

## 10.1 General context

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## Historical developments

Romania does not have a long-standing tradition when it comes to what is formally defined as youth work. Child-care instruments together with informal education combined with elements of formal education were constantly combined into different forms of what could be defined as youth work. Romanian youth work practice and policy was sometimes substantively different from standard definitions of youth work being subordinated to values, which would be firmly rejected by current youth workers: nationalism, authoritarianism or formalism. Traditionally, young people were getting some attention only when support was required in their transition to adulthood and very few forms of [forms of self-organization](#) of the youth groups could be identified in the recent history (such as the groups of singers of Christmas carols in the villages) or the groups of young boys engaged in a military-type form of organization that practiced initiation rituals. It was only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century together with the educational reform when the concept of “extra-curricular education” was introduced. Even if not completed out of school, setting up parallel to school structures such as –courses for adults, cultural clubs, and public libraries – created an advantage into working with bigger groups of young people. Immediately after the First World War the first successful western European youth movements emerged in Romania as well: scouting and YMCA received official recognition. But very few years later, the nationalist youth movements started their sharp actions against what was considered as “democratic authorities”. Later on, in the early 30s’, for almost 10 years, a [social service](#) was put in place, young professionals being asked to support, on voluntary basis, the functioning of cultural centers (foyers) in the villages, the social service being then transformed into a mandatory task for the ones who were interested into their social promotion. The communist regime came then with one of the most advertised forms of youth work represented by the [‘youth yards’](#) having the Youth Laborers’ Unions and the Communist Youth Union’s branches recruiting and training young volunteers for the projects set by the Communist Party. Another attempt to attract young people within institutional structures was the setting up of the youth clubs in the biggest urban settlements but the activities that were organized here were not that attractive to young people.

At the end of the communist era, all these attempts – including the infrastructure for the youth

activities were almost abandoned or excluded from the public funding (as the youth clubs). There were few learning activities put in place for the youth workers to learn from their French peers (animateurs) at the beginning of the 90s but as the new trained specialists were lacking the required infrastructure to work and the official recognition of their work was missing, very few results could be seen in practice. More than this, the central and local authorities did not manifest a direct interest to invest into the development of the youth domain, neither in terms of supporting the professionals in the field nor in creating the infrastructure for youth activities.

The only notable achievements when speaking of the development of those activities that would help young people to reach their full personal and professional development stayed with the youth NGOs or with the student organizations. It was only with the European funding programmes and initiatives when the real advancement of youth work in Romania could be noticed – having youth workers trained in training programmes, setting up the occupational standard for the [youth worker](#) or to having some pilot structures functioning as youth centers.

## **National definition or understanding of Youth Work**

Youth work has been mainly defined through the [National Youth Law \(no. 350/2006\)](#) but through the function of the youth workers – supporting and guiding young people – than in trying to come up with a clear definition of the field (youth work). The national definition or understanding of youth work is mainly set through describing the profession of youth worker through the [National Occupational Standard set in 2012](#). The youth worker is the one who mobilizes young people in order to develop the life skills and behaviors, stimulating the associative life and cooperation among young people and facilitating their participation to the community life. Youth workers act as the resources for young people, for organizations and communities, delivering a wide range of activities and services such as information, guidance and support for young people, facilitating their social integration and their personal evolution within the context of enhancing human, cultural diversity and promoting active citizenship. Those activities take place within a general project of an organization (non-governmental or governmental – local or central organization that has responsibilities in the field of youth), facilitating their learning process and contributing as well to the development of the relevant youth policies.