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TRANSFORMING YOUTH WORK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO YOUTH
ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

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01

Introduction

Purpose of the manual

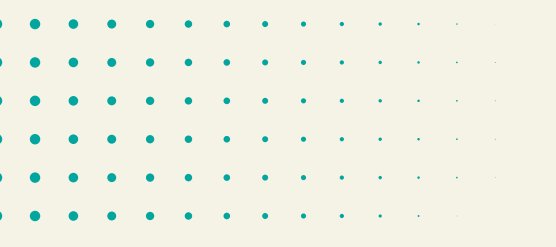
This manual is designed to support youth workers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educators, and local authorities in effectively engaging young people, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups. It provides practical tools, methodologies, and positive models to empower youth participation and promote democratic engagement at community and institutional levels.

Its purpose is to help them effectively engage young people, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, and provide practical tools, methodologies, and positive models to empower youth participation and promote democratic engagement

This manual is developed within the framework of the project, "Transforming Youth Work: From Ideas to Action in Local and European Contexts," which has the overarching aim of enabling greater participation of young people in democracy.

THE CORE OBJECTIVES OF THIS MANUAL ARE:

- **To provide youth workers with resources** on how to effectively engage young people, including those from marginalized groups, by sharing positive models, practices, and methods from Norway and all participating countries.
- **To support youth workers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educators, and local authorities** in effectively engaging young people, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups.
- **To provide practical tools, methodologies, and positive models** to empower youth participation and promote democratic engagement at community and institutional levels.



This manual is of vital importance as it directly addresses the critical challenges of youth disengagement and strengthening democratic resilience in local and European contexts. It is developed to support professionals, including youth workers, NGOs, and local authorities, who are on the frontline of connecting with young people, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups. By consolidating positive models, practices, and methods from Norway and all participating countries, the manual acts as an essential resource to combat systemic barriers, social exclusion, and political alienation that prevent meaningful youth participation. Furthermore, it reinforces the crucial concept of viewing young people not just as beneficiaries, but as active contributors who bring fresh perspectives and energy necessary for democratic renewal.

The manual's effectiveness is rooted in its practical, holistic, and inclusive approach. It explicitly tackles the need for building trust between young people and institutions through strategies like transparency and meaningful participation. By applying a multidisciplinary and participatory approach, along with inclusive outreach strategies, the manual provides a step-by-step guide to overcome the multi-dimensional barriers to engagement—such as economic hardship, geographical isolation, and personal trauma. The resources provided, including a focus on trauma-informed and culturally sensitive youth work, ensure that practitioners have the skills and tools to create safe, accessible, and authentic spaces, thereby empowering young people to take ownership and strengthen their agency in democratic life.

The applicant organization, PVN Norway, in collaboration with the participating countries and organizations involved in the project include: Albania (PVN); Armenia (Gyumri Youth House); Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (Global Analitika); Bulgaria (Via Civic Association); Czech Republic (Petrklíč); Greece (Velos Youth); Kosovo (NGO THY); North Macedonia (Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency); Norway (Samsen kulturhus); Ukraine (InformHub).

It is structured around key sections, including the context of youth disengagement in different democracies, an in-depth look at "youth with fewer opportunities" and the multi-dimensional barriers they face, and perspectives on the skills and challenges of modern youth work. To use it effectively, the manual offers practical tools, methodologies, and positive models, emphasizing a holistic, inclusive, and trauma-informed approach, including a five-step process for inclusive outreach and strategies for building trust with young people and institutions. The content is intended to be applied as a step-by-step guide to overcome barriers like economic hardship, geographical isolation, and personal trauma, thereby empowering young people to become active contributors in democratic life.

02

Context of youth engagement

2.1 Understanding youth engagement and disengagement

Youth engagement is about more than just keeping young people busy; it's the active and meaningful participation of young people in decisions and activities that affect their lives and communities, it's fundamentally about enabling young people to be true and active contributors to society and democracy. This means youth workers are key: they need the models, practices, and resources to help young people move from having an idea to taking action. When young people are engaged, they are not just recipients of services, but equal partners and leaders, working alongside adults to shape a better future for their local communities and the wider European context. Engaging youth is vital because a thriving democracy and social life require the energy, perspectives, and innovative solutions of the next generation. It's about building a stronger, more resilient society by ensuring all voices are heard and that power is shared.



However, real youth engagement faces hurdles. One challenge is ensuring consistent capacity-building for youth workers, giving them the tools to navigate complex social and political landscapes. Another significant challenge is addressing the varying contexts in which youth operate, especially the disparities between consolidated and fragile democracies.

This requires tailored approaches, continuous monitoring and evaluation, and overcoming practical barriers to participation to ensure that engagement is truly inclusive and impactful.

Youth disengagement is a complex phenomenon that describes the trend of young people being less involved in traditional political activities such as voting, party membership, or direct engagement with political institutions. Instead, youth may show interest in alternative forms of participation like digital activism or issue-based movements. Disengagement often stems from feelings of exclusion, lack of representation, or skepticism towards political elites and institutions. It also reflects broader social and economic challenges like unemployment, inequality, and marginalization, which disproportionately impact youth, especially in countries undergoing democratic transitions or hybrid regimes. It occurs in diverse political contexts, including hybrid democracies and developed democracies.

Hybrid Democracies

Hybrid democracies combine elements of democratic governance with authoritarian tendencies, leading to weakened rule of law, constrained civic freedoms, and irregular electoral processes. In these settings, young people may experience greater barriers to engagement due to political repression, limited free media, and weak institutional accountability, which further fuels disengagement and distrust.

Developed Democracies

Even in developed democracies with established institutions, youth disengagement remains a critical concern. Challenges include political alienation, generational divides, perceived inefficacy of political systems, and dissatisfaction with traditional party politics. These democracies face the task of innovating youth engagement strategies to make democratic participation more inclusive and relevant for younger generations.

Democratic Threats

Democratic systems worldwide are facing increasing threats such as rising populism, disinformation campaigns, erosion of democratic norms, and institutional decay. These threats deeply affect youth, who emerge as both vulnerable targets of misinformation and as crucial actors in pushing for democratic renewal. Understanding and addressing these democratic challenges is vital to re-engage youth and to strengthen democratic resilience.

2.2 Importance of youth as contributors (not just beneficiaries)

Youth are often framed as beneficiaries of policies and programs, but their true potential lies in being active contributors to society and democracy. Recognizing young people as agents of change transforms the narrative from passive recipients to dynamic participants who shape social, political, and economic realities.

Young people bring fresh perspectives, creativity, and energy that are crucial for democratic renewal and innovation. Their involvement in civic activities, advocacy, and decision-making processes enriches democracy, making it more responsive and inclusive.

Empowering youth means providing them with the skills, opportunities, and platforms to participate meaningfully. This includes education on rights and responsibilities, leadership training, and accessible channels for engagement in public life. Programs designed to enhance youth agency encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their communities and democratic institutions.

Youth contributions extend beyond politics; they play vital roles in social entrepreneurship, cultural development, and economic innovation. Their initiatives often address unmet needs and marginalized groups, fostering social cohesion and community resilience.

Inclusion of young people in policy formulation and institutional governance ensures that their unique needs and aspirations are reflected. This can improve trust in institutions and lead to more effective and sustainable policy outcomes. Several countries and organizations have established youth councils, advisory boards, and participatory platforms as practical mechanisms for integrating youth voices in governance.



2.3 Importance of building trust between institutions and young people.

Trust acts as the invisible glue binding citizens to institutions. It reflects the belief that institutions operate transparently, fairly, and in the best interest of the public. For young people, who often feel overlooked or marginalized, building trust means demonstrating that their voices matter and that institutions are responsive to their needs and concerns.

Many young people experience skepticism and disillusionment due to corruption, lack of transparency, inefficiency, or perceived distance between decision-makers and citizens, especially in hybrid and fragile democracies. Particularly in hybrid democracies or polarizing environments, this distrust can be exacerbated, leading youth to disengage or seek alternative forms of participation outside traditional institutions. Research shows that youth tend to trust more those institutions they see as close and effective, such as local governments or community organizations, compared to distant national or federal bodies.

Strategies for Building Trust

- **Transparency and accountability:** Institutions must be open about their decision-making processes, and there should be clear mechanisms for accountability. Young people appreciate when governments and organizations demonstrate integrity and deliver on promises.
- **Inclusive and meaningful participation:** Trust grows when youth are actively involved in policy-making, community projects, and institutional oversight, not just consulted as an afterthought. Participatory governance models like youth councils and forums can provide these pathways.
- **Dialogue and communication:** Continuous, two-way communication that listens to youth perspectives and addresses their concerns fosters understanding and trust. Safe spaces free of discrimination and harassment encourage authentic engagement.
- **Addressing youth-centric issues:** Institutions gain trust when they focus on issues that matter to young people—like education, employment, social justice, and climate change—and show results in these areas.



2.4 Importance of cross sectorial collaboration.

Cross-sector collaboration means working together with different actors such as public institutions, civil society organizations, educational institutions, the private sector, and youth organizations. For youth workers, this approach is essential because young people face challenges in many areas at the same time, including education, employment, health, social inclusion, and civic participation. No single organization or sector can respond to these needs on its own.

By collaborating across sectors, youth workers can connect young people with a wider range of opportunities and support services. Sharing resources, expertise, and networks helps avoid duplication of efforts and increases the impact of youth work. For example, government policies can support youth programs, civil society organizations can provide community-based activities, and the private sector can offer internships, training, or employment pathways. Working together allows youth workers to better guide young people and help them develop skills such as leadership, advocacy, critical thinking, and active citizenship.

Cross-sector collaboration also supports the meaningful involvement of young people in designing and implementing programs. When young people are included as partners, activities are more relevant to their real needs and life situations. This approach helps reduce inequalities and ensures that marginalized and underrepresented young people are not left behind, but are given fair opportunities to participate and have their voices heard.

For long-term impact, collaboration should be supported by shared structures such as youth councils, advisory groups, coordination platforms, and regular meetings between different sectors. These mechanisms help align youth-related actions and policies, improve transparency and accountability, and create space for learning and innovation. By working across sectors, youth workers can contribute to stronger democratic participation and develop innovative responses to emerging issues, including digital participation and social justice concerns.

03

Engaging Youth with Fewer Opportunities

3.1 Who are “fewer opportunities”

The term “**youth with fewer opportunities**” refers to young people who have limited access to education, employment, participation, mobility, and inclusion compared to their peers. These limitations may arise from social, economic, educational, cultural, geographical, or health-related obstacles, which can significantly restrict their opportunities for personal and professional development.

Across different countries and contexts, youth with fewer opportunities may include:

- **Migrants, refugees, and internally displaced youth** facing challenges of integration, legal uncertainty, and language barriers.
- **LGBTQI+ youth** often experiencing discrimination, stigma, or exclusion from safe spaces.
- **Roma youth** encountering systemic marginalization and limited access to education or employment.
- **Young people with disabilities** facing physical, sensory, or intellectual barriers that restrict participation.
- **Youth from low-income families** often limited by economic hardship, reduced social mobility, and unequal access to opportunities.
- **Rural youth** affected by geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and fewer opportunities for participation or services.
- **Youth experiencing mental health challenges** frequently facing stigma, lack of support, or exclusion from social and educational activities.
- **Children and young people in social care systems** growing up without stable family support or consistent adult guidance.
- **Racial and ethnic minority youth** encountering prejudice, systemic discrimination, and underrepresentation in public and institutional spaces.

While these categories help to identify specific groups, it is important to recognize that many young people experience multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion. A young person can, for example, be both from a rural area and part of an ethnic minority group, facing double or even triple disadvantage.

Understanding the complex realities these young people face also means exploring what prevents them from participating fully in community, civic, or democratic life. Both research findings and field experiences from youth workers highlight a range of barriers to engagement that limit youth involvement, trust, and empowerment.

3.2 Barriers to engagement

Despite the growing recognition of youth participation as a cornerstone of democratic and inclusive societies, many young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, remain disengaged or excluded from active participation. Research findings and field experiences from youth workers across participating countries highlight that these barriers are often multi-dimensional and interconnected. They can be systemic, social, economic, or deeply personal.

Understanding these barriers is the first step toward removing them and designing approaches that are inclusive, supportive, and realistic.

Systemic barriers

Systemic barriers arise from institutional structures, policies, and practices that unintentionally exclude or limit participation.

- Educational systems that are overly formal or inflexible, failing to engage diverse learners.
- Lack of access to information about opportunities, rights, and participation channels.
- Bureaucratic procedures that make youth participation seem complicated or irrelevant.
- Limited institutional support for youth-led initiatives or ideas.
- Financial constraints that prevent organizations from reaching marginalized groups.

Example: In some contexts, youth councils exist but are dominated by the same social groups, leaving rural or minority youth underrepresented.

Social and cultural barriers

Social norms and cultural attitudes often shape who feels entitled or welcomed to participate.

- Discrimination or prejudice based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or disability.
- Family expectations or social pressure that limit girls' or minority youth participation.
- Low community support for youth-led initiatives or civic engagement.
- Stigma around mental health, poverty, or other social conditions.

Example: Roma youth or LGBTQI+ youth may hesitate to participate in public programs due to fear of stigma or lack of safe spaces.

Economic and geographical barriers

Material conditions and place of residence play a significant role in shaping engagement.

- Poverty or unemployment, limiting time, mobility, or access to opportunities.
- Lack of transportation or safe infrastructure in rural and remote areas.
- Digital divide, where limited internet access restricts participation in online activities.
- Low-income environments that prioritize survival over civic participation.

Example: In rural areas, youth may not participate simply because events happen in urban centers and transport is unaffordable.

Legal and political barriers

Certain groups face legal restrictions or political exclusion that prevent active engagement.

- Unclear legal status (e.g., refugees, undocumented youth).
- Age restrictions in political participation or decision-making.
- Limited representation of youth interests in formal structures.
- Mistrust between youth and institutions, often due to a lack of transparency or past negative experiences.

Example: Refugee or migrant youth may want to engage in local initiatives but face legal limitations or fear of visibility.

Personal and psychological barriers

Many young people face internal challenges that impact confidence and willingness to engage.

- Low self-esteem or lack of confidence in expressing opinions.
- Past trauma or adverse experiences that cause withdrawal or mistrust.
- Mental health challenges or stress.
- Family responsibilities that limit free time.
- Peer pressure discouraging civic involvement.

Example: Youth who have experienced bullying or exclusion may prefer to avoid group activities, needing patient, trust-based outreach.

Intersectional Barriers

Barriers rarely exist in isolation. Many young people experience overlapping forms of disadvantage, for example, being a young woman with a disability from a low-income, rural background. Intersectionality helps youth workers understand how these combined challenges intensify exclusion and require personalized, flexible approaches.

Example: A migrant young woman with limited language skills and caregiving responsibilities faces compounded barriers to participation.

3.3 Intersectionality and youth identity

Intersectionality and youth identity refer to the understanding that young people's experiences, identities, and challenges are shaped by multiple, overlapping social categories such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and more. This concept recognizes that these intersecting identities create unique modes of discrimination or privilege that cannot be examined separately.

For youth, intersectionality means acknowledging the complexity of their identities and how these influence their social inclusion, access to opportunities, and participation in democratic and community life. For example, a young person may face different barriers and experiences based on being both from a marginalized ethnic group and part of the LGBTQ+ community, requiring nuanced support and policies that consider this complexity.

Applying an intersectional lens in youth work and policy-making ensures that programs are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of all young people. It promotes recognizing and addressing the multiple dimensions of identity and oppression to empower youth fully and foster social justice.

Understanding intersectionality encourages youth workers and institutions to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and instead tailor their engagement to reflect the rich diversity and specific contexts of young people's lives.

3.4 Inclusive outreach strategies

Reaching and engaging youth with fewer opportunities requires sensitivity, creativity, and consistency. Many young people in this target group have faced exclusion or disappointment from institutions before, so building trust and creating accessible entry points are essential first steps. Engaging youth with fewer opportunities requires a holistic, sensitive, and flexible approach. Many young people in this target group have experienced exclusion, discrimination, trauma, or disappointment from institutions, which can create barriers to participation. Effective youth engagement depends on building trust, understanding individual and cultural differences, and creating safe and accessible spaces where young people feel valued and empowered.

Youth workers should adopt strategies that are trauma-informed and culturally sensitive, recognizing that each young person comes with unique experiences, identities, and needs. This includes:

- Respecting personal boundaries and allowing young people to engage at their own pace.
- Acknowledging past trauma and providing support without pressure.
- Adapting activities to the realities of participants' lives, including cultural, social, and economic contexts.
- Building resilience through consistent support, encouragement, and skill-building opportunities.
- Understanding intersectionality, recognizing how overlapping aspects of identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status) shape the way youth experience inclusion and exclusion.

Building trust is central to meaningful engagement. Youth workers should demonstrate consistency, empathy, respect, and authenticity, involve young people in planning, and create safe physical and emotional spaces. By actively listening and valuing youth perspectives, programs can empower young people to participate meaningfully and develop agency.

To make these principles practical, engagement strategies can be structured into the following step-by-step approach:

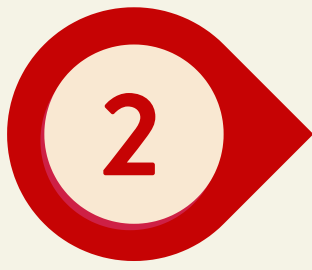
Creating safe and accessible spaces.



1

To facilitate engagement, it is essential to provide physical spaces where youth feel secure and welcomed. Libraries, community centers, or municipal buildings can become hubs for participation, as long as they are designed to be inclusive. Accessibility must be considered in all aspects, from ramps and seating arrangements to signage and communication materials. For young people who lack internet access or personal devices, these spaces also serve as vital points where they can connect, learn, and express themselves. The focus should always be on creating a sense of belonging rather than simply offering activities.

Build trust before engagement.



2

Trust cannot be demanded, it must be earned. Before formal activities or workshops, youth workers should organize informal, non-formal meetings aimed at listening, sharing, and establishing rapport. These initial encounters are not about achieving participation immediately but about showing genuine interest in young people's lives and perspectives. Particularly for youth dealing with psychological or emotional challenges, engagement often requires additional time, patience, and approaches tailored to their comfort levels. Providing consistency and reliability in these early interactions lays the foundation for meaningful participation later.

Meet them where they are.



3

Outreach is most effective when it meets young people in their own environments, rather than expecting them to come to institutional spaces. This could mean connecting in schools, youth clubs, community centers, streets, or even online spaces where they are already active. Collaborating with trusted local actors, such as teachers, social workers, peer mentors, or NGOs helps bridge the gap between youth and programs. The emphasis should be on creating approachable, familiar, and non-intimidating settings, where youth feel safe to engage and contribute

Use inclusive and creative communication channels.



4

Effective engagement also depends on how information is shared. Youth workers should use channels and methods that are familiar to the young people they wish to reach, whether social media platforms, local community boards, peer networks, or informal conversations. Messaging should be clear, relatable, and free from bureaucratic or technical language. Providing creative outlets such as art, music, storytelling, photography, or digital media allows young people to express themselves in ways that feel authentic, encouraging participation even among those who may be reluctant to speak in traditional formats.

Apply a multidisciplinary and participatory approach.



5

Finally, engaging youth effectively requires a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach. Youth workers, educators, psychologists, social services, and municipal staff should coordinate their efforts to address the diverse needs of young people. Equally important is involving youth in the planning and design of activities, ensuring that initiatives are co-created rather than imposed. When young people see their ideas, preferences, and feedback reflected in projects, they are more likely to take ownership, remain motivated, and actively participate.

3.5 Building trust with underserved youth communities

Building trust with underserved youth communities requires targeted and empathetic approaches that address their unique experiences and challenges. These communities often face barriers such as social exclusion, discrimination, economic hardship, and historical mistrust of institutions, which can hinder their engagement.

To build trust effectively, youth workers and institutions must:

- Demonstrate cultural humility by actively listening and respecting the identities, values, and lived realities of these youth without judgment or assumptions.
- Create safe and inclusive spaces where young people feel valued and empowered to express themselves freely.
- Engage consistently and transparently, delivering on promises to show reliability and accountability.
- Collaborate with community leaders and organizations that already have established relationships and credibility within these communities.
- Address systemic barriers by advocating for equitable access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes.
- Use trauma-informed approaches recognizing how historical or personal trauma impacts trust and participation.

Building this trust fosters a sense of belonging and ownership among underserved youth, enabling their authentic participation in social and democratic processes and improving their overall wellbeing and development.

3.6 Trauma-informed and culturally sensitive youth work



Trauma-informed and culturally sensitive youth work recognizes how experiences such as abuse, neglect, loss, or violence affect young people, and adapts practices to create safe, supportive environments that respect their cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, youth workers prioritize physical and emotional safety, build trusting and transparent relationships, and empower young people by involving them in decision-making processes about their participation.

Cultural sensitivity complements this by acknowledging the diverse cultural, historical, and social identities of young people, which influence their experiences of trauma and healing. It promotes understanding and respect for these differences, avoids stereotypes, and encourages youth workers to engage with young people as experts of their own experiences and identities. This approach helps overcome cultural barriers, fosters resilience, and supports the healthy development of identity in varied social contexts.

Together, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive youth work creates spaces where young people feel valued, heard, and supported, enabling them to build resilience, develop life skills, and thrive despite past challenges. It emphasizes healing, empowerment, and respect for diversity as foundational to effective youth engagement.

3.7 Tips for inclusive communication.

Include everyone, value every voice.

Use interpreters or cultural mediators when working with multilingual or multicultural groups.

Employ people from the community you are supporting to ensure representation and trust.

Utilize peer-to-peer methods to promote shared understanding and empowerment.

Apply interactive tools to encourage participation and make communication engaging.

Choose generationally appropriate communication channels (e.g., social media, in-person dialogue, creative workshops).

Practice active listening, listen to understand, not just to respond.

Provide space for creative expression, such as art, theatre, or storytelling, allowing young people to share experiences in their own way.

Incorporate culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to ensure all participants feel safe and respected.



3.8 Checklist: "Is your approach inclusive?"

- ✓ Is your space physically and socially accessible (considering disability, location, and visibility)?
- ✓ Do you demonstrate empathy and respect in all interactions?
- ✓ Is your material understandable to all participants (language, literacy, digital access)?
- ✓ Are your professionals trained according to the specific needs of the beneficiaries?



- ✓ Do you employ people from the community you are supporting?
- ✓ Have you established policies on confidentiality and safeguarding, including signed agreements with youth workers and participants?
- ✓ Do you ensure accessibility to information, facilities, and technology?
- ✓ -Are you respecting personal boundaries (e.g., hugging, personal space, gender norms)?

04

Youth workers perspectives

4.1 Youth work and youth workers.

Youth work refers to a range of social, educational, and community-based practices that aim to support the personal, social, and civic development of young people. It focuses on helping youth build skills, confidence, and active participation in society.

Youth work often takes place outside the formal education system, in spaces such as youth centers, community projects, schools (as extracurricular programs), or online.

Youth workers are trained professionals (or volunteers) who work directly with young people to help them overcome challenges, develop skills, and engage positively in their communities.

They act as mentors, educators, and facilitators, providing safe spaces for learning and self-expression. Youth workers may organize activities like workshops, cultural events, career guidance sessions, or advocacy initiatives.

The **core goals** of youth work are to:

- Empower young people to reach their full potential;
- Promote social inclusion and equal opportunities;
- Encourage participation in decision-making and community life;
- Support personal development, well-being, and active citizenship.

Youth workers are guided by **core values** such as:

- Respect for young people's rights and autonomy;
- Inclusivity and equality;
- Empowerment and participation;
- Ethical and reflective practice.

4.2 What are the skills youth workers need?

Youth workers require a wide range of skills to effectively engage, support, and empower young people. These include interpersonal, professional, and organizational competencies that enable them to create safe, inclusive, and inspiring environments.

Communication skills – The ability to listen actively, express ideas clearly, and build trustful relationships with young people, colleagues, and the community.

Empathy and emotional intelligence – Understanding young people's emotions, backgrounds, and challenges with sensitivity and respect.

Facilitation and group work skills – Leading discussions, workshops, and activities that promote participation and collaboration.

Conflict resolution and problem-solving – Managing disagreements or crises in a calm and constructive way.

Cultural awareness and inclusivity – Recognizing diversity and ensuring that all young people feel valued and represented.

Leadership and motivation – Inspiring young people to take initiative and develop confidence in their abilities.

Organization and project management – Planning, delivering, and evaluating youth programs effectively.

Advocacy and networking – Representing youth interests and building partnerships with organizations, schools, and local authorities.

Digital literacy – Using technology and social media responsibly to connect and communicate with youth.

Reflective practice – Continuously evaluating one's work and seeking professional development.

4.3 What are the challenges youth workers face?

Youth workers often face complex and demanding challenges due to the social, emotional, and economic realities of young people's lives. These challenges can affect both their work and well-being.

Main challenges:

- **Limited funding and resources** – Many youth programs rely on unstable or insufficient financial support, making it difficult to maintain quality services.
- **High workloads and emotional strain** – Working with vulnerable youth can be emotionally exhausting and lead to burnout.
- **Lack of recognition and professional status** – In some countries, youth work is undervalued compared to other social professions.
- **Complex social issues** – Youth workers deal with issues such as unemployment, poverty, discrimination, substance abuse, or mental health problems.
- **Keeping up with digital trends** – The fast-changing online environment requires youth workers to adapt constantly.
- **Balancing authority and friendship** – Maintaining professional boundaries while building trust can be challenging.
- **Safety and ethical dilemmas** – Managing confidentiality, safeguarding, and risk in youth settings requires constant attention.
- **Engaging marginalized or disinterested youth** – Reaching young people who feel excluded or disengaged from society can be difficult.

05

Methods, Tools & Activities for Youth Workers

01

Blind Navigation



10-30
participants



15 minutes

Materials

- Blindfolds or scarves (one per group).
- Several small hidden objects (e.g., a ball, bottle, piece of paper, cube, etc.).
- An open outdoor space (school yard, park, or field)

Objectives

- To build trust among group members.
- To strengthen communication and active listening skills.
- To promote teamwork, cooperation, and mutual support.
- To reflect on the importance of responsible leadership and trust within institutions and communities.

Step by step guide

1. Divide participants into small groups of 4–6 people
2. Hide several objects around the open area before the activity starts.
3. Ask each group to choose one person to be blindfolded for the first round.
4. Instruct the blindfolded participant to find a hidden object using only verbal guidance from their teammates.
5. Once an object is found, have another group member take a turn being blindfolded and continue the activity.

Reflections tips

(Optional) You can share with participants the result by explaining the game purpose. After the activity, gather everyone together and discuss:

- How did it feel to trust someone else's guidance?
- Was it easy to communicate clearly and listen carefully?
- How can this activity relate to trust within institutions or communities?
- What did you learn about teamwork and responsibility?

02

Take a step forward



10-30
participants



60 minutes

Materials

- Role cards (one per participant, folded and placed in a hat)
- Open space (corridor, hall, outdoors)
- Soft background music (optional)

Objectives

- Raise awareness about unequal opportunities.
- Develop imagination and critical thinking.
- Foster empathy for people with fewer resources

Step by step guide

Overview: We are all equal, but some are more equal than others. In this activity participants take on roles and move forward depending on their chances and opportunities in life.

Related rights:

- The right to equality in dignity and rights.
- The right to education.
- The right to a standard of living adequate for good health and well-being.

Preparation:

- Read the instructions carefully. Review the list of “situations and events” and adapt it to the group that you are working with.
- Make the role cards, one per participant.

Instructions:

1. Create a calm atmosphere with some soft background music. Alternatively, ask the participants for silence.
2. Ask participants to take a role card out of the hat. Tell them to keep it to themselves and not to show it to anyone else.
3. Invite them to sit down (preferably on the floor) and to read carefully what is on their role card.
4. Now ask them to begin to get into role. To help, read out some of the following questions, pausing after each one, to give people time to reflect and build up a picture of themselves and their lives:
 - What was your childhood like? What sort of house did you live in? What kind of games did you play? What sort of work did your parents do?
 - What is your everyday life like now? Where do you socialise? What do you do in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening?
 - What sort of lifestyle do you have? Where do you live? How much money do you earn each month? What do you do in your leisure time? What you do in your holidays?
 - What excites you and what are you afraid of?

5. Now ask people to remain absolutely silent as they line up beside each other (like on a starting line)
6. Tell the participants that you are going to read out a list of situations or events. Every time that they can answer “yes” to the statement, they should take a step forward. Otherwise, they should stay where they are and not move.
7. Read out the situations one at a time. Pause for a while between each statement to allow people time to step forward and to look around to take note of their positions relative to each other.
8. At the end invite everyone to take note of their final positions. Then give them a couple of minutes to come out of role before debriefing in plenary.

Reflections tips

Start by asking participants about what happened and how they feel about the activity and then go on to talk about the issues raised and what they learnt.

- *How did people feel stepping forward - or not?*
- *For those who stepped forward often, at what point did they begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as they were?*
- *Did anyone feel that there were moments when their basic human rights were being ignored?*
- *Can people guess each other's roles? (Let people reveal their roles during this part of the discussion)*
- *How easy or difficult was it to play the different roles? How did they imagine what the person they were playing was like?*
- *Does the exercise mirror society in some way? How?*
- *Which human rights are at stake for each of the roles? Could anyone say that their human rights were not being respected or that they did not have access to them?*

03

The Pasta Game



15-30
participants



75 minutes

Materials

- Uncooked pasta (approx. 200–300 pieces) represents a budget or resources.
- Large sheets of paper and markers for project proposals.
- Paper and pens for planning.
- Optional: stickers or labels to decorate or name projects.
- Socks, scarf.

Objectives

- To help participants understand how democratic participation works in collective decision making.
- To simulate how participatory budgeting allows people to influence how public resources are spent.
- To encourage collaboration, negotiation, and compromise within a democratic process.

Step by step guide

Phase 1:

1. Ask four participants to volunteer and assign disadvantages simulating real-life barriers to around 20–40% of participants (e.g., wearing socks on hands, sitting down, delayed start, closed eyes). Define safety rules: no pushing or physical contact.
2. Throw the pasta in the middle and ask participants to start. Upon “start,” they have 30–45 seconds to collect and return as many pasta pieces as possible. Participants with disadvantages must follow their specific limitations.

3. After time ends, everyone counts their pasta; the facilitator record results(ex in flip charts visible for everyone). Participants may give some pasta away to others voluntarily. Donations are recorded, and donors recognized. After donations, pasta totals are recounted and updated.

Phase 2:

1.Divide participants into wealth-based groups according to their pasta holdings:

- High wealth group: 10 or more pasta pieces
- Medium wealth group: 5 to 9 pasta pieces
- Low wealth group: 0 to 4 pasta pieces

Instructor actions:

1. Clearly announce and explain the wealth groups and where each participant belongs based on their pasta count. Physically direct participants to move to their group area in the room.

2. Assign each group a flipchart/page or worksheet to draft a fair redistribution plan. Emphasize these key points to the groups:

- The plan should describe how all pasta (wealth) will be redistributed among all participants.
- Consider different fairness criteria such as equality (everyone gets the same), need (those with less get more), merit (based on effort or contribution), or combinations.

3. Give the groups 10–15 minutes to discuss and write down their plan. Circulate to support the discussion, answer questions, but avoid influencing decisions.

4. Ask each group to briefly present their plan (2–3 minutes each) to the entire group. Write short summaries of each plan on a visible flipchart.

Weighted voting:

- Every participant has the right to vote no one is excluded.
- However, the value of each vote differs based on how many pasta pieces (wealth) the participant currently holds. This means some people have more influence than others in deciding which plan wins.
- Voting power is assigned as follows:
 - Participants with 0 to 4 pasta pieces have 1 vote each.
 - Participants with 5 to 9 pasta pieces have 2 votes each.
 - Participants with 10 or more pasta pieces have 3 votes each.

4. Conduct the vote: call participants by name and record the votes accordingly on the flipchart. Ensure transparency during counting.
5. Announce the winning plan based on the highest weighted vote total.

Reflections tips

- Ask participants how they felt during each phase (collection, giving, voting).
- Encourage sharing thoughts on fairness and barriers they experienced or observed.
- Highlight the difference between having equal votes and votes weighted by wealth, ask if that seemed fair and why.
- Prompt discussion on real-life examples of inequality and participation challenges.
- Invite ideas on how to make decision-making more inclusive, especially for youth with fewer opportunities.
- Keep the tone respectful and open; encourage listening and learning from different perspectives.

04

Labels of Opportunity

“Labels of Opportunity” is an experiential role-play activity where each participant receives a hidden label that represents a real barrier or situation commonly experienced by young people with fewer opportunities (e.g., “has no internet access,” “works to support family,” “newly arrived migrant,” “has a learning difficulty”). Participants do not see their own label. Other participants interact with them as if the label were true.



8-20
participants



90 minutes

Materials

- Sticky notes / labels
- Markers
- Tape (if labels need to be attached)
- Timer or phone
- Optional: music for atmosphere
- Flipchart for reflection notes

Objectives

- Develop empathy toward youth with fewer opportunities.
- Recognize barriers that limit participation (financial, social, cultural, accessibility).
- Identifies supportive behaviors for peer-to-peer outreach.
- Reflect on inclusive communication and safe group dynamics.

Step by step guide

Preparation:

Write one hidden label for each participant.

Use roles connected to fewer opportunities, such as:

- “Has no internet at home”
- “Needs to work after school”
- “New immigrant—does not speak the language well”
- “Has a disability”
- “Comes from a rural isolated area”
- “Very shy and afraid to speak”
- “Cares for younger siblings”
- “Has limited financial resources”
- “Has never traveled outside their town”
- “Feels excluded in group activities”

Make sure labels are not insulting or harmful.

Place all labels face-down on a table.

Instructions:

1. Explain the rules of the game.
2. Ask each participant to pick one label without looking.
3. Attach it to their forehead or back so others can read it.
4. Give participants a scenario, such as:
 - “You are all planning a youth event together. Talk, move around, and make decisions based on how you perceive others.” Participants behave according to the labels they see on others.

Examples:

- Someone with the label “shy” might get ignored.
- Someone with “no internet access” may not be included in planning online tasks.
- Someone with “limited finances” might be told they can’t join paid activities.

Allow the dynamic to unfold naturally.

5. After the interaction, ask participants:

- “Based on how others treated you, who do you think you were?”

Let a few people guess before revealing.

6. .Participants finally see their own labels.
7. This often creates strong emotional reactions and insights.
8. Reflection

Reflections tips

Use open questions such as:

- *How did you feel during the activity?*
- *What clues did others give you through their behavior?*
- *Did some labels get visibly more support?*
- *Did some get ignored or treated as less capable?*
- *Does this happen in real life?*
- *What does this tell us about youth with fewer opportunities?*
- *How can we avoid reproducing these patterns in real programs?*
- *How can young people support each other more effectively?*
- *What small behaviors can make someone feel included?*
- *Which labels represent real youth in your community?*
- *What barriers do you personally recognize?*

05

Reflection game



10-35
participants



10-15 minutes

Materials

- A set of illustrated cards (Dixit cards or any other symbolic/visual cards)
- Calm instrumental background music (optional but recommended)
- A speaker or sound source

Objectives

- To support participants in reflecting on their learning and emotional experience of the day.
- To encourage self-awareness, emotional expression and gratitude.
- To create a calm and meaningful closure of a session or training day.
- To strengthen group connection through shared reflection.

Step by step guide

1. Invite participants to sit in a circle or in a comfortable position where they can see the cards.
2. Place the illustrated cards face up in the center of the space or spread them on the floor/table.
3. Play soft instrumental music in the background to create a calm and reflective atmosphere.

Give the following instruction:

“Please choose one card that represents how you feel about the day as a whole , everything you experienced, learned, or felt during the sessions.”

5. Give participants a short moment (1–2 minutes) to silently choose a card.
6. One by one, invite participants to share:
 - The card they chose
 - One short sentence explaining what the card represents for them
7. Emphasize that:
 - There are no right or wrong interpretations.
 - Participants should only share what they feel comfortable sharing.
 - No comments, questions or discussions follow each sharing, only attentive listening.
8. After everyone has shared (or passed), thank the group and gently close the activity.

Reflections tips

- *Keep the space emotionally safe and non-judgmental.*
- *Model openness by sharing first, if appropriate.*
- *Do not analyze or interpret participants' cards — let the meaning belong to them.*
- *Respect silence and emotional moments; do not rush the process.*
- *Use this activity mainly as a closing tool, not as a discussion starter.*

06

Planning for Impact: Designing Local Projects

6.1 A suggested guide on how to co-design democratic engagement projects with youth:

Designing effective youth engagement projects requires careful planning, youth participation, and a focus on long-term impact. Projects are most successful when they are co-designed with young people, informed by research, guided by theory, and adapted to local contexts. This section provides practical guidance on co-design, using logic models, involving youth in decision-making, applying proven models, and writing strong project proposals.

01

Prepare and plan

Before involving youth, careful preparation ensures that engagement is meaningful:

- Identify local authorities, NGOs, schools, or community centers that can support youth engagement. Show young people who they can contact and how different institutions work.
- Explain that outcomes may not appear immediately; democratic change takes time.
- Understand what you want to achieve, but remain flexible to adapt based on youth input.
- Know which youth will be involved, especially considering youth with fewer opportunities, marginalized groups, or those facing barriers to participation.

Tip: Preparation helps youth feel safe and ensures their voices will genuinely influence the project.



02

Introduce concepts of democracy

Before youth can co-design projects, they need to understand the principles of democratic participation:

- Ask youth how they imagine democracy and civic participation. This helps them reflect critically and think creatively.
- Use mock councils or small-scale youth councils to demonstrate decision-making processes.
- Include topics such as the right to protest, advocacy, or organizing campaigns in a safe and structured environment.

Tip: Interactive activities (role plays, simulations) are more effective than lectures, especially for youth with fewer opportunities.



03

Build trust and establish relationships

Meaningful co-design requires trust and mutual respect:

- Hold small, non-formal gatherings to listen and understand youth perspectives.
- Youth with psychological or social challenges may need extra time to engage.
- Reliable presence and follow-through show youth that their contributions matter.

Tip: Early trust-building activities should not focus on immediate results but on creating a safe, supportive environment.



04

Engage youth in brainstorming and ideation

Once trust is established, facilitate youth-led idea generation:

- Encourage youth to share ideas freely, without judgment.
- Use art, storytelling, or digital media to express ideas, especially for those less comfortable speaking in groups.
- Ensure youth see their contributions recorded and acknowledged.

Tip: Youth workers act as guides, not directors. Their role is to facilitate, provide resources, and help clarify ideas.



05

Plan and shape projects together with youth

- Work with youth to define project objectives, activities, and expected outcomes.
- Test ideas in smaller settings to refine them based on real feedback.
- Adapt activities to accommodate diverse needs, including accessibility for youth with disabilities and considerations for marginalized groups.

Tip: Youth ownership increases commitment and ensures the project is meaningful to participants.



06

Use proven models and theories locally

In this step, you take inspiration from successful practices or theoretical frameworks (like Norwegian youth engagement models or the Theory of Change) and adapt them to your local context.

- Ensure youth and local actors know how it works and why it is effective.
- Modify activities, structures, or approaches to suit your community's culture, resources, and needs.
- Use simulations, pilot projects, or study visits to experience the model in practice.
- Collaborate with schools, NGOs, authorities, and community members to gain support and overcome resistance.
- Apply tools like the “if-then” logic from Theory of Change to link activities with expected outcomes.

Logic models / Theory of Change basics

Designing effective youth projects starts with a clear understanding of **how and why** change happens.

A Logic Model or Theory of Change (ToC) helps visualize this process, it's a simple way to map out the connection between your actions and the impact you want to achieve.

A Theory of Change explains how your project's activities are expected to lead to short- and long-term outcomes.

It often follows an “if–then” logic, for example:

- **If** we create safe spaces for youth to express their opinions, **then** they will feel more confident to engage in local decision-making.
- **If** young people are involved in planning activities, **then** they will feel ownership and stay engaged.

This framework encourages youth workers and participants to think about the pathway of change, not just the activities. It helps make sure that every workshop, meeting, or campaign links back to a meaningful goal.

How to Use It:

- **Start with your goal:** What change do you want to see in your community?
- **Identify the needs:** What challenges or barriers exist for youth?
- **Define your inputs:** What resources (time, skills, partners) will you use?
- **Plan your activities:** What will you do to address those needs?
- **Predict outcomes:** What short- and long-term results do you expect?
- **Test your logic:** Use the “if–then” test — does each activity clearly connect to your goal?

Helps youth workers to:

- Clarify their goals and methods.
- Communicate ideas clearly to funders and partners.
- Track and evaluate impact.
- Involve youth in reflective and critical thinking about how their actions lead to real change.

6.2 Tips for writing better project proposals.

Writing a strong project proposal is mainly about clear thinking and clear writing. A well-written proposal is easy to read, logically structured, and precise.

Necessary tips:

Write with a clear structure

Organize your proposal into logical sections with headings and subheadings. This helps the reader follow your ideas and understand the flow of your argument.

Use simple and precise language

Avoid long, complicated sentences and unnecessary jargon. Write in a direct and professional style that is easy to understand.

Be specific, not vague

Replace general statements with concrete descriptions. Clearly explain what will happen, who will be involved, and how activities will be carried out.

Example: Instead of “we will support young people,” write “we will organize three training workshops for 25 young people.”

Support statements with references or evidence

When you mention facts or needs, briefly refer to data, research, or observations to make your writing credible.

Edit and revise carefully

Always revise your proposal before submission. Check for grammar, spelling, clarity, and logical flow.

Stay focused and relevant

Remove any information that does not directly support your proposal's purpose. Every paragraph should have a clear function.

07

Models of Youth Engagement

7.1 Models of youth engagement from the Norway

1 **ARENDALSUKA** is Norway's largest annual political festival held in Arendal, designed to bring together politicians, NGOs, businesses, media, and the public. The youth-focused program, Arendalsuka Ung, engages around 6,000 children and young people aged 4 to 19. It promotes democratic participation by exposing young people to political debates, civic education, and social issues.

How it Works:

Arendalsuka Ung hosts about 50 events targeted at different youth age groups. These include workshops, debates, and interactions with politicians and experts on topics relevant to young people such as human rights, environment, fake news, and digital culture. The events are free and open, enabling broad community participation.

What Makes it Successful:

- Integration of youth voices into a major political forum.
- Diverse and age-appropriate programming.
- Collaboration between the municipality, NGOs, educational institutions, and political parties.
- Active involvement of youth in event organization and content setting.
-

Challenges:

- Maintaining engagement across a wide age range from young children to adolescents.
- Ensuring inclusivity of marginalized youth groups.
- Balancing entertainment and educational content.

How to Adapt in Other Countries:

- Develop partnerships across sectors (government, civil society, education).
- Create continuous youth dialogue platforms linked to larger political events.
- Ensure accessibility free of charge and embed youth perspectives early in planning.





2 Kristiansand Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum (EYF) is a pan-European platform based in Brussels, bringing together national youth councils and international youth organizations from across Europe. It represents millions of young people through more than 100 member organizations.

The Forum exists to ensure that young people's voices are heard in European and international decision-making processes. It promotes youth rights, democratic participation, social inclusion, and equal opportunities, with a strong focus on empowering young people as active citizens.

For youth workers, the EYF represents a positive model of structured youth participation, showing how young people can move from local engagement to influencing policies at national and European levels.

How It Works:

It operates as a member-led and youth-driven network.

- Member organizations (national youth councils and international NGOs) nominate young representatives.
- These representatives take part in assemblies, working groups, consultations, and thematic forums.
- Young people collectively identify priorities, develop policy positions, and advocate for change.
- The Forum maintains structured dialogue with European institutions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations.

What makes it successful:

Several factors contribute to the success of the European Youth Forum:

- Young people are at the center of decision-making processes.
- A broad and diverse membership ensures legitimacy and impact.
- Well-defined channels for dialogue with institutions.
- Strong focus on diversity, equality, and human rights.
- Training and learning opportunities strengthen young people's skills and confidence.

Challenges:

Despite its success, the model also faces challenges:

- Ensuring inclusivity: Reaching and representing young people from marginalized backgrounds remains an ongoing challenge.
- Complex structures: Large international frameworks can be difficult to access for smaller or local organizations.
- Resource demands: Participation often requires time, funding, and strong organizational capacity.
- Bridging local and European levels: Translating European-level discussions into local impact can be challenging.

How to adapt this model in other countries:

The European Youth Forum model can be adapted at national, regional, or local level:

- Establish local or national youth forums with clear roles and decision-making power.
- Create structured dialogue spaces between young people and local authorities.
- Ensure inclusive participation by actively involving young people with fewer opportunities.
- Use simplified consultation tools, workshops, and focus groups to gather youth input.
- Support youth representatives with mentoring, training, and logistical assistance.

3 Cross-sectoral collaboration in youth engagement

Norway's approach to youth engagement strongly emphasizes collaboration between multiple sectors, including government ministries, municipalities, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and the private sector. This cooperation responds to the recognition that complex youth challenges require integrated solutions and collective responsibility.



How it Works:

- The Ministry of Children and Families coordinates efforts across ministries such as Education, Health, and Labor to align youth policies and initiatives.
- Municipalities collaborate with local NGOs, youth councils, schools, and businesses to co-create programs and youth-friendly services.
- Cross-sector forums and networks facilitate information sharing, joint planning, and resource pooling, ensuring a cohesive approach to youth engagement.

What makes it successful:

- Clear roles and shared goals among stakeholders.
- Institutionalized structures for dialogue and partnership.
- Funding mechanisms that support joint projects and innovation.
- Active involvement of youth representatives in decision-making bodies.
- Flexibility to adapt programs to local contexts through municipal leadership.

Challenges:

- Coordinating diverse stakeholders while balancing autonomy and accountability.
- Ensuring youth voices are meaningfully included, not symbolic.
- Sustaining long-term commitment beyond political cycles.
- Addressing inequities between regions or communities.

How to adapt in other countries:

- Establish inter-ministerial youth councils or working groups.
- Promote strong local government engagement and partnerships with community organizations.
- Secure dedicated funding for cross-sector youth initiatives.
- Develop mechanisms for youth participation at all levels to ensure responsiveness and ownership.

7.2 Positive Practices from Participating Countries



Context:

1. Local Youth Councils in Albania represent a good practice for strengthening youth participation in local governance. They are consultative bodies established at the municipal level as part of the national youth policy framework, with the purpose of ensuring that young people's voices are included in local decision-making processes. In a context where youth participation has often been limited or symbolic, Local Youth Councils provide a structured and legitimate channel for dialogue between young people and local authorities.

Description of the practice:

The councils are composed of young representatives selected through open calls or youth organisations, and they work by providing recommendations on youth-related policies, raising local youth concerns, and facilitating regular communication with municipal institutions. Through this mechanism, young people are not only consulted but also encouraged to take an active role in shaping their local communities.

Outcomes:

As a result, municipalities benefit from better-informed policies that reflect the real needs of young people, while young citizens develop a stronger sense of ownership, civic responsibility, and trust in public institutions. The experience shows that clear mandates, institutional support, and capacity-building for youth representatives are essential for the councils to be effective and sustainable.

Adaptation tips:

For successful adaptation and scaling, it is important to ensure transparent and inclusive selection processes, to provide training for youth council members, and to start with pilot municipalities before expanding the model more widely. In this way, Local Youth Councils can continue to serve as a valuable tool for participatory democracy and youth empowerment at the local level.

2. Albania plans to pilot a combined version of the **Arendal Week and the Democracy Week in 2026** as an innovative approach to strengthen participatory democracy and public dialogue at the local level. The pilot will bring together open public debates, multi-stakeholder discussions, and civic engagement activities into a single coordinated framework, adapted to the Albanian context. The experience from this pilot phase will be used to assess its relevance, impact, and potential for wider replication across the country.

**Context**

The Youth to the Region – (Mládež kraji) is a program designed to support youth initiatives in the 14 Regions in the Czech Republic. It is operated through the web portal mladezkraji.cz and focuses on young people aged 15 to 26 years. The program aims to bridge the gap between young people's creative ideas and the formal requirements of public administration and project management. It operates as a structured partnership between informal youth groups, the municipality, and regional youth councils and Regional Youth NGO Umbrella.

Description of the practice:

The practice follows a rigorous 5-step methodology to transform a simple idea into a community-beneficial reality:

1. **Idea registration:** Young people register a community-improving idea on a web portal within five minutes.
2. **Consultation:** Organizers contact the youth group for a personal or online consultation to refine the idea into a project proposal.
3. **Weekend meeting:** Participants attend training where they learn project management, finalize applications, and network with other active youth⁹.
4. **Personal presentation (defense):** Representatives defend their project in a 3-minute presentation before a City Council committee. This direct interaction is a key tool for youth workers to address political apathy, as it allows young people to see that their voices can influence local government.
5. **Realization:** Supported projects receive up to 40,000 CZK (around 1500 EUR). Youth groups implement the project with constant support from the town.

Outcomes:

- Approximately 100 young people per year gain hands-on experience in project management, public speaking, and responsibility for public funds.
- Young people are empowered to lead their own projects, moving from passive observers to active creators of community life.
- The program facilitates a direct dialogue between youth and city representatives, which is the primary method for building trust and overcoming low trust in public institutions. It allows the municipality to learn directly about youth needs.

- Projects contribute to culture, sports, the environment, and social inclusion. The practice specifically addresses inclusive practices for marginalized groups by allowing projects to focus on multicultural environments and human rights, helping to reduce marginalization risks.

Lessons learned:

- The transparency of the public defense and the immediate feedback from the City Council are essential for building mutual trust between the town and its young citizens. By involving youth directly in decisions about public funds, youth workers effectively combat apathy.
- The program is designed to be technically feasible and easy to learn, ensuring there are no economic barriers to participation. This ensures that even youth from disadvantaged backgrounds can participate.
- Moving from an idea to a project requires a "Consultation" phase and "Weekend Training" to ensure the project is feasible²⁴.
- Making the initial entry point very fast (5 minutes) is crucial for engaging youth who might otherwise be discouraged by bureaucracy.

Adaptation tips:

- Keep idea submission simple and fast.
- Make the program easy to learn, use, and replicate locally.
- Support projects on human rights, diversity, and social inclusion.
- Include direct presentations to officials and experts to build trust.
- Offer ongoing mentoring and financial support without requiring co-funding.



Context

Don't close your eyes project: Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a highly sensitive and often taboo topic within refugee and migrant communities, particularly among young men. Cultural norms, gender stereotypes, lack of safe spaces for dialogue, and language barriers often prevent open discussion and critical reflection on harmful behaviors and attitudes. Traditional awareness-raising approaches led by external professionals frequently struggle to reach young men effectively or generate meaningful engagement. This context highlighted the need for peer-led, culturally and linguistically accessible interventions that empower young men from refugee communities to become active agents of change within their own social environments.

Description of the practice

The GBV Mentoring Programme was designed as a peer education and capacity-building initiative targeting young refugee men.

- **Recruitment and selection:** Ten young men from refugee communities were recruited through an open call, followed by interviews and shortlisting to ensure motivation, commitment, and basic communication skills.
- **Employment and commitment:** Mentors were hired for 20 hours per month over six months, reinforcing accountability and recognizing their contribution as formal work experience.
- **Capacity-building training:** Mentors participated in an intensive one-week training on Gender-Based Violence, including its forms, root causes, cultural dimensions, power dynamics, and prevention strategies.

The training was highly interactive and experiential, allowing participants to reflect on personal experiences, cultural norms, stereotypes, and their own behaviors.

- **Co-creation of workshops:** Following the training, mentors took part in weekly mentoring and preparation meetings. With continuous support, they designed their own workshops in their native languages, focusing on GBV aspects most relevant to their communities and of personal interest to them.
- **Community implementation:** Each mentor delivered at least one workshop to a minimum of 10 young men from their community. When needed, mentors worked in pairs to ensure confidence and quality of delivery.
- **Awareness-raising and dissemination:** After completing the workshops, mentors co-created social media content and podcasts in their own languages, sharing reflections, key messages, and awareness-raising content to stimulate broader community dialogue.

Outcomes

- **Direct reach:** At least 100 young men from refugee communities participated in GBV awareness workshops delivered by peers in their own language.
- **Empowerment of mentors:** Ten young men gained practical skills in research, workshop design, public speaking, facilitation, communication, and critical thinking.
- **Attitude change:** Mentors demonstrated increased self-reflection on gender norms, stereotypes, and personal responsibility, acting as role models within their communities.
- **Community dialogue:** The programme opened safe spaces for discussion on GBV in communities where the topic is often silenced.
- **Employability:** Participation provided formal work experience, strengthening mentors' CVs and professional confidence.

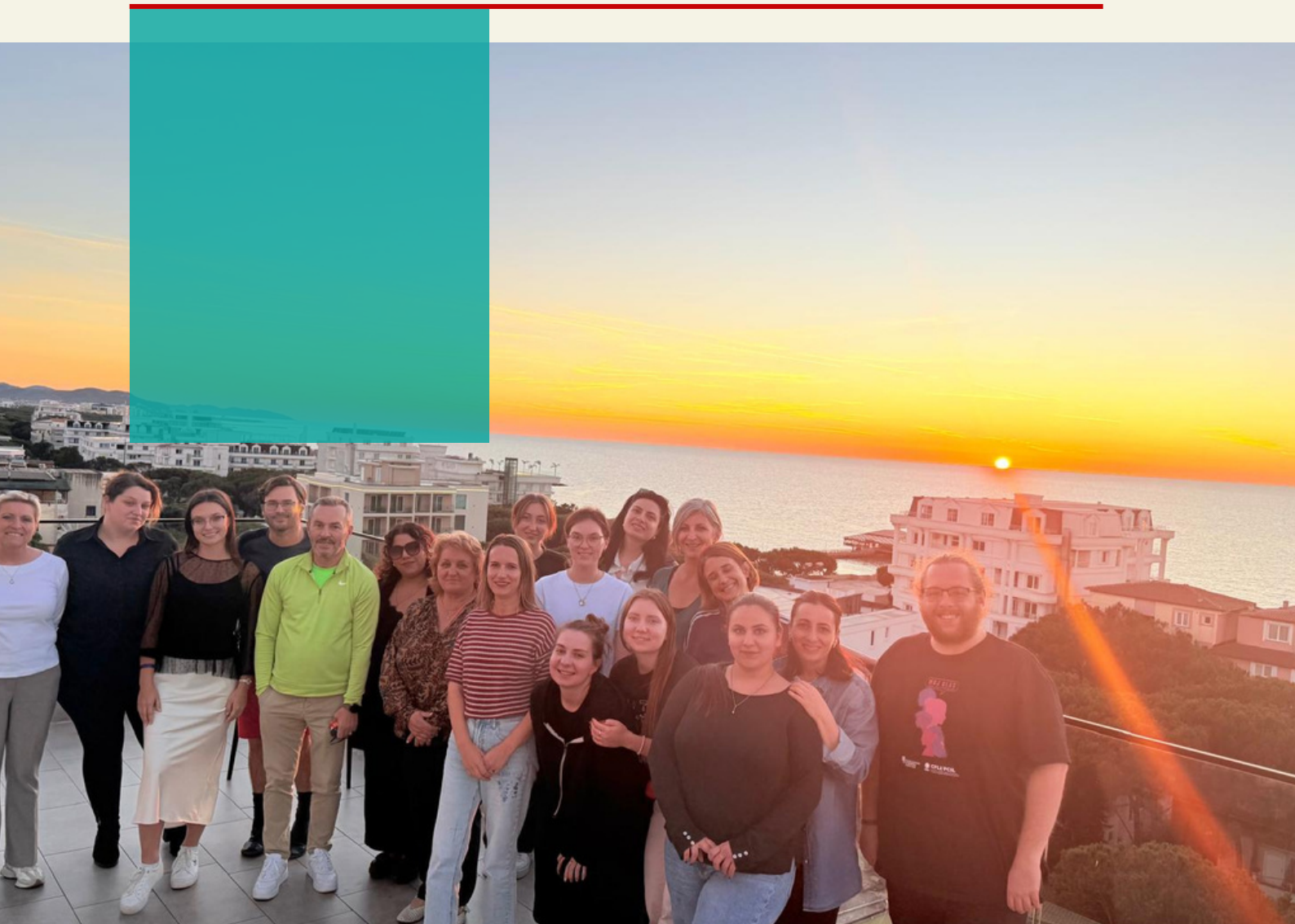
Lessons learned:

- Peer-led approaches are highly effective: Messages delivered by trusted community members in the same language significantly increased engagement and openness.
- Paid roles increase commitment: Treating mentors as employees reinforced responsibility and sustained motivation.
- Instability must be anticipated: Housing insecurity, seasonal work, and migration-related challenges affected participation and required flexibility in planning.
- Support structures are essential: Many participants needed close mentoring, co-facilitation, and assistance with recruitment from their communities.
- Safe spaces enable transformation: Experiential and emotionally safe training allowed participants to critically examine deeply rooted beliefs and behaviors.

Adaptation tips:

- Invest in mentor preparation: Allocate sufficient time for intensive training and ongoing weekly mentoring.
- Ensure flexibility: Build in contingency plans for participant drop-out due to instability or seasonal employment.
- Use native languages: Deliver workshops and awareness materials in participants' mother tongues to maximize impact.
- Recognize participation as work: Paid or formally recognized roles significantly enhance commitment and outcomes.
- Provide recruitment support: Do not assume mentors can independently mobilize participants; offer logistical and outreach assistance.

**Learning does not
end with the last
page, it begins with
the first action.**



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