internally developed procedures and systems for the development of competences of their employees. So some of them base the competences on behavioural theory, others use ready-made models (e.g. Lominger competence model), while there are those who are only just in the process of developing a system of assessment of competences. In this regard, during the development of the mechanism, it is preferable to look at the existing practices and devise a way in which the future instruments would connect with them.

The highlighted key **prerequisite for the success and validity** of the tool is the credibility of the body that will develop and implement it. The very recognition of competences will motivate more young people to participate in non-formal education, but recognition must be accompanied by certain criteria to ensure that validation of competences obtained only by those who did actually acquire them. Respondents still believe that the process of development and application of tools would be more successful if they rely on past experience from other countries that have a similar mechanism.

Another aspect that for employers would be a guarantee of validity and objectivity of this mechanism is **the institution that will be the leader in the process**. Respondents' attitudes however differ when it comes to specific institutions and organizations. Common to most of the respondents is the view that there should actually be more carriers, including government institutions, CSOs and businesses. As far as the public authorities, as the potential carriers, they see the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, or any of the institutes under the Ministry (Institute for the Advancement of Education, the Institute for Quality of Education), the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economy. In addition to the ministries, the perceived potential carrier is the National Employment Service as well. As for civil society organizations and their associations, respondents most frequently cited NAPOR and National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS). When it comes to the business sector, the credibility of the Union of Employers of Serbia is highlighted, as well as Serbian Chamber of Commerce, AmCham, and so on.

In addition to the aforementioned potential holders of the mechanism, the respondents believe that **the consultation process of its development should necessarily include more stakeholders**. Among them - the young people, then the organizers of the youth work programmes, the Belgrade Open School, the Centre for Educational Policy, Youth Council, an advisory bodies within the National Assembly, institutions that follow education policy, universities and several colleges, high schools and school administration, Infostud, companies of different sizes and from different industries, the Foreign Investors Council, regional chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, business incubator centres, media, and so on. The importance is emphasized of participation of people from different levels in large systems (*"from the National employment Service - include persons from the headquarters who write procedures, but also people from the branches"*). When it comes to the economy, the respondents point out that it is important *"to include not only the department of human resources, but also people from the business world who may not know how to explain competence, but work in management, manufacturing, finance ... because they have their own systems of assessment and different language and terminology that define competence."*

Most organizations, institutions and businesses surveyed have expressed a **willingness to engage in a consultative process of mechanism development**. In addition to participation in working groups, respondents were willing to participate in data collection, promotion of the future tool, and reaching out to marginalized youth with the particularly important role of CSOs from smaller communities.

Overall, apart from the specific dilemmas and different views on the mechanism that need to be harmonized throughout the consultation process, the respondents identified some **challenges** related to the context in which it will develop. They first point out that young people have not developed sufficient awareness to what extent non-formal education can contribute to personal development. They state civil society is unfamiliar and uninformed about the needs and trends of the company and the business sector as well as the business sector about the processes of non-formal education, and that *"the current lack of understanding of the concept of non-formal education is larger problem than its formal legal validity."* Therefore, the respondents point out the importance of the participation of the media and ensuring visibility of the development process mechanisms, and intensive promotion of non-formal education and youth work, and the benefits that young people have thanks to them.

Speaking of possible responses to the challenges and dilemmas that this initiative bears, the respondents identified the **need to establish links between this and other reform process and implementation of practical public policies**. In the context of standards and licensing of those who implement programs to acquire competences that will be validated, the respondents recognize **NAPOR's system of accreditation** of organizations and processes to acquire competences for different levels of youth worker jobs. In the context of programme quality and licensing of those who carry them out, it is important to establish close ties with the implementation of the **Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia by 2020** with the accompanying action plan and the **Adult Education Law**. It is also believed that it is important to ensure the **quality compliance of various trainings on the same topic** (e.g. those implemented by CSOs and those offered by NES). Furthermore, given that volunteering ensures acquiring important competences, it is necessary to have the process connected with the **Law on Volunteering** (especially in light of initiatives to amend this law). Another option for institutional networking of the future mechanism stated is the **cooperation with universities and presentation of competences acquired through a "diploma supplement"**. The use of the tools is seen in the field of labour law, in relation to the

recognition of competences acquired at a particular workplace (from soft to specific, technical skills), which could be important in the transmission of previous years of service and for severance payment.

Recommendations for the improvement of youth work towards a greater contribution to the employability of young people

Within the study, in addition to the recommendations for the development of the mechanism, the recommendations have been designed for improvement of youth work towards contribution to gaining competencies for employability of young people.

The focus on increasing the employability of young people **should not involve changing the nature of youth work as an integral part - of civil society**. Youth workers should continue with the programmes that they are already working on, but with an improved awareness of the competences that young people develop, which may have added value to their employability. The programmes should primarily **develop applicable competences with the mandatory practical experience**, including, for example, communication, teamwork, innovation, entrepreneurship, analytical skills, personal organization, conflict management, flexibility and leadership skills.

During implementation, the **organizers of the program should respect the principles of non-formal education and youth work**, particularly those for which the youth emphasize that they contribute to the process of acquiring competences: active participation in the learning process, learning from other participants, supported by competent and trained educators, learning from experience, encouraging openness, readiness and motivation for learning, and so on. Through structured reflection, supporting the learning process and providing feedback – **make sure that after participating in youth work activities the young people become aware of the competences acquired**, and by additional mentoring support and connecting with experts for career guidance and counselling - **it is necessary to work on the adaptability of youth for implementation of competences acquired in youth work in other contexts and situations (e.g. in a business context)**.

It is necessary to work on further developing and promoting the wider use of **Standards for ensuring the quality of youth work**, regardless of who conducts it. Ensure that aspects of the standards implementation be incorporated into strategic documents for the upcoming period, as well as ensure that the **trainings for acquiring the qualification of youth workers** include **in-depth understanding of the process of learning and competence development** of young people in non-formal education in youth work.

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