SLOVENIA

National Report

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YOUTH@WORK
FOSTERING YOUTH WORK AND
MANAGEMENT IN NGO'S

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Content

INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the Erasmus+ YOUTH@WORK project, which aims to research and assess the current needs of youth work in project partner's countries. It provides an overview of the current situation of young people, especially those with disadvantaged background in Slovenia, including their needs and problems. Additionally, it covers the experiences and needs of youth workers who work with these young people, as well as recommendations and key elements of youth work in Slovenia. The report also includes some examples of good practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research method consists of two components: A theoretical part – carried out through a desk research - literature review (data, document and web research) and an empirical part which includes the results of the focus groups discussions/interviews with 17 participants – youth and social workers working in Slovenian public organisations and NGOs. Beside this each focus groups participant also filled in a standardised survey questionnaire (Participants Information Sheet) which was provided to all project partners by the project coordinator.

The desk research was conducted in April and May 2024, the focus group discussions in May and June 2024.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Analysis on current situation of young people having
disadvantaged background and needs of youth
workers working with youngsters with
disadvantaged background

3.1.1. Framework of youth work [1] [2] [3]

The youth work field in Slovenia is currently regulated within following framework:
The Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector (Zakon o javnem interesu v mladinskem sektorju, ZJIMS)[4], addopted in 2010, is the most complete and binding official document that addresses how to deal with youth issues and the needs and/or rights of young people.

It defines the public interest in the youth sector and how to implement it. Furthermore, it represents a legal basis for the adoption of the **Resolution on the National Youth Programme** (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za mladino, **ReNPM13–22**)[5] which is an overarching strategic public document or action plan that outlines the main directions for policy making on youth matters at the national level. It is the thematic guide for all youth policies and programmes. Current Programme was set for the period 2013-2022, new covering the period 2023 -2032 is in the parliamentary procedure and expected to be adopted in the mid of 2024.
The Slovenian **Youth Council Act** (Zakon o mladinskih svetih, ZMS)[6] adopted in 2000, regulates the status, operation, activities, and financing of the National Youth Council of Slovenia and local community youth councils.
According to the ZJIMS, the State, local self-governing communities and in areas where members of the Italian and Hungarian national minorities live autochthonously, their self-governing national communities have the responsibility of governing the youth sector.
The main national public authority is the **Ministry of Education, Science and Sport** and its independent body, the **Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth**. The Office for Youth is an administrative body that takes care of the needs and interests of young people and the youth sector in the area of youth work. It shapes youth policies in an autonomous way, including by providing financial support for youth programmes and encouraging research on youth. Its main focus is on fostering youth work, coordinating actions within youth policy and ensuring effective social dialogue with young people. It also coordinates the work of the **Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth** - an advisory body, that helps with decision-making on issues related to youth and the youth sector. It also reviews proposed laws and other regulations and measures of the Government that affect the area of youth work and coordinates the youth related issues with other ministries. Cross-sectoral cooperation is essential to address the challenges young people face. The co-operation of major actors across sectors is usually project-based, as systemic cooperation would require continuous funding.

According to the ZJIMS, local communities carry out the youth policy at a local level based on their own interests, needs, abilities and situations, such as the number and composition of residents, its economic strength, and spatial and personnel resources in the youth sector. Local communities can carry out the youth policy at a local level by adopting a local youth programme/strategy, setting up a working or advisory body for youth issues, financially supporting the programmes in the youth sector, and implementing other measures in the youth sector.
The involvement of **local communities** in developing youth polices differs and depends on the size of each local community. Bigger cities: Ljubljana and Maribor, have a structure within the city administration (youth department) that offers public tenders (for youth programmes, projects, information network, international activities), youth research, networking NGO in youth sector, information network for young people, educational programmes and trainings for youth workers, empowerment of youth NGO structures. Most local communities do not have a special office for youth or a person who would be officially responsible for youth affairs.
The ZJIMS (Article 3) defines the target youth group as adolescents and young adults of both genders, who are aged between 15 years and a completed 29 years.

[1] YouthWiki; https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/overview
[2] Deželan T, Vombergar N. Kratek oris mladinskega dela v Sloveniji [Internet]. 1. elektronska izd. Ljubljana: Zavod Movit; 2020; https://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Tematske/Kratek_oris_mladinskega_dela_v_Sloveniji_web.pdf
[3] Zupan B. Country sheet on youth work in Slovenia; 2018; https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262550/Slovenia_country_sheet_youth+work.pdf/d25d9726-e54a-0582-15ac-b042017d769f?t=1536677541000
[4] https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5834
[5] https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=RESO93
[6] https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2614

3.1.1. Framework of youth work

The involvement of local communities in developing youth polices differs and depends on the size of each local community. Bigger cities: Ljubljana and Maribor, have a structure within the city administration (youth department) that offers public tenders (for youth programmes, projects, information network, international activities), youth research, networking NGO in youth sector, information network for young people, educational programmes and trainings for youth workers, empowerment of youth NGO structures. Most local communities do not have a special office for youth or a person who would be officially responsible for youth affairs.

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The total population of young people aged 15 to 29 in Slovenia at the end of 2023 was approximately 313,000 representing 14,8% of the country's total population[7]. There are indications that the rapid decline in the number of young people, noticed over the past decades (e.g. in 2008 the population counted approximately 404,000 persons) has been stopped and stabilized in the last five years (Figure 1).
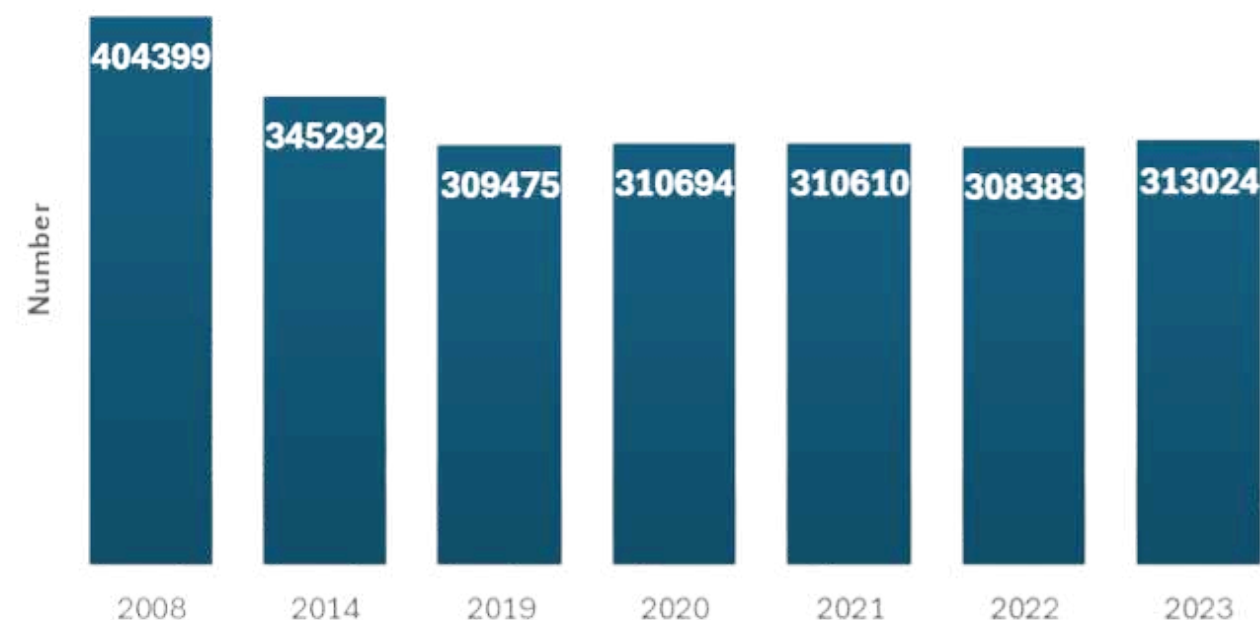

Figure 1: Total population 15-29 years; Source: SURS; https://www.stat.si/statweb

3.1.1. Framework of youth work

Youth migration has been a significant factor in the demographic changes observed. There has been a noticeable trend of young people moving abroad for education and employment opportunities. However, in recent years, efforts to attract young talent back to Slovenia have seen some success, with return migration rates increasing slightly.

Young people are predominantly concentrated in urban areas, with the highest numbers in the capital, Ljubljana, and other major cities like Maribor and Koper. Over the past decade, there has been a gradual migration from rural to urban areas. In 2013, rural regions had a higher proportion of young people, but by 2023, urbanization trends have led to more young individuals living in cities, seeking better educational and employment opportunities.

The educational attainment among young people aged 15-29 years shows that as of end 2023 approximately 50% have completed secondary education, 18% have tertiary education, and 32% have only primary education or less. The share of population with tertiary education in the age class 25-29 is round 38%.[8]

The ZJIMS (Article 3) defines "**youth work**" as "an organised and target-oriented form of youth action and is for the youth, within which the youth, based on their own efforts, contribute to their own inclusion in society, strengthen their competences and contribute to the development of the community. The implementation of various forms of youth work is based on the volunteer participation of the youth regardless of their interest, cultural, principle or political orientation."

Beočanin[9] cites several other definitions in use both in Slovenia and elsewhere, from which some common basic characteristics can be extracted:

Learning experience: Involvement in youth work provides a unique learning experience for every young individual. Youth work is considered part of non-formal learning, separate from the formal education system.

Planned process: Youth work is a planned process, ensuring its ability to achieve educational and other effects.

Active participation: Youth work aims to develop young people into active citizens who easily integrate into society and contribute to its development. Youth participation is understood as active social engagement by young people in everyday (social, political, etc.) life, with the goal of taking an active role as citizens.

Personal and social development of young individuals: Those involved in youth work undergo personal and social development in this process.

[8] Source: SURS; https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStat/en/Podrocja/Index/100/population
[9] Beočanin T in Beočanin T, Cepin M, Dogenik S, Guček M, Mrak Merhar I, Pucelj Lukan P. Mladinsko delo v teoriji in praksi. Ljubljana, Mladinski svet Slovenije; 2011 p.52.

3.1.2. Profile of youth workers [10] [11] [12]

In Slovenia, the status of the youth worker is accessible to every individual who expresses an intention to work as a youth worker. Youth workers can be paid employees or can be involved in youth activities on a voluntary basis. Involvement can be full- time or part-time among both paid employees and volunteers, also involving a rich variety of people.

For employees working in public sector (e.g. in publicly funded youth centres), the Catalogue of functions, jobs and titles specifies five roles (Youth worker I, Youth worker II, Youth programmes coordinator, Head of youth programmes and Specialist for youth work) connected to youth work, depending on tariff class and formal education level[13].

The exact number of youth workers is not officially recorded.

There are no minimum qualification standards for publicly funded youth workers or for volunteer/unpaid youth workers. Since 2017 youth worker as a vocation/occupation has been recognised as part of the National Vocational Qualification System and with it, part of the Vocational Education and training system.

Occupational competences of youth workers defined in the occupational standard[14] are (youth worker is able to):

- plan, implement and evaluate youth programmes in cooperation with young people;
- establish and maintain cooperative and confidential relations with a young person;
- work with young people in groups and teams;
- enable young people to acquire competences;
- undertake activities to disseminate the results of young people's work;
- ensure the quality of one's own work and to take care of one's own personal and professional development;
- respect the principles of sustainable development and the protection of health at work with young people.

The occupational profile of a youth worker involves different types of staff, especially within organisations in the youth sector. Youth workers are running youth organisations or groups of young people, do project work, volunteering, non-formal education and other professional support to young people. They also help young people to develop their skills and talents, especially in the field of extracurricular activities. In communication with young people, youth worker implements and designs youth work programmes. The youth worker is an expert in organizing, implementing and evaluating the activities of young people in their free time and placing them in the decision-making processes.

[10] YouthWiki; https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/105-youth-workers
[11] Deželan T, Vombergar N. Kratek oris mladinskega dela v Sloveniji [Internet]. 1. elektronska izd. Ljubljana: Zavod Movit; 2020; https://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Tematske/Kratek_oris_mladinskega_dela_v_Sloveniji_web.pdf
[12] Zupan B. Country sheet on youth work in Slovenia; 2018; https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262550/Slovenia_country_sheet_youth+work.pdf/d25d9726-e54a-0582-15ac-b042017d769f?t=1536677541000
[13] GOV.SI; http://www.pportal.gov.si/FDMN/index.html
[14] Institute of Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training; https://npk.si/en/catalogues/3365545/

3.1.2. Profile of youth workers

In his book "Kam z mularijo?" Albert Mrgole[15] outlines the profile of a youth worker in, emphasizing several key characteristics and skills. According to Mrgole, an effective youth worker is someone who possesses:

1. **Empathy and Understanding:** Youth workers must have a strong ability to empathize with young people and understand their unique challenges and needs. This involves active listening and creating a safe, non-judgmental environment where youth feel comfortable expressing themselves.
2. **Professional Training and Continuous Education:** A solid educational background in psychology, sociology, or social work is essential. Furthermore, youth workers should engage in continuous professional development to stay updated with the latest research and best practices in the field.
3. **Personal Involvement:** Mrgole highlights the importance of personal involvement and authenticity. Youth workers should bring their own experiences and personality into their work, fostering genuine relationships with the youth.
4. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The ability to adapt to different situations and the diverse needs of young people is crucial. This means being creative in problem-solving and open to using various approaches and methods.
5. **Commitment to Non-Formal Education:** Mrgole emphasizes the value of non-formal education in youth work, advocating for learning experiences that occur outside traditional educational settings. This includes activities that promote personal development, social skills, and active citizenship.
6. **Collaboration and Networking:** Effective youth workers collaborate with other professionals, organizations, and community members. Building a strong network is vital for providing comprehensive support to young people.

Currently there is no formal education for a youth worker in Slovenia. There are also no accredited courses in youth work, but the Faculty of Social Work (University of Ljubljana) provides a course on Concepts of social work with youth, that is part of the social work studies[16].

Contents relevant to youth work, such as the life courses of young people, participation, social exclusion of young people, strategies for their inclusion, unemployment and alternative employment, discrimination, anti-discriminatory practice, advocacy, and similar, are also included in their programs by the Faculty of Education, the Department of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Social Sciences.[17]

The profession of a youth worker can be obtained only through the National Occupational Qualification System, which means that the candidate draws up a compilation of a portfolio (e.g. certificates, supporting documents, reference letters, products, recognition documents …) with his/her experience and defends it in front of the committee. If the candidate fails to prove all the competences from the occupational standard with the portfolio, he/she needs to pass the exam. The qualification certificate is issued by the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and is recognized both nationally and at the European level.

Although there is no formal education to become a youth worker or a youth leader, there are many different training opportunities available for youth workers within different (youth) organisations (s. also chapter 3.5.).

[15] Mrgole A. Kam z mularijo?: načela kakovosti neformalnega dela z mladimi. [Ljubljana]; Maribor: Ministrstvo za šolstvo, znanost in šport, Urad Republike Slovenije za mladino; Aristej; 2003. p. 81-86
[16] University of Ljubljana, Faculty of social work; https://www.fsd.uni-lj.si/izobrazevanje/dodiplomski-studij/ucni_nacrti/program_1%20_stopnje/2023050914064430/
[17] Pazlar N. Profil mladinskega delavca v Sloveniji danes in v prihodnosti: diplomsko delo [Internet]. [Ljubljana]: [N. Pazlar]; 2009. http://dk.fdv.uni-lj.si/diplomska/pdfs/pazlar-nina.pdf

3.1.3 National strategies for youth work and priorities of the national policies on youth work[18]

There is no specific national youth strategy on youth work in Slovenia. The Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector Act **(ZJIMS)** provides youth work with a legal basis. It stipulates that the public interest in the field of the youth sector is realized by providing norms and other conditions for the development of areas of youth work and the inclusion of the youth perspective into strategies, policies, and measures that affect young people. ZJIMS defines areas of the young sector which are also areas of the youth work:

- autonomy of youth;
- non-formal learning and training and increasing the competences of youth;
- access of youth to the labour market and enterprise development of youth;
- care for youth with fewer opportunities in society;
- volunteering, solidarity and intergenerational participation of youth;
- mobility of youth and international integration;
- promotion of healthy lifestyle the prevention of various forms of youth dependencies;
- access of youth to cultural activities and the promotion of creativity and innovation among youth; and,
- participation of youth in managing public affairs in society.

In accordance with the ZJIMS, the Resolution on the National Youth Programme (ReNPM) as the fundamental programme document defines the priorities and measures that are in the public interest in the youth sector. The current ReNPM, set for the period 2013-2022 is based on a study on the position of young people in Slovenia »Youth 2010[18]«. The study covered demographic change and intergenerational cooperation, education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, participation, creativity, culture and leisure time, the virtualisation of daily life, health and wellbeing, the financial status of young people, housing and living conditions, globalisation and youth mobility, values, sustainable social action plans and visions of the future, personal characteristics and the religiosity.

As mentioned above, the new ReNPM, covering the years 2023-2032, is in the final procedure stage of adoption by the Slovenian parliament. The Programme considers the results of the new national youth study – Youth 2020[20].

[18] YouthWiki; https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/103-support-to-youth-work
[19] Lavrič M, Flere S, Tavčar Krajnc M, Klanjšek R, Musil B, Naterer A, Kirbiš A, Divjak M, Lešek P. Mladina 2010: družbeni profil mladih v Sloveniji [Internet]. 1. izd. Ljubljana; Maribor: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, Urad RS za mladino; Aristej; 2011.; https://arhiv.mlad.si/files/knjiznica/mladina2010-2(1).pdf
[20] Lavrič M, Deželan T, Klanjšek R, Lahe D, Naterer A, Radovan M, Rutar T, Sardoč M, Uršič M, Majce M, Cupar T, Matjašič M, Nacevski K, Vombergar N, Prešeren J. Mladina 2020: položaj mladih v Sloveniji [Internet]. 1. elektronska izd. Maribor; Ljubljana: Univerza v Mariboru, Univerzitetna založba; Založba Univerze v Ljubljani;2021 https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-4PASDZFN?&language=eng

3.1.3 National strategies for youth work and priorities of the national policies on youth work

The objectives and priorities of the ReNPM13-22 are divided into six domains. There is no separate domain/section on youth work, however, youth work is mentioned in the Section 6: "Youth and society and the importance of the youth sector" and Section 2: »Education«. Objectives of the Programme including references to youth work are:

- Promoting the establishment and development of organisations in the youth sector, developing key areas of the youth sector and ensuring the functioning of disorganized youth (Objective 6.2.2.), Creating capacities for quality youth work and establishing a national training and education system for youth workers and youth leaders (Priority subsection 8). The indicators for success are the number of persons who acquire a qualification for a youth worker by education or part of programmes of higher education institutions, by gender and established national training system for youth workers and youth.

The capacity building for quality youth work within this objective is divided into four areas:

- Ensuring professional profile of the youth worker is formalized, promoting active citizenship, development of local youth policies, and promoting youth work.
- Promoting and strengthening the involvement in international youth work and learning mobility in youth work (Objective 6.2.3.), Promoting mobility in the youth sector (Priority subsection 10). Main assessment indicators are young people enrolled in non-formal education, international cooperation, youth organisation enrolled in international activities.
- Strengthening the research and analysis segment in the youth field (Objective 6.2.4.), Establishment of a national youth research organisation (Priority subsection 11). Assessment indicators are establishment of a unit for youth research (within existing research organisations) and number of analyses and surveys that analyse and substantively evaluate the impact of international youth work and learning mobility in youth work.
- Improving the competence of young people (Objective 2.2.1), Establishing comprehensive recognition of non-formal forms of knowledge and experience and linking formal and non-formal education (Priority subsection 1).Main assessment indicators for this priority are the placement of the problem of non-recognition of informally acquired knowledge and skills on the political decision-making agenda; the introduction of the status of a youth worker or youth leader in secondary schools and universities (following the example of the status of athletes, artists); and the consideration of active participation in organizations in the youth sector as part of the completed mandatory elective content in schools.

The field of youth work with disadvantaged young population is tackled within special Objective 6.2.7. - Greater social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, Priority subsection 15- Improving and strengthening programs that promote and support the social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. Assessment indicators fort his priority are: number of calls for proposals related to the social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities; number of calls for proposals on the topic of social inclusion, for which organisations in the youth sector may apply; number of programmes to increase social inclusion within the framework of the measures and active employment policy programmes; number of young people (to age 29) enrolled in programmes for increasing social inclusion within the framework of measures and active employment policy programmes, by gender.

3.1.4 Types of organizations including in youth work and activities of organizations carrying out youth work [21] [22]

The youth work in Slovenia is mainly carried out in **national youth organisations, youth centres and othernon-governmental organizations that work with young people**[23].

A **national youth organization** is a voluntary organization, the majority of whose leadership and membership are young people aged 14 to 29. It is organized and operates at the national level and has numerous members organized in local units of the organization. Its purpose is to represent and develop the interests of young people, to perform youth work in accordance with the organization's statute, and to encourage young people to unite and participate in society. The N**ational Youth Council of Slovenia** (Mladinski svet Slovenije)[24] is an umbrella organisation of national youth organisations of various interests, ideological, or political orientations. operating at the national level. The mission of the Youth Council of Slovenia is to represent the interests of member youth organisations. Their main activities are creating youth policies, conducting dialogue throughout the non-governmental youth field, encouraging the development of youth work and non-formal education, and other youth activities that support the development of youth initiatives and youth organisations. The National Youth Council of Slovenia has 11 full member organisations and two associated member organisations. **Youth Councils of Local Communities (Mladinski sveti lokalnih skupnosti)** are umbrella associations of youth organisations at the local level, which represent the interests of young people and youth organisations relation to municipal authorities and all other institutions. Youth Councils of Local Communities also organize trainings and other community events for young people or youth organisations.

Youth Centre is an organized functional centre for youth, provided by the local community or another legal entity of public or private law, or an individual, where programs in the youth sector and youth work at the local level are carried out.

[21] YouthWiki; https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/102-administration-and-governance-of-youth-work
[22] Deželan T, Vombergar N. Kratek oris mladinskega dela v Sloveniji [Internet]. 1. elektronska izd. Ljubljana: Zavod Movit; 2020; https://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Tematske/Kratek_oris_mladinskega_dela_v_Sloveniji_web.pdf
[23] Urad Republike Slovenije za mladino (gov.si); https://www.gov.si/teme/mladinski-sektor/
[24] Mladinski svet Slovenije

3.1.4 Types of organizations including in youth work and activities of organizations carrying out youth work

Youth Centre is an organized functional centre for youth, provided by the local community or another legal entity of public or private law, or an individual, where programs in the youth sector and youth work at the local level are carried out.

Tasks of youth centres are:

- They care for the conditions of operation, socializing, and other activities of young individuals, regardless of whether they are members of youth organizations or not, and of youth organizations of local communities;
- They take care of the youth infrastructure;
- They provide appropriate spatial conditions and equipment for the implementation of youth work and ensure the proper training of staff to support youth work;
- They enable the development of creative and critical young individuals;
- They develop and implement programs in the field of information and counselling and non-formal learning;
- They participate in the implementation of youth mobility, voluntary youth work, active citizenship, research work of young people, and international networking;
- They provide support to other programs in the youth sector in the local environment.

Results of the annual evaluation of the tool for recording and monitoring the effects of youth work – Logbook, for the year 2023, published by the Youth Network MaMa indicate, that in the youth centres open activities in which all young people can participate dominate over closed activities limited to various interest and project groups of young people. The most common activities are social gatherings, followed by cultural and creative activities, educational assistance, counselling, sports, information services, and active citizenship[25]. The work is conducted in centre's locations or in the form of street work. The latter is increasingly recognized in practice as particularly effective for working with vulnerable groups of young people who would otherwise not engage in other forms of organizational programs[26].

[25] Mladinska mreža MaMa; Logbook 2023: uspehi in trendi v mladinskih centrih; https://www.mreza-mama.si/logbook-2023-uspehi-in-trendi-v-mladinskih-centrih/
[26] Rakovec K., Vodeb N.A. in: Mednarodna konferenca Mladinskega doma Jarše 3. Sodobni izzivi dela z mladimi iz ranljivih skupin: 3. mednarodna konferenca Mladinskega doma Jarše: konferenčni zbornik= Contemporary Challenges of Working with At-risk Youth [Internet]. 1. izd. Ljubljana: Mladinski dom Jarše; = Jarše Youth Home; 2023; https://e.mdj.si/konferenca/zbornik2023.pdf

3.1.4 Types of organizations including in youth work and activities of organizations carrying out youth work

During the Covid-19 period many youth centres adopted and moved their activities very quickly and successfully also to online platforms. In that time the Network MaMa established so called padlets[27] where a comprehensive overview of activities and innovative good practices of centres were available in one place.

Other non-governmental organizations are non-profit and voluntary organizations that do not fall into any of the groups mentioned above, and at the national or regional level, they implement youth programs and programs for young people. These also include organizations that carry out so-called support and service programs for young people, that is, programs that contribute to the higher quality of youth work, youth policy, or the position of young people. An important role among them on national level have:

- **Youth Network MaMa**[28] (Mladinska mreža MaMa) which combines and represents organisations that run youth centres or are active in youth work in Slovenia in order to support the youth, their spending of quality free time and a better life in society. MaMa also provides non- formal education for youth and youth workers. Currently it has 56 members.
- **Private Institute for the development of youth mobility[29] (Zavod MOVIT),** which performs tasks of the national agency for the European Union programme Erasmus+: Youth in Action. MOVIT manages indirectly centralized EU budget funds and provides support for various forms of learning mobility in youth work and enhances solidarity at local, national and European level, while carrying out activities for the general development of youth work and non- formal learning. An important part of MOVIT's activity is also the publicity, through which some of the basic works for the development of youth work, especially learning mobility in youth work, were created.
- **The institute NEFIKS**[30] **(Zavod Nefiks)** a youth organization, which advises young people to consider non-formal education as a reference when searching for employment. The institute offers counselling and tutoring in this field targeting also young people with fewer opportunities.

In the field of social inclusion of disadvantaged young people, youth organisations and non-governmental organisations as the main youth work providers, have the responsibility for spreading information about the needs of young people with fewer opportunities and advocating the interests of the socially excluded. The YouthWiki[31] lists some of organisations and their activities:

- **Young Street Network**[32] **(Mreža Mlada ulica)** by the non-governmental non-profit organization **BOB Institute**[33] **(Zavod BOB)** offers young people in Ljubljana alternative ways of spending their time than simply gathering in public spaces. With young people and local communities, the project creates new solutions that improve the quality of coexistence. The objective of the Young Street Network is to foster social inclusion of young people through action, giving them a voice and shedding light on the issues from their perspective.

[27] Mladinska Mreža MaMa; Prakse mladinskih centrov v času epidemije COVID-19 (padlet.com); https://padlet.com/mrezamama/prakse-mladinskih-centrov-v-asu-epidemije-covid-19-j3o7kgurg2mi
[28] Mladinska mreža MaMa; http://www.mreza-mama.si/about-us/
[29] Zavod MOVIT; http://www.movit.si/
[30] Zavod NEFIKS; https://nefiks.si/article?path=/kontakt/zavod-nefiks
[31] YouthWiki; https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/47-youth-work-to-foster-social-inclusion
[32] Zavod BOB http://www.zavod-bob.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Usp-MUD-info-paket-o-MMU.doc.pdf
[33] Zavod BOB; http://www.zavod-bob.si/

3.1.4 Types of organizations including in youth work and activities of organizations carrying out youth work

- **The Youth Information and Counselling Centre of Slovenia**[34] **(Dnevni center za otroke in mladostnike – MISSS**) is a non-governmental non-profit national youth information and counselling service, collaborating with 16 regional and local youth information and counselling centres throughout Slovenia. Applying European standards and principles of generalist youth information work, local centres disseminate information in their local space and provide counselling and assistance in choosing appropriate information.

- **The Social Academy**[35] **(Socialna akademija)** encourages social responsibility among Slovene citizens through education, research and cultural activities, which are its three constituent units. Its main activities include various forms of education, cultural and educational evenings, production of a number of publications, cultural events and international activities.

- **Voluntariat - SCI Sloveni**a[36] **(Zavod voluntariat**) is a non-governmental non-profit organization coordinating volunteering activities and international volunteering camps in Slovenia. It organises trainings for volunteers and volunteer actions across country, where and when they are needed, in cooperation with local groups, associations and other organisations in areas such as nature preservation, peace education and helping the disadvantaged. Furthermore, it supports the initiatives of groups and individuals engaged in volunteer work. It also provides and disseminates information about volunteering possibilities in Slovenia as well as in other countries and brings together international campaigns that promote cooperation between people of different nationalities, religions, cultures and political beliefs, based on the belief that such mutual understanding can lead to the non-violent resolution of conflicts.

- **Slovene Philanthropy**[37] **(Slovenska filantropija**) is a humanitarian organization, operating in the public interest since 1992. Its programmes seek to enhance quality of life in the community and provide advocacy for the socially weak. The central activity of Slovene Philanthropy is the promotion of volunteering.

- **Society of Allies for Soft Landing**[38] **(Društvo zaveznikov mehkega pristanka)** is a youth non-governmental organization active in the fields of youth culture, non-formal education, contemporary art and social and humanitarian activities. It has recently devoted special attention to projects in the field of media education, film, video and multimedia. The organisation is involved in a range of activities at local, national and international levels to stimulate the active participation of young people through different forms of media.

[34] Zavod MISS; Zavod MISS; http://www.misss.si/
[35] Socialna akademija; https://socialna-akademija.si/
[36] Zavod Voluntariat; https://www.zavod-voluntariat.si/en/
[37] Slovenska filantropija; http://www.filantropija.org/en/
[38] Društvo zaveznikov mehkega pristanka; https://www.luksuz.si/en/

3.2. Good Practices on youth work aimed at youngsters having disadvantaged background

Name/Title of Good Practice/project/National, regional or local	YOUTH TRANSITION (PREHOD MLADIH) / National
Year of Good practice	2018-2022
Promoting organisation/institution	Združenjeizvajalcev zaposlitvene rehabilitacije v Republiki Sloveniji (Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Providers of the Republic of Slovenia)
Analyse the good practice considering cultural, generational or gender issues.	The project effectively addressed the cultural and systemic challenges faced by disadvantaged youth with disabilities. By providing a structured support system and fostering cooperation among various stakeholders, the Youth Transition project facilitated the inclusion of young people with special needs into the labor market, promoting their independence and enhancing their quality of life. The primary goals of the project included: Enhancing social inclusion and employability of young people with disabilities.Improving their competences and skills to facilitate better integration into the labor market.Raising awareness among employers about the benefits of hiring young people with disabilities.Creating a supportive environment bridging the gap between education and employment.Encouraging involvement from educational professionals, parents, and guardians in the transition process.
What are the main activities delivered during the good practice?	Professional assistance and vocational rehabilitation services were provided to the participants.Collaboration with schools, employers, and various professional organizations in health and social care.Implementation of a single supporting employment network to aid the transition from school to work.Engaging employers to offer job tours, work experiences, and employment opportunities.Workshops and counseling for young people, their parents, and educational professionals to support career planning and job placement.
Main Achievements obtained by the good practice	Involvement of 2,073 young people with disabilitiesEngagement of 36 professionals and active participation from parents and school counselors.Collaboration with 246 employers, leading to job opportunities and work experiences for the participants.Establishment of a multidisciplinary and inter-institutional approach, which proved effective in aiding the transition of young people with special needs.Positive feedback from participants, highlighting the project's role in providing career guidance, fostering new skills, and promoting social integration.
References	PMTD (prehodmladih.si) ; https://prehodmladih.si/en/

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References	PMTD (prehodmladih.si) ; https://prehodmladih.si/en/

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

There is no unique national definition of a young person with disadvantaged background. In the section 6 of the RNYP, priorities for the bigger social inclusion of »young people with fewer opportunities« are set without the exact definition of these term.

According to the definition used in the Implementation guidelines of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy[39] (young) people with fewer opportunities means (young)people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme.

The definition of young people with fewer opportunities can be very broad, but it certainly includes young people who, due to (low) education or incomplete schooling, have fewer chances in the labour market, those who grow up in difficult socio-economic conditions, or those who face greater obstacles to their integration into society due to their personal circumstances, and similar situations.[40]

M. Ule sees the youth unemployment also as one of the main reasons for the social vulnerability of young people, because it not only places the young person in an unfavourable socio-economic position, reduces their status and reputation in society, marginalizes them, but also causes long-term psychological damage and consequences on the self-image of the young person.[41]

In the following part of our research, we will therefore focus on the analysis of statistical data that reveals the current picture of youth unemployment. After the increase on nearly 18.500 persons due to pandemic effects in 2020, the total registered unemployed youth number in Slovenia aged 15-29, significantly dropped and has almost halved till end of 2023 on 9.852, whereby the two age brackets 15-24 years and 25-29 years equalized at each around 4,925 persons (Figure 2). The tendency continues also in current year, with latest available total number of 8.503 unemployed for April 2024[42]. Similar decreases can be seen in the registered unemployed rates, representing unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force within the age group 15-29 years (Figure 3), while the rate of the unemployed youth group within the whole unemployed population fluctuates with an indeterminate trend between 20.1% at the end of 2019 and 18.8% in April 2024[43].

[39] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/implementation-inclusion-diversity_apr21_en.pdf
[40] Zavod MOVIT; https://www.movit.si/ese/pomembneznacilnostiprograma0/socialno-vkljucevanje/
[41] Ule M, Rener T, Mencin Čeplak M, Tivadar B. Socialna ranljivost mladih. [Ljubljana]; [Šentilj]: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, Urad Republike Slovenije za mladino; Aristej; 2000 p. 49
[42] Zavod Republike Slovenije za zaposlovanje (ess.gov.si); https://www.ess.gov.si/partnerji/trg-dela/trg-dela-v-stevilkah/
[43] Zavod Republike Slovenije za zaposlovanje (ess.gov.si); https://www.ess.gov.si/partnerji/trg-dela/trg-dela-v-stevilkah/

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

Figure 2: Number of registered unemployed youth 2019-2023; Source: www.ess.gov.si

Figure 3: Registered youth unemployment rates 2019-2023; Source: www.ess.gov.si

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation
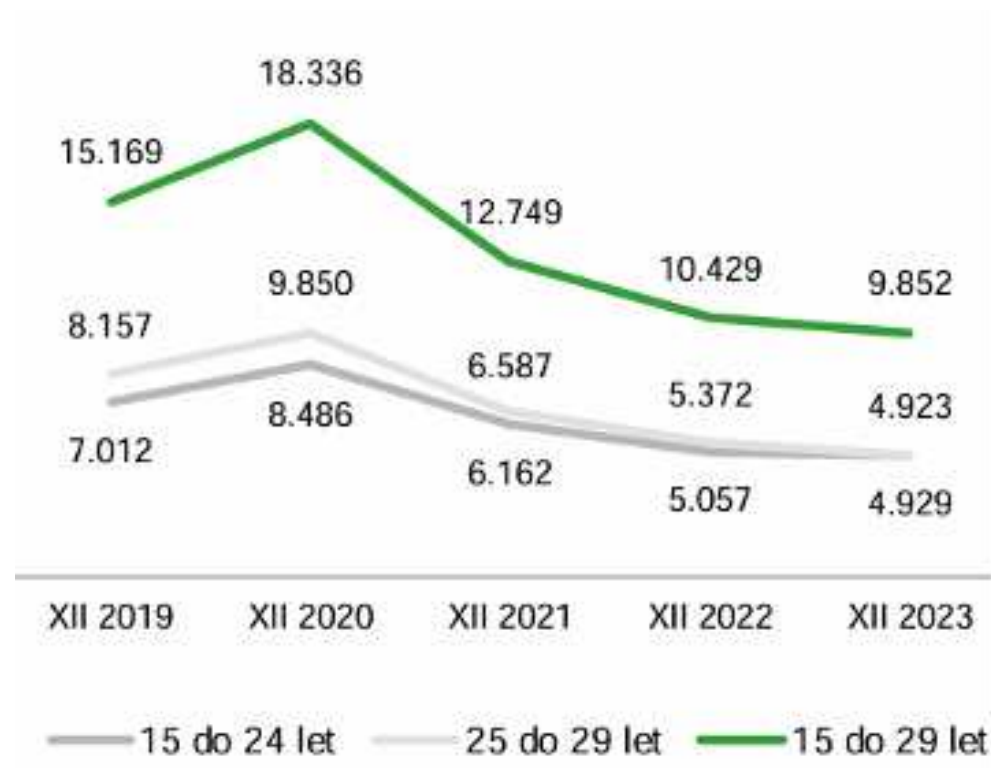
A relatively new indicator, but one that is given increasing importance by international organizations and the media is the so-called NEET indicator. NEET refers to young people, typically aged between 15 and 29, who are not participating in education, employment, or any form of training. This category includes those who may be unemployed and seeking work, as well as those who are economically inactive and not currently seeking employment or education opportunities.
The NEET rate has seen fluctuations over the past decade. It was approximately 13% in 2014, decreased to 8.8% in 2018, and slightly increased to 9.2% in 2020. In the post covid 19 period a stabilisation tendency of the indicator around 8% can be noted (Figure 4).

Time frequency: **Annual** Sex: **Total** Age class: **From 15 to 29 years** Training: **Neither formal nor non-formal education or training** Activity and employment status: **Not employed persons** Unit of measure: **Percentage**

Figure 4: Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, male & female; Source: Eurostat - Last updated date: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 11:00 PM; [edat_lfse_20__custom_11558405]https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/94a791d6-a20a-4fb6-8ea8-d7eb8361f377?lang=en

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

The NEET rate among female population is constantly higher than among young men (Figure 5, Figure 6).

Figure 5: Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, male; Source: Eurostat - Last updated date: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 11:00 PM; [edat_lfse_20__custom_11558405]https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/edd4447e-7808-4666-816e-4a0dc9f6f344?lang=en
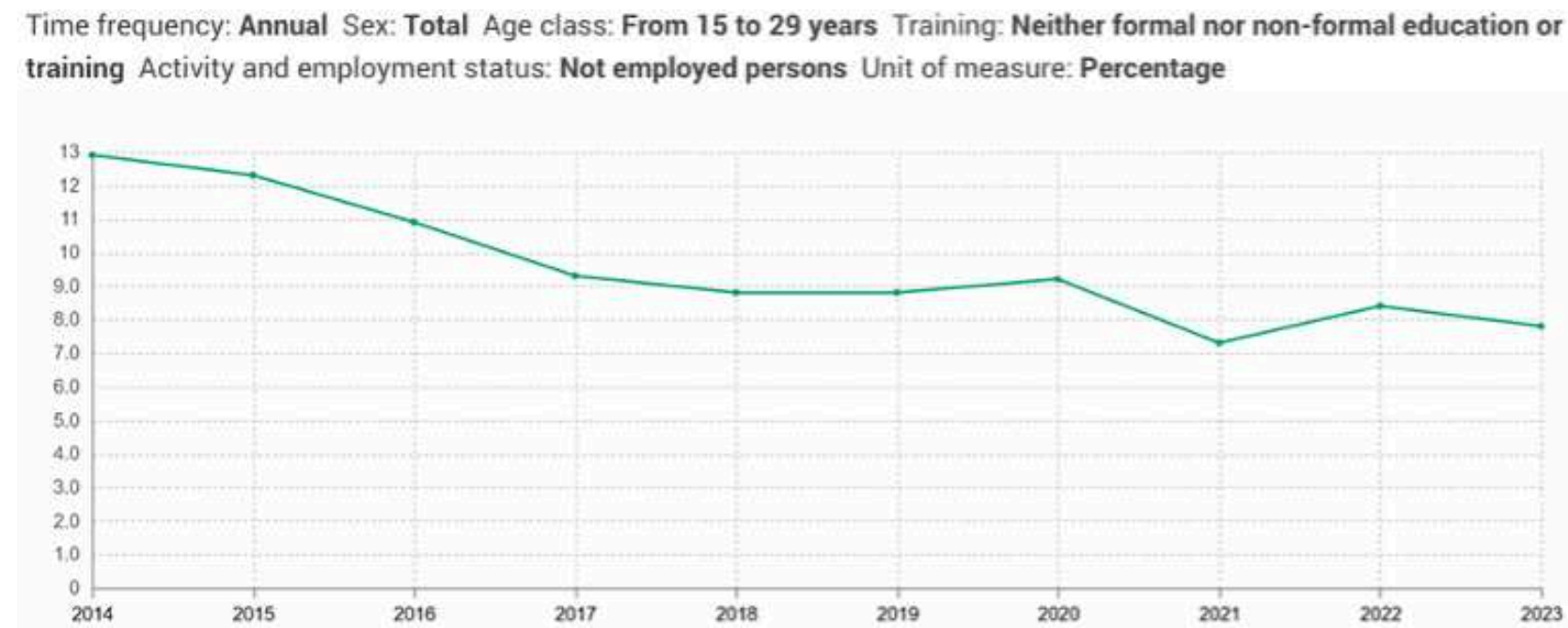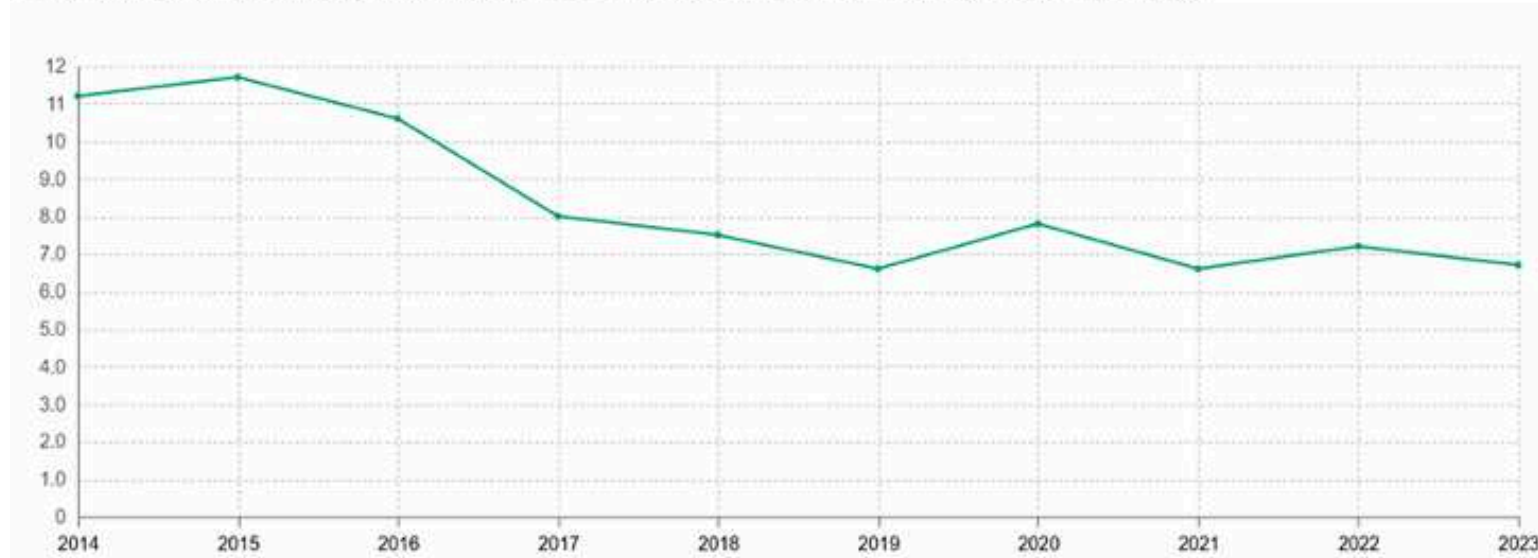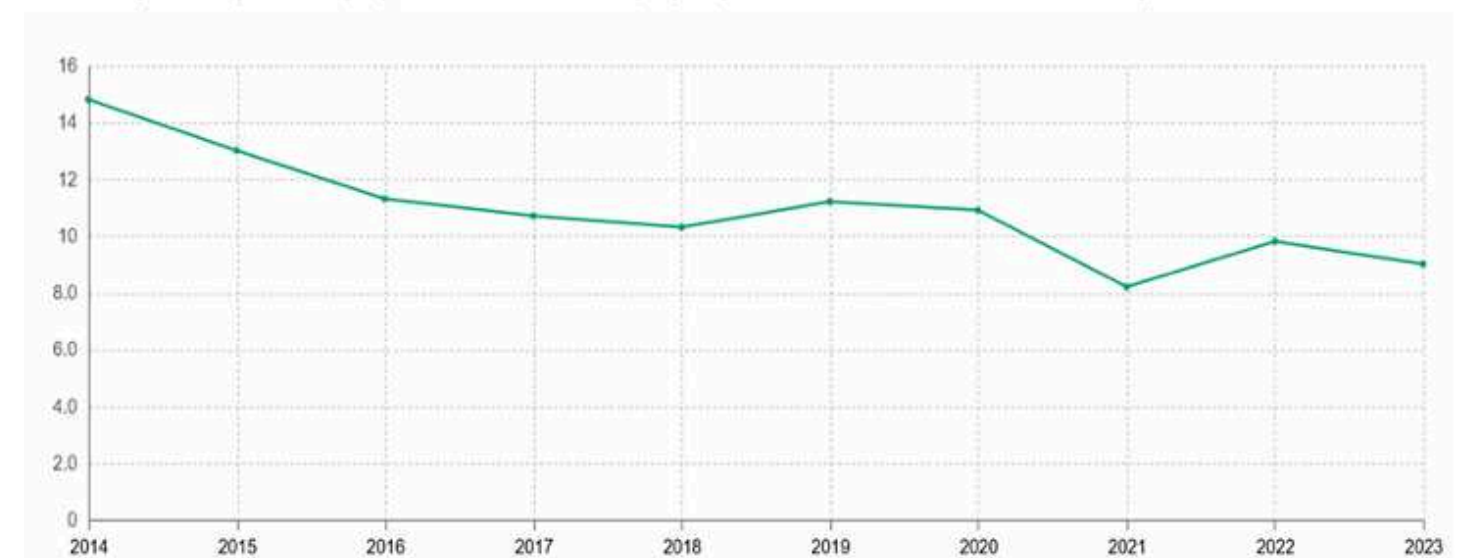

Figure 6: Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, female; Source: Eurostat - Last updated date: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 11:00 PM; [edat_lfse_20__custom_11558405]; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/f3673a8e-5304-4425-bf3c-5e91cf807cbd?lang=en

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

The OECD report »Investing in Youth« [44] describes following main characteristics of NEETs in Slovenia. In 2018 women with a share of 56% and older youth (aged 25-29) with a share of 13% were over-represented among NEETs population (Figure 7). For all age groups, the Slovenian NEET rates are significantly below the OECD and EU averages due to the high share of young people who participate in education.

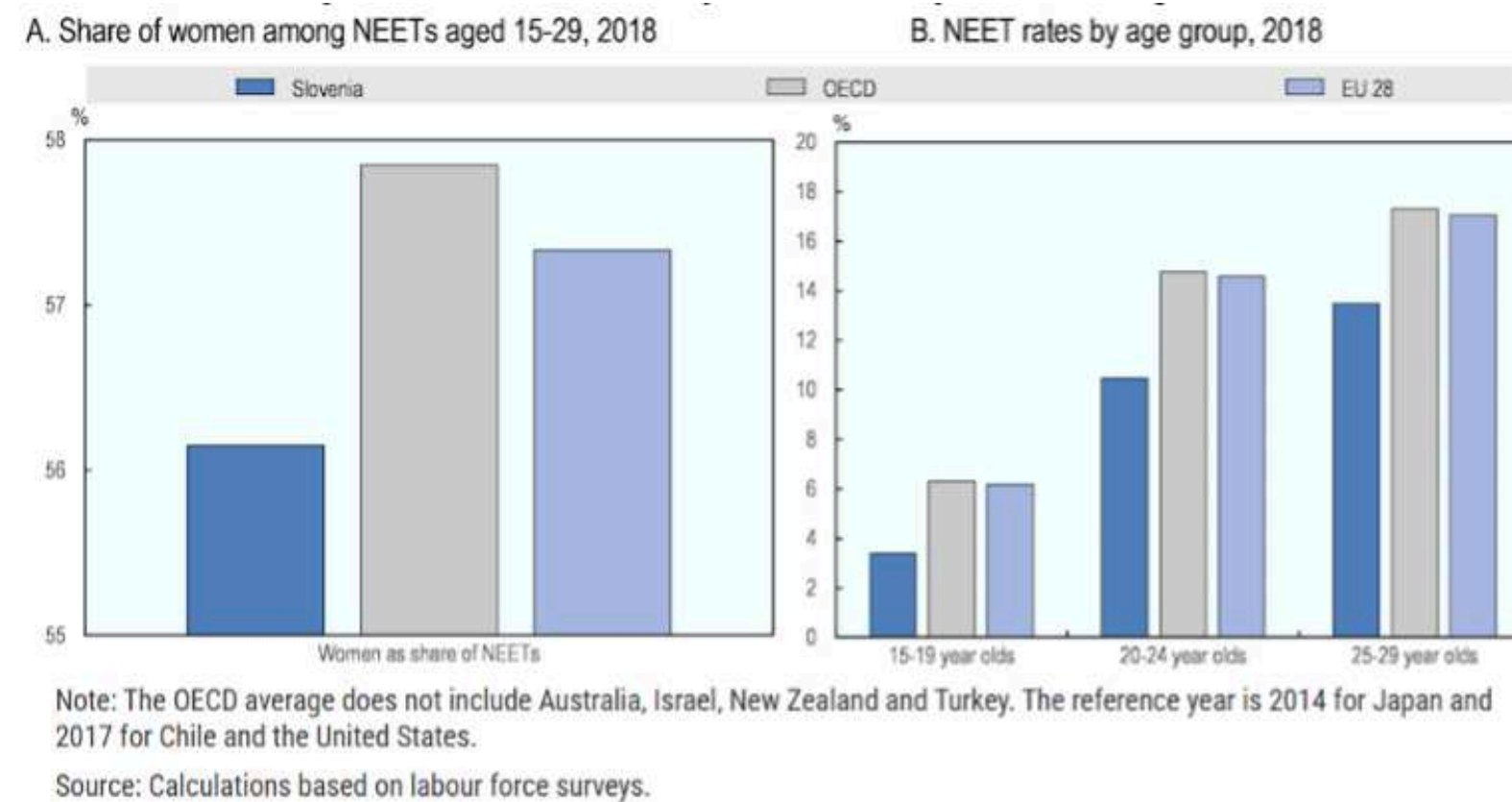Figure 7: (A) Share of women among NEETs 2018; (B) NEET rates by age group 2018; https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c3df2833-en/1/3/2/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c3df2833-en&_csp_=3c37de1962becea765b5f73ca42c21f2&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#figure-d1e1624

[44] OECD (2021), Investing in Youth: Slovenia, Investing in Youth, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c3df2833-en

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

The NEET rate among foreign-born was nearly three time as high as among native-born in Slovenia: 24.2% compared to 8.3%. (Figure 8). Despite the absence of official statistical data due to data protection laws, the OECD identifies also Roma youth as one of the particularly vulnerable groups at risk of being NEET in Slovenia.

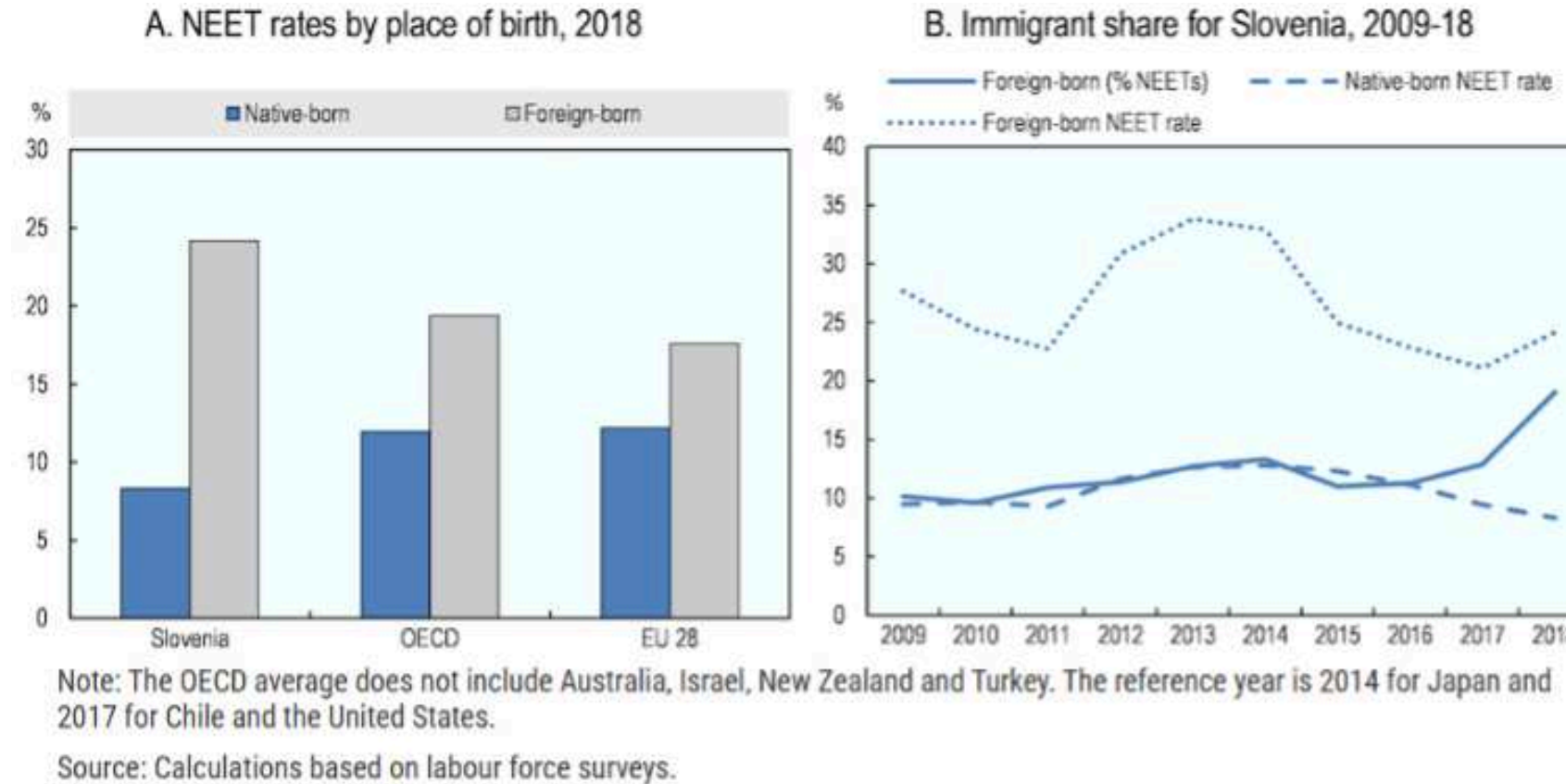Figure 8: (A) NEET rates by place of birth, 2018; (B) Immigrant NEET share ; https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c3df2833-en/1/3/2/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c3df2833-en&_csp_=3c37de1962becea765b5f73ca42c21f2&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#figure-d1e1646

[44] OECD (2021), Investing in Youth: Slovenia, Investing in Youth, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c3df2833-en

3.3. Current situation on participation of youngsters with disadvantaged background into youth work, any problems and integration issues about their participation

According to OECD[45], youth in eastern Slovenia are more frequently NEETs than in western Slovenia. According to 2018 registry data, almost one in five youth in the north-eastern Pomurska statistical region were NEETs. In contrast, in north-western Gorenjska, only one in ten were NEETs; and the NEET rate was only slightly higher in the capital region of Osrednjeslovenska. NEET rates are also higher among those reporting poor health than among those who do not, though the NEET status itself may also cause health problems. Short bouts of inactivity or unemployment do not necessarily have negative repercussions on future employment opportunities and income. But about half of all Slovenian NEETs remain in this status for a year or more, which might affect their future chances of employment. Low education and being a mother are the strongest determinants of the NEET duration in Slovenia. Nearly four in five NEETs or their families receive some kind of social benefit, yet, one in four Slovenian NEETs are poor.

The participation of young people with fewer opportunities in youth work is an important area supported by various programs and projects. Most recognised among them for example, the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program, which offers numerous opportunities for young people to get involved in international projects, youth exchanges, volunteering, and youth worker mobility projects. The evaluation of the program »Recording Effects. Key Findings of the Research on the Impact of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Program[2]« reports that projects implemented in Slovenia have also been successful in involving young people with fewer opportunities, which should serve as an encouragement for further work in this field. The program applicants have relatively well reached young people with fewer opportunities, including those with special needs, as well as participants and project leaders who identify with various minorities. Research has found that young people with fewer opportunities tend to have lower confidence in their abilities and less knowledge of social issues compared to their peers. However, participation in program activities helps reduce these deficits. Unfortunately, these effects tend to fade over a longer period of time. Therefore, it makes sense to provide continuous access to program activities for young people with fewer opportunities. Research has also shown the key obstacles experienced by participants in projects. Most frequently, they reported obstacles related to employment and financial barriers, as well as barriers to active participation in social and political life, and (to a lesser extent) barriers related to mobility and education. Although participants in projects were not primarily involved due to a desire to improve employment opportunities, they still developed competences and skills through these projects, thereby enhancing their prospects in the job market.

[45] OECD (2021), Investing in Youth: Slovenia, Investing in Youth, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c3df2833-en
[46] Beležimo učinke. Ključni izsledki raziskav učinkov programa Erasmus+: Mladi v akciji, Movit, Ljubljana, 2020; https://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Raziskave/RAY_FINAL_splet.pdf

3.4. Main challenges of youth workers who work with youngsters having disadvantaged background in their daily implementation

According to Razpotnik[47] youth workers strive to respond as effectively as possible to the challenges and issues faced by adolescents. Their task is to develop alternatives for inclusion, expand the field of existing opportunities (education, earning, work, belonging), and create new spaces for action. When working with marginalized youth, destigmatization and advocacy for these groups in the broader public are crucial. Additionally, expanding the spaces of legitimacy that these groups control is essential. The principles of working with (especially) vulnerable young people, which are developing in this context, include:

- Life-Field Approach: Engaging with an individual's life context and operating within that environment.
- Fieldwork: Approaching young people in their own life spaces, in environments they understand and know.
- Building Stable and Lasting Relationships: Particularly important for individuals who lack significant protective social networks in their primary environment.
- In his description of the practice of youth work in Slovenia, Mrgole[48] also mentions some facts that negatively affect the quality of youth work. In the context of the impact on the work of an individual youth worker, we highlight following:
- Youth workers acquire knowledge and experience based on the principle of learning on the job and from work, so their knowledge is intuitive, and many skills and knowledge are not reflected upon.
- Young people respond to programs and activities in small numbers and with a lack of motivation.
- Most activities fail to connect young people on a local or national level in a lasting way.
- The offering of youth initiatives is based on one-time events and occasions, with a lack of long-term projects and continuous activities where young people would connect as a group and cultivate a sense of belonging.
- Activities of youth centres and clubs offer proven events that ensure mass attendance, but less attention is paid to planning activities based on the needs and initiatives of young people.
- The financing system prevents the planning of more demanding and long-term projects, which are usually more impactful and contribute more to improving the quality of life for young people.
- The belonging of young people to different reference groups, which are not willing to cooperate with each other, often results in initiatives that aim to attract as many young people as possible, ending up with each group remaining isolated (or self-sufficient) within its own circle.[49]

One of the major challenges of youth work identified in the national evaluation of the effects of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program is the unstable nature of youth work and employment because of high staff turnover due to unregulated systemic financing. The absence of consistent funding and the constant search for resources hinder continuous work and cause uncertainty and precariousness for individuals in youth work.[50]

[47] Razpotnik Š, O vizijah in dometu mladinskega dela na primeru cirkuške pedagogike in: Kuhar M., Razpotnik Š. Okviri in izzivi mladinskega dela v Sloveniji: znanstvena monografija . Ljubljana, Pedagoška fakulteta; 2011. p.177;
[48] Mrgole A. Kam z mularijo?: načela kakovosti neformalnega dela z mladimi. [Ljubljana]; Maribor: Ministrstvo za šolstvo, znanost in šport, Urad Republike Slovenije za mladino; Aristej; 2003. p. 31-32
[49] Ibidem p. 65
[50] Beležimo učinke. Ključni izsledki raziskav učinkov programa Erasmus+: Mladi v akciji, Movit, Ljubljana, 2020; https://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Raziskave/RAY_FINAL_splet.pdf

3.5. Current tools and methodology that youth workers and social workers use by working with disadvantaged youngsters to promote their integration

Youth workers can choose between various possibilities of tools and trainings to support their work. Some National youth organisations (e.g. Scouts) provide their own regular training systems which are well tested due to the long practical usage.

Other organizations offer well-organized professional training with various relevant topics open to all youth workers within the framework of numerous, including international projects, and they inform about them on their websites. We highlight the youth network MaMa, Social Academy, MOVIT Institute, Centre for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS). Main informative websites of the youth sector such as mlad.si[51], lmit.org[52], mss.si[53] comprehensively and promptly notify about current trainings and consultations. Information about the trainings is also disseminated through email notifications.

In addition to the tools described in some widely recognized publications from the past[54], whose practical content is still useful today, users also have access to newer tools that organizations publish within the framework of projects in which they have participated themselves[55] or are linked to webpages with collections of tools developed in other international projects.[56]
As a valuable opportunity for exchanging experiences and discussing challenges and opportunities in youth work, the traditional annual National Conference on the Youth Sector has also become established. This event is organized by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth in collaboration with other organizations.

An important and well-established transnational initiative is the »European Academy on Youth Work« (EAYW)[57] - a strategic cooperation of National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, youth field, and the European Solidarity Corps and SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres. It targets youth workers, professionals in areas with relevance for the youth field and representatives of youth policies and public services, National Agencies and other staff working in youth work structures, from NGOs, science and research. For the specific field of work with disadvantaged youth »The Jarše Youth Home International Conference:
Contemporary Challenges of Working with At-risk Youth«[58] has also become a noteworthy event covering numerous relevant theoretical and practical themes, presented by domestic and foreign lecturers.

One of the latest wider national initiatives of youth workers education working with disadvantaged young people is the project »Dostojno delo« (Decent work). According to the project website[59], the purpose of the programme is to empower and raise awareness among youth workers with knowledge in the field of precarity to provide quality information to young people, strengthen the knowledge and competences of youth in the mentioned field, recognize issues related to precarious forms of work among young people, and also offer advisory assistance and support to young people facing precarity. The training will involve 400 youth workers from all over the country.

[51] www.mlad.si
[52] www.lmit.org
[53] www.mss.si
[54] e.g. Cepin M, Gornik J. Priročnik za trenerje mladinskih voditeljev. Ljubljana: Mladinski svet Slovenije; 2003
[55] e.g.ABC of youth work; https://abc.socialna-akademija.si/portfolio/abc-of-youth-work-how-to-work-with-groups-in-the-changing-world/
[56] e.g. https://www.eayw.net/2nd-eayw-practice-reflection-forums/
 https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/
[57] https://www.eayw.net/
[58] MDJ-Mladinski dom Jarše; https://konferenca.mdj.si/en/about/
[59] Zavod Nefiks, Dostojno delo; https://dostojnodelo.si/

3.6. Suggested tools or services to promote youth workers and social workers working with youngsters having disadvantaged background

Based on the results of previous recent research[60], youth workers need both education and resources related to the basics of youth work, as well as opportunities for exchanging experiences, learning about new innovative methods for working with young people, and various resources for professional development, even when they already have significant experience. Additionally, they desire greater networking and community-building among youth workers within their own country and beyond[61].

The selection and offerings of recent initiatives and educational events also indicate an increased need or interest among youth workers for specific knowledge about different groups of vulnerable young people and methods they can use in their work with them (s. above Chapter 3.5.).

[60] Youth_app Study – Final Report ; https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S5LsbITHEupybFmsGCELDeJU1sS39g8d/view
[61] Mlad.si; https://www.mlad.si/raziskava-o-stanju-mladinskega-dela-in-potrebah-mladinskih-delavcev/

4. Support and Integration needs of youth workers

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
a. Participants' characteristics (Age, Gender, Country of origin / nationality)

The analysis of the age structure of the participants showed that most of them were between 31 and 40 years old (41%), followed by the age groups 21 to 30 years, 41 to 50 years and 51 to 60 years (all 18%). One participant was over 61 years old. The average age of all participants was 39,5 years (Figure 9).

82% of respondents were female, 18% male. Except for one participant, who listed Kosovo as the country of origin, all of them were from Slovenia.
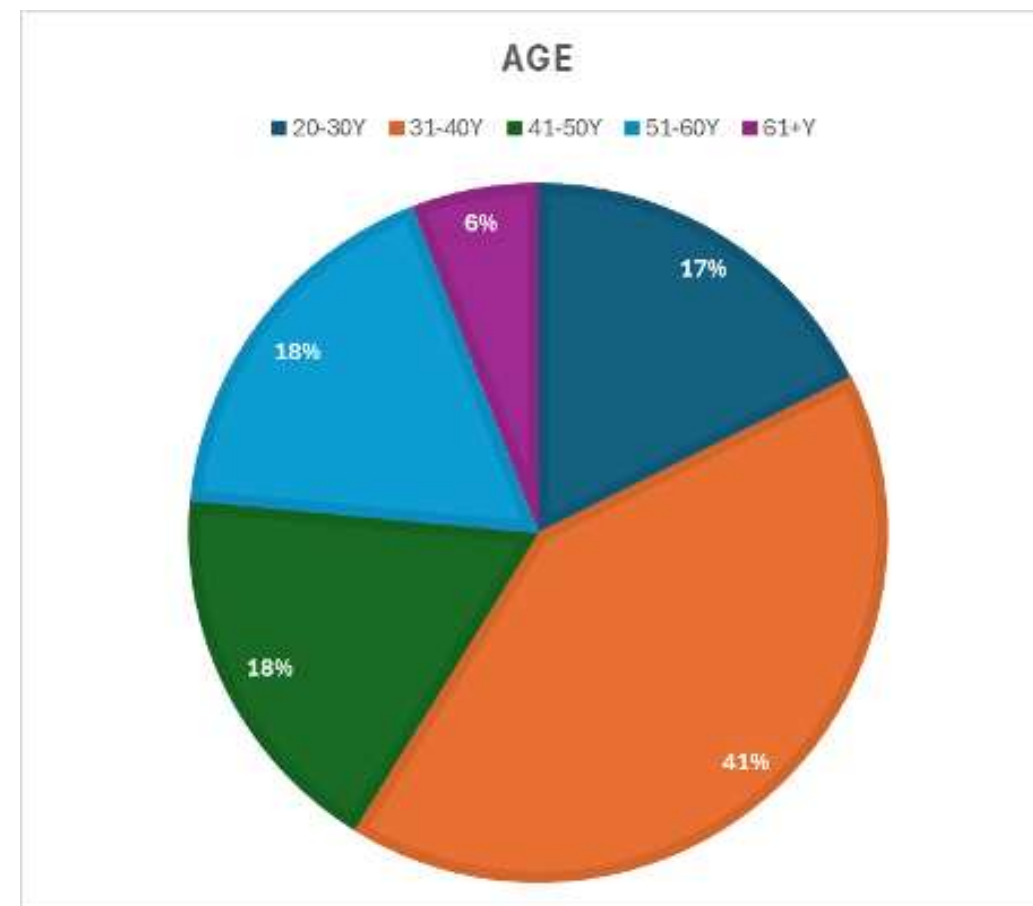
Figure 9: Age structure of participants
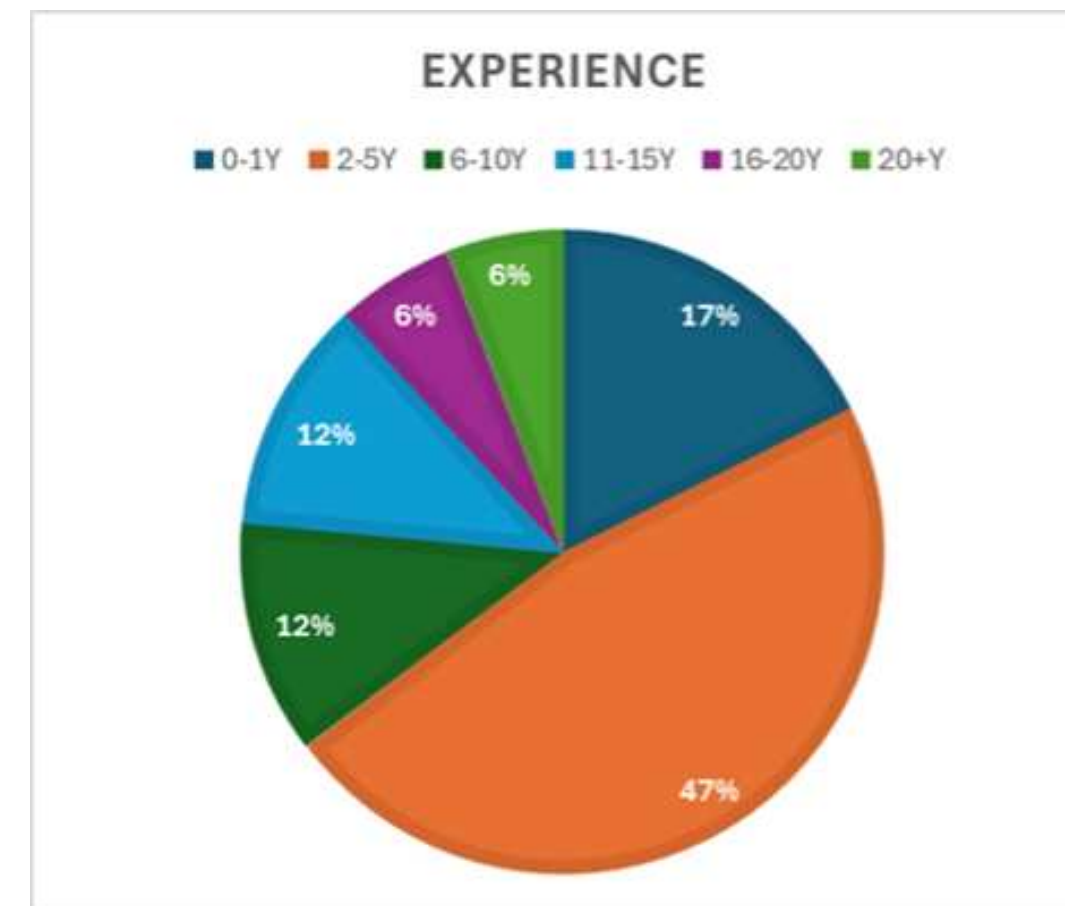
Figure 10: Working experience of participants

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
b. Participants' professional background
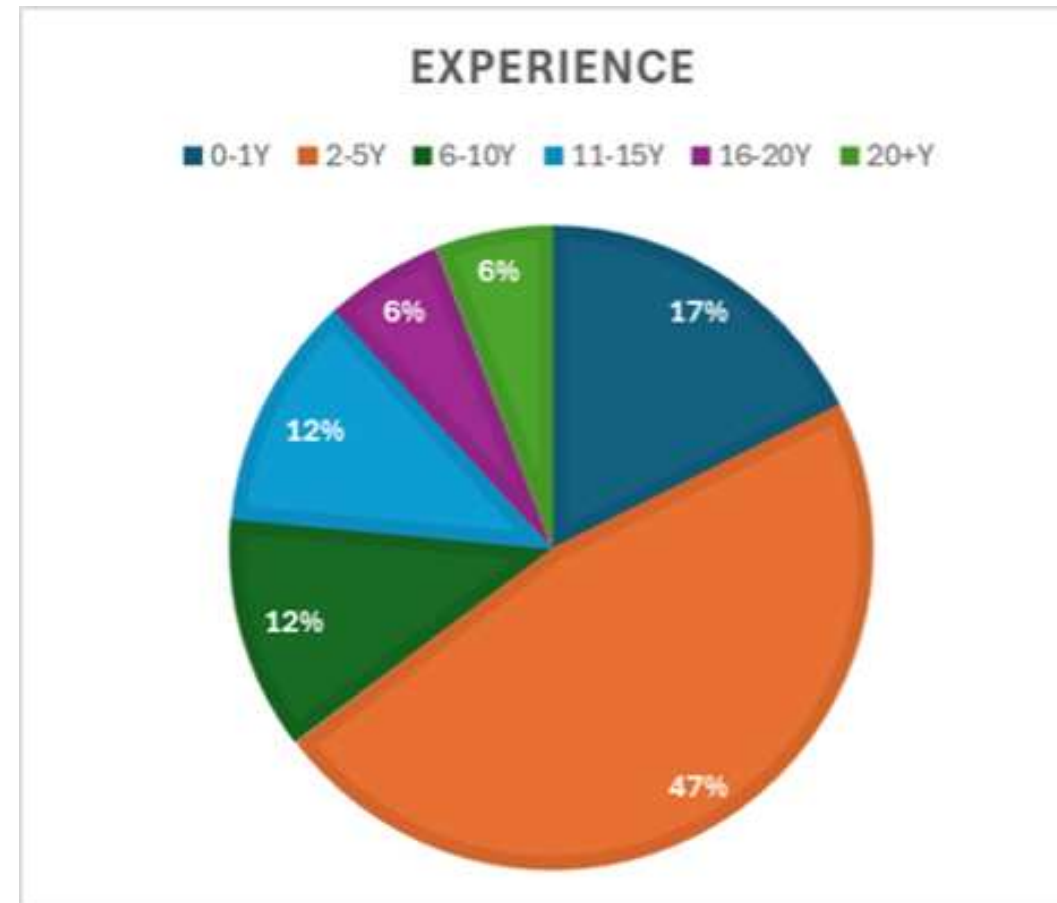
Figure 10: Working experience of participants

(The highest level of education they have completed, year of experience in their position)

The majority of participants has Bachelor (41%) or Master (29%) educational degree, while the rest of the levels are underrepresented: high school (12%), other (18%). Noticeably the most (47%) have 2-5 years of work experience in this position, followed by beginners with one or less years of experience (17%) (Figure 10).

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
c. Information on their position

P1	learning assistance	counselling	workshops	social games	trips/excursions	socialising
P2	learning assistance	listening	guiding	playing	laerning skills	
P3	learning assistance	taking care of the space	assistance with filling in documents			
P4	playing					
P5	learning assistance	workshops	arranging of documents	regulating relationships within the community	motivation through play	
P6	counselling	learning assistance	leisure activities			
P7	workshops	learning assistance	psychosocial assistance	working with families		
P8	field work	counselling	entourage	conversation	learning assistance	
P9	counselling	conversation	entourage	advocacy	interpreting	mediation
P10	individual counselling	street work	assistance with organising	moderating group discuss	reflecting group dynamics	
P11	counselling	relieving conversation	coordination of institutional activities	practical assistance	learning assistance	
P12	creating projects	organizing events	organizing workshops	managing of web portal		
P13	counselling	conversation	workshops	lectures	fun/entertainment contents	
P14	project related commun	posting on social networ	managing project docume	creating project contents		
P15	psychosocial workshops	sport activities	culinary workshops			
P16	psychosocial counselling	group work	organizational work	administrative work	leading - mentoring	
P17	group work	playing	learning assistance			

Figure 11: Participants' activities in daily work

(What is the age of young people they work with, the type of the organization they work, 5 activities that they do most in their daily task at work in, if they have had any training or course related to their field)

Most of the youth workers surveyed work with adolescents in the age group of 16 to 18 years (27%), with approximately the same proportions in the age groups of 6 to 11 years (20%), 12 to 15 years (22%), and 19 to 24 years (22%). The "Other" category (9%) includes three interviewees who also work with young people aged 25-29 and one who works with children up to 6 years of age.
The proportion of participants employed in public organisations (47%) is almost the same as that of those working in a NGO (53%).
The majority of participants engage in assistance-related tasks during their daily work, most of which are learning assistance. Among the most frequently mentioned are activities of various forms of counselling and entourage. The answers also show a relatively high frequency of activities in the field of playing and other leisure activities. Different forms of group work are often used, such as various workshops, field and street work. A high level of citation also have conversational activities and activities related to project work, as well as organisational and/or administrative work (Figure 11). 88% of participants attended trainings/courses related to their field of work.

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
d. Current competences that a youth worker, social worker and vocational needs

Universally acknowledged, 100% of the participants emphasized the importance of teamwork. A close second. 94% of participants identified the ability to analyze and solve problems as a vital competence. Also highlighted by 94% of respondents, digital literacy is crucial in today's technology-driven environment. Another skill with 94% endorsement, effective communication is paramount. 88% of participants pointed to the importance of flexible thinking. Also rated important by 88% of respondents, planning work efficiently, an equal % noted the significance of being able to express themselves clearly and confidently. Finally, 76% of participants recognized the need for strong leadership and decision-making skills. Additionally following »other« competences were mentioned by the attendees: empathy, emotional intelligence, knowledge of personality specifics in the development of a young person, ability to work youngsters facing trauma or other psychodynamic specifics and active listening and contemplation (Figure 12).

	Analyzing and solve the problems	Digital literacy	Communication	Ability to express themselves	Flexibility in thinking	Teamwork	Leadership	Planning of work	Decission making	other
%	94	94	94	82	88	100	76	88	76	35

Figure 12: Needed competences

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
e. Awareness on initiatives and policies needs

47% of participants said they were aware of initiatives and policies addressing these areas, 18% said they were only partially/limited aware of them, while 35% were not familiar at all.
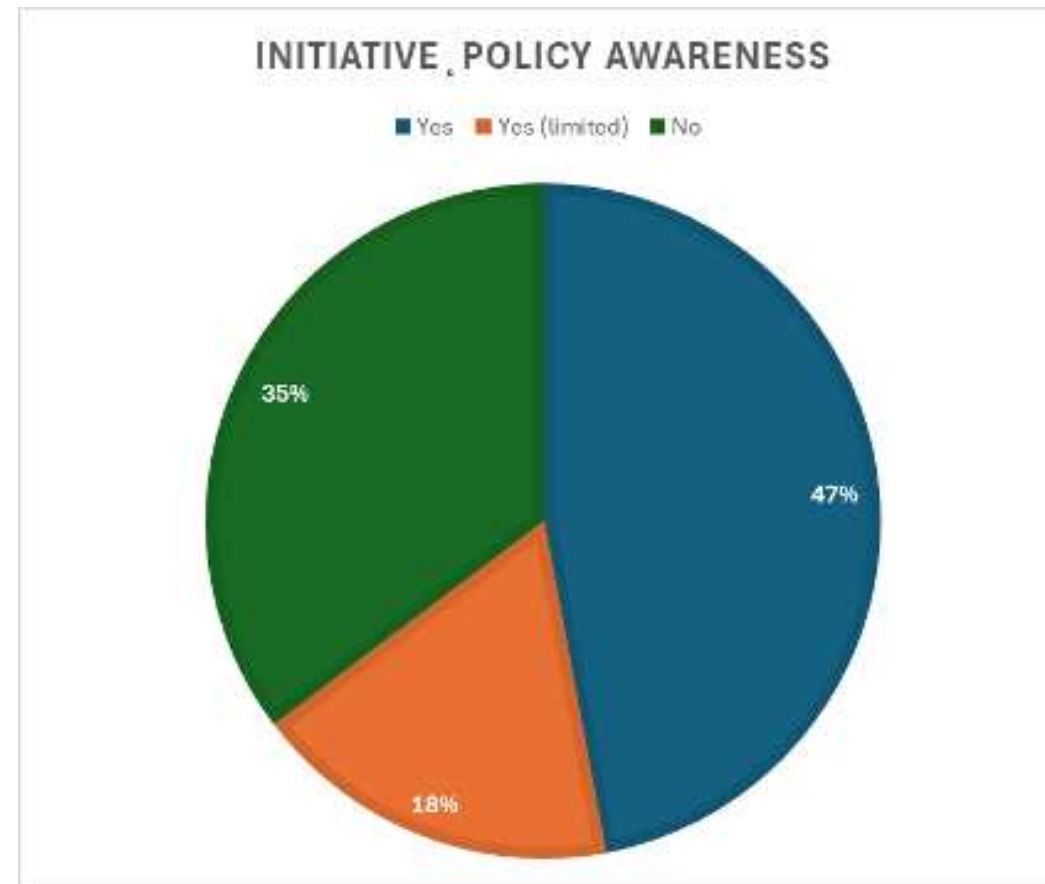

Figure 12: Needed competences

4.1. Analysis of Participants Information Sheet
f. Training needs

All participants stated they would need or are interested in further trainings. The most frequently cited need, 82% of participants expressed a desire for training in the various types of activities and programs used in youth work, as well as staying updated on current trends. Training in understanding the developmental aspects of youth was identified by 71% of respondents. 59% of participants highlighted the need for training on how to analyze the needs of youngsters. Over half (53%) of the respondents indicated a need for training in the relevant laws, regulations, and standards. The smallest portion 35% of participants identified a need for training on understanding the basic principles of project cycle phases. Within the »other« category one participant specified a training related to communication with children in dire need (thoughts about suicide, auto aggression...) (Figure 14).

	various types of activities and programs used in youth work current trends in youth work	laws, regulations and standards on legislation	basic principles of project cycle phases	ways of analyzing the needs of youngsters	biological psychological and sociological aspects of the development of youth	other
%	82	53	35	59	71	12

Figure 14: Training needs

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
a. Profile of the target group that they are working with

The focus group interviews provided a detailed profile of the target group, highlighting their diverse social, educational, and vocational backgrounds. The key characteristics are:

Age Range:
- **Children, adolescents and young adults:** Predominantly aged 6-18 years, with some programs extending to 21 years if they are still in school, a significant portion also aged 15-29 years.

Social Background:
- **Victims of Domestic Violence and Neglect:** Many children and adolescents are victims of domestic violence and neglect.
- **Self-Abusive Individuals:** Some adolescents engage in self-abusive behaviours and seek refuge in crisis centres.
- **Socially Disadvantaged:** A large portion comes from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including poor families and those with low or no income.
- **Roma Population:** Specific mention of primary school Roma children and young parents up to 29 years old.
- **Immigrants:** Including children from immigrant families facing difficult circumstances.
- **Youth with Disabilities:** Youth with various health barriers, such as blindness, visual impairments, and mobility issues.
- **Long-Term Ill Adolescents:** Adolescents dealing with long-term illnesses or other health problems, as well as those with family members who have addictions or illnesses.
- **NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training):** Young people not engaged in education or employment.

Educational Background:
- **Primary School Students:** Many of the target group are in primary school.
- **School Dropouts:** Some adolescents and young adults who have left the educational system.
- **Functional Illiteracy:** Some youth have difficulties with basic literacy, affecting their ability to engage with services and institutions.

Vocational Background:
- **Young Parents:** A subset includes young parents who are part of the target group.
- **Youth from Vulnerable Groups:** This includes adolescents who come to programs for socializing and support rather than specific vocational training.
- **Health Barriers Impacting Employment:** Some youth face health-related challenges that hinder their ability to work or participate in vocational training.

Other overall Characteristics:
- **Balanced Gender Structure:** The gender distribution within the target group is balanced.
- **Deprivation:** The majority of the target group is perceived as deprived, regardless of specific background characteristics.
- **Segregated Locations:** Many live in segregated or isolated locations, compounding their social disadvantages.

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
b. Obstacles they face working with their target group

The focus group interviews identified several key obstacles faced by youth/social workers working with their target group. The challenges can be categorized into systemic issues, logistical/organisational barriers, and specific difficulties related to the target population. Here's a summary of the main points raised by the participants:

Systemic Issues:

Institutional Neglect and Inconsistency:
- Participants highlighted systemic (institutional) neglect of their target group, which often results in a different treatment, compared to other groups.
- There are frequent misunderstandings and friction with state institutions, and inconsistency across these institutions exacerbates the problem.

Recognition and Integration:
- There's a lack of recognition for youth work and insufficient integration between organizations working with youth.
- This lack of coordination leads to duplicated efforts and inefficiencies.

Funding and Bureaucracy:
- Irregular and inadequate funding for programs hampers consistent service delivery.
- Bureaucratic processes consume time that could otherwise be spent on direct youth work.

Logistical/Organisational Barriers:

Personnel and Space Issues:
- High staff turnover and personnel distress are significant issues, impacting service continuity.
- Inadequate space and facilities further constrain the effectiveness of programs

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4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
b. Obstacles they face working with their target group

Delays in Treatment:
- A participant working in the crisis centre said that adolescents are often supposed to stay in their centre for only a short duration (up to 21 days), but in reality, this period is extended up to nine months due to delays in further treatment arrangements. This overextends the capacity and the intended function of their service

Specific Challenges with the Target Population:
Mixed Age Groups and Functional Illiteracy:
- Managing mixed age groups (children and teenagers) poses challenges in maintaining mutual relationships and appropriate engagement.
- Functional illiteracy among some youth complicates communication and their ability to navigate institutional processes.

Engagement and Content Relevance:
- There is difficulty in creating content that meets the real needs of young people. General events see higher participation than specific programs, indicating a need for better-targeted activities.
- Post-Covid, there's a noticeable disengagement among youth, with many preferring online activities and exhibiting deficits in social interaction and increased mental health problems.

Mobility and Participation:
- Some young people are not mobile, limiting their ability to engage with services.
- There is also a decline in interest among adolescents aged 13-20, particularly males, in participating in available content and activities.

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
c. The importance of youth work for better integration of youngsters having disadvantaged background

The focus group interviews emphasized the significant role youth work plays in integrating young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The participants outlined various ways in which youth work contributes to their personal development and social integration:

Building Self-Confidence and Future Prospects:
- Individual Development: Youth work is crucial in helping young individuals build self-confidence and create a vision for their future.
- Laying Foundations: It provides the foundational support necessary for young people to progress, which they might not achieve without such assistance.

Representation and Inclusion:
- Advocacy: Youth work ensures that the interests and needs of disadvantaged young people are represented and taken seriously in society, addressing the common issue of these groups being overlooked.
- Active Inclusion: It actively works towards including marginalized youth, such as those with disabilities, providing them with a sense of acceptance and opportunities to form lasting relationships.

Broadening Horizons and Providing Information:
- Access to Information: Youth work broadens the horizons of young people by providing them with information and opportunities they would not otherwise have.
- Encouraging Critical Evaluation: It helps youth critically evaluate their surroundings and circumstances, fostering a more informed and proactive approach to life.

Community and Social Dynamics:
- Creating a Community: Youth work helps create a supportive community where young people can engage in activities different from those in a school setting, promoting quality time and mutual help.
- Positive Group Dynamics: It fosters positive group dynamics, reducing the likelihood of risky behaviours and ensuring that no individual feels excluded.

Alternatives to Unhealthy Environments:
- Safe Spaces: Youth work offers an alternative to unhealthy environments, providing a safe space for young people to escape their daily challenges.
- Engagement in Public Environments: It encourages marginalized youth to participate in broader public environments, enhancing their social integration.

Unique Opportunities and Activities:
- Exclusive Activities: Youth work provides unique opportunities and activities not available elsewhere, giving young people a chance to explore new interests and skills.
- Personal Contact: Initial general interactions can later lead to specific workshops, allowing for a tailored approach to individual needs and interests.

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers

d. The elements that make up successful youth work

The focus group interviews with youth workers highlighted several key elements that contribute to successful youth work. Here is a summary of the main points raised by the participants:

Core Elements:

Unconditional Acceptance and Listening:
- Successful youth work requires unconditional acceptance of young people, active listening, and setting clear boundaries to create a supportive environment.

Building Trust and Security:
- Establishing trust and a sense of security is essential. Adolescents should feel equally considered in the design of activities and content, ensuring they have a voice in the process.

Comprehensive and Inclusive Projects:
- Effective youth work involves comprehensive project development that is inclusive and time-consuming. Short-term or one-off events are less impactful.
- There should be efforts to connect youth workers from various fields and institutions, fostering collaboration and openness to diversity.

Direct and Authentic Relationships:
- Direct contact and authentic relationships are crucial. Conscious listening and genuine interactions help build rapport and trust with young people.

Good Collective Relations and Basic Conditions:
- Good relationships within the collective of youth workers are important.
- Basic conditions for the implementation of activities, such as adequate resources and expertise, are necessary to support successful youth work.

Individual Approach:
- Each young person requires an individual approach, tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Flexibility in work and adapting to the environment are critical.

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
d. The elements that make up successful youth work

Volunteering and Flexibility:
- The role of volunteering is significant in youth work. Flexibility in the work approach allows for better adaptation to the needs of young people and the changing dynamics of youth work.

Awareness of Boundaries and Proper Guidance:
- Awareness of boundaries and providing proper guidance for additional activities and assistance are essential components.
- Youth workers should offer appropriate support without overstepping boundaries.

Return to Basics and Trust:
- A return to the basics of youth work, focusing on unencumbered trust, is emphasized as a foundational element for success.

Additional Considerations:
Accessibility:
- Accessibility and the right location are important to ensure that youth work activities are available and reachable for all young people.

Adaptation to Specifics:
- Youth workers expressed a need to adapt to the specifics of individuals and their environments rather than relying on standardized platforms for recording the quality of youth work.

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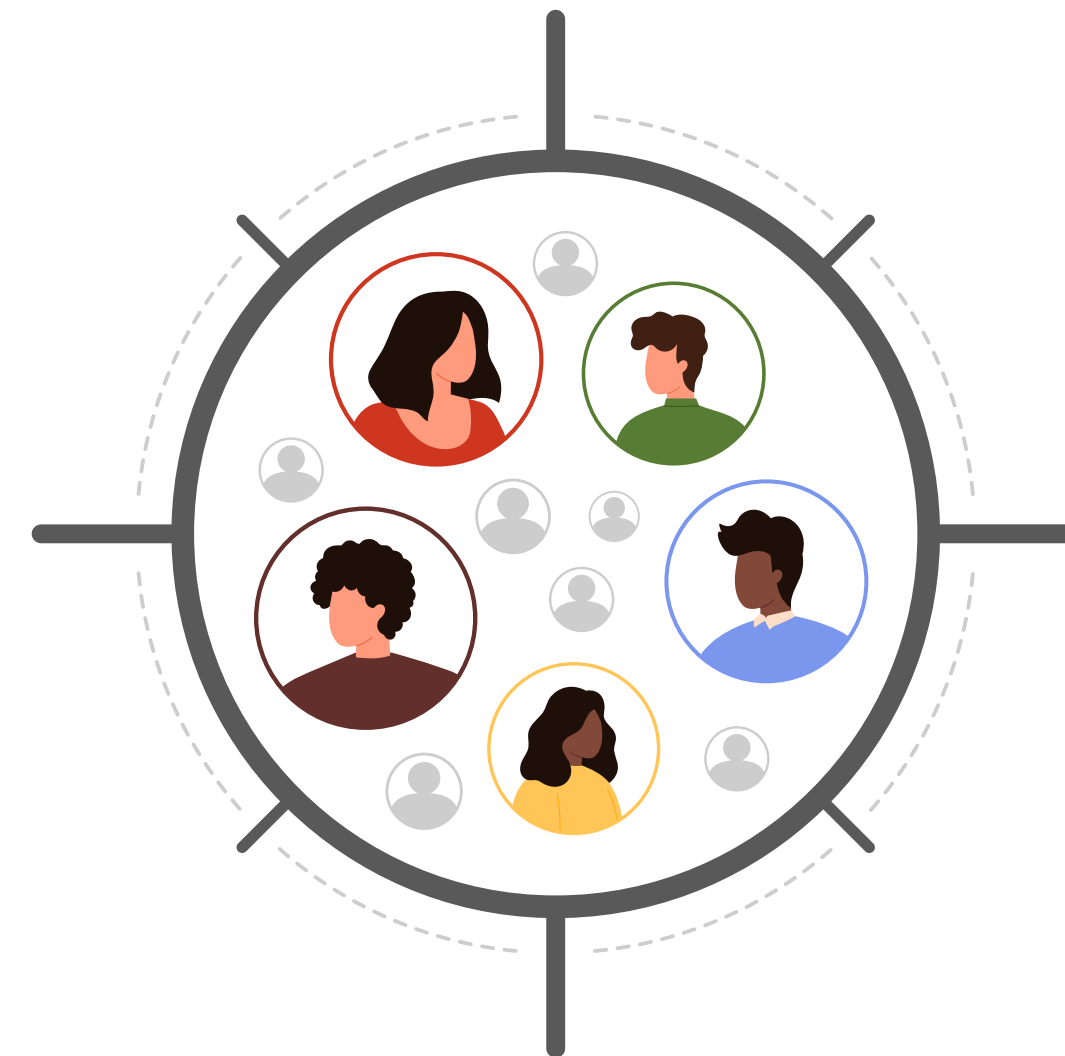
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4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers

e. Helpful tools or services

The focus group interviews with youth workers highlighted various tools and services that would help promote youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds. Below is a recap of the main ideas and suggestions provided by the participants:

Systemic Solutions:
- Participants emphasized the need for more systemic solutions, including realistic norms for the scope of their work and networking with institutions. This would facilitate faster and more effective treatment for young people.

Volunteer Involvement:
- They expressed a desire for conditions that encourage volunteer involvement, which could enhance the resources and support available to youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Street Work and Community Interventions:
- There was a call for more street work and interventions in community spaces. This approach would involve engaging young people directly in their environments and introducing them to events and activities.

Local Youth Centres:
- Participants highlighted the importance of establishing local youth centres. These centres would serve as hubs for youth activities and provide information about opportunities for collaboration with other organizations.

Information Sharing and Cooperation:
- They suggested tools that facilitate involvement in activities of other organizations and provide information about their initiatives. This would promote cooperation and prevent young people from feeling excluded from society.

Quality Education and Professional Development:
- There was a strong emphasis on the need for quality education and ongoing professional development for youth workers. This includes in-depth guidelines for conducting conversations that take into account age groups and gender sensitivities.

Systemic Arrangements and Competence Definition:
- Participants noted the importance of clearer systemic arrangements and defined competencies at youth centres. This clarity would help improve the quality and effectiveness of youth work practices.

Innovative Engagement Tools:
- Suggestions included tools that utilize modern platforms like TikTok or games to attract young people to youth work content. This innovative approach could make youth work more appealing and accessible to the target group.

Networking and Exchange of Practices:
- Lastly, participants emphasized the importance of networking among youth workers for exchanging both good and bad practices. This could include opportunities for job shadowing and learning from each other's experiences.

4.2. Analysis of focus groups with youth workers and social workers
f. Good practices and methods that they are using in youth work

The focus group interviews with youth workers provided insights into various effective practices and methods used in youth work. Here's a summary of the good practices and methods highlighted by the participants:

Safe Environment and Art Therapy:
- Participants emphasized the importance of creating a safe environment for young people. Some utilize art therapy as a method to support youth in expressing themselves and dealing with challenges.

Promotion of Activities Based on Youth Interests:
- Tailoring activities to the interests of young people, such as sports and other hobbies, was noted as a successful approach to engage them actively.

Organizational Support and Collaboration:
- One organization acts as an umbrella for regional youth organizations, facilitating collaboration and offering joint activities. They support local organizations in promoting their initiatives through coordinated efforts.

Methods of Social Work and Teamwork:
- Methods include individualized social work plans with clear goals, team workshops, and collaboration with other organizations. Encouraging young people to take responsibility and providing supervisions were also mentioned as effective strategies.

Inclusion Projects:
- Implementation of project with inclusive activities. The project Adaptive sports programs for blind, visually impaired, and physically disabled individuals was highlighted by one organisation. It included publishing a manual in Braille and ongoing integrative activities beyond project duration.

Evaluation Tools and Online Platforms:
- Utilization of online tools (Logbook) for evaluating youth work and conducting evaluation questionnaires helps assess and improve program effectiveness.

Autonomous and Group Activities:
- Engaging young people through autonomous group activities within youth centres, ensuring safety through pre-processes, and offering individual and informal education sessions were effective methods noted.

Formalizing Informal Learning:
- Adopting concepts from organizations like Gangway e.V.[60] in Berlin, which formalize informal learning through community cooperation, was cited as a beneficial approach.

Youth-Led Movements:
- Examples such as the Youth for Climate Justice movement (Mladi za podnebno pravičnost)[61]demonstrate successful self-organization and youth engagement, highlighting the power of grassroots initiatives in driving social change.

[60] Gangway e.V.; https://gangway.de/
[61] MZPP; https://mzpp.si/

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5.National Level Recommendations

Youth work is a critical domain that directly influences the development and well-being of young individuals. Focus group interviews with youth workers have identified several key challenges and competencies required for improving the effectiveness of youth work. This section explores suggestions for enhancing education, tooling, support, and overall improvement in youth work based on these insights. It also explains why addressing these areas is vital for the quality of youth work.

5.1. Addressing Systemic Issues

Youth workers face **systemic neglect, different treatment** of their target group and inconsistencies across state institutions. To address these issues, training programs should include modules on advocacy and policy engagement, equipping youth workers with skills to navigate and influence institutional frameworks. This is crucial for ensuring fair treatment and consistent support for their target groups.

The **lack of recognition and integration among organizations** working with youth leads to inefficiencies. Establishing collaborative networks and communication channels between different organizations can mitigate these issues. Joint training sessions and conferences can foster mutual understanding and coordinated efforts, maximizing the impact of youth work.

Irregular **funding and bureaucratic hurdles** are significant barriers. Advocacy for streamlined funding processes and reduced bureaucratic red tape is essential. Training in grant writing and fundraising can empower youth workers to secure more consistent funding, enabling them to focus more on direct service delivery.

5.2. Overcoming Logistical and Organizational Barriers

High **staff turnover and inadequate facilities** hinder service continuity. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and creating supportive work environments can help retain staff. Additionally, investment in adequate infrastructure is necessary to ensure that youth programs can be delivered effectively.

Delays in treatment for adolescents in crisis centres indicate a need for improved coordination with follow-up services. Developing partnerships with healthcare providers and social services can facilitate smoother transitions and reduce overextension of crisis centres.

5.3. Tackling Specific Challenges with the Target Population

Managing **mixed age groups and functional illiteracy** requires tailored approaches. Age-specific programs and literacy support initiatives can address these challenges. Training youth workers in differentiated instruction techniques will enable them to meet diverse needs more effectively.

Post-Covid **disengagement and a preference for online activities** necessitate innovative program design. Youth workers should be trained in digital engagement strategies and mental health support to better connect with young people. Regular feedback from youth can help ensure that programs remain relevant and engaging.

Limited mobility and declining participation among certain age groups, particularly males, call for outreach strategies that bring services to the youth. Mobile units and community-based programs can increase accessibility. Additionally, understanding and addressing the specific interests of these demographics can enhance participation rates.

5.4. Core Competencies for Effective Youth Work

With universal recognition of its importance, **teamwork** is foundational to effective youth work. Training programs should emphasize team-building exercises and collaborative project work to improve coordination and collective problem-solving skills.

Problem-solving and analytical skills are vital for addressing the complex issues faced by youth. Training modules should include case studies and scenario-based learning to hone these skills, ensuring youth workers can effectively identify issues and implement solutions.

In today's technology-driven world, **digital literacy** is indispensable. Training programs must cover a wide range of digital tools and platforms that can be utilized in youth work. This includes social media management, virtual communication tools, and online resource management, enabling youth workers to connect with young people in more dynamic and engaging ways.

Effective communication is critical for building rapport and understanding with young people. Training should focus on both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, active listening, and techniques for clear and confident expression.

Flexibility in thinking allows youth workers to adapt to changing situations. Creative problem-solving exercises and exposure to diverse scenarios can enhance this ability, making youth workers more resilient and resourceful.

Efficient planning ensures that programs are well-structured and impactful. Training in time management, project planning, and organizational skills is essential for effective youth work.

Strong **leadership and decision-making skills** are necessary for guiding teams and making informed choices. Training should include leadership workshops, decision-making frameworks, and opportunities for youth workers to practice these skills in controlled environments.

5.5. Specialized Training Needs

Keeping up to date with **current trends and understanding various types of activities and programs** used in youth work is critical. Ongoing professional development opportunities should be provided to ensure youth workers remain informed and innovative in their practice.

Empathy and emotional intelligence are crucial for connecting with and supporting young people. Training should include modules on emotional intelligence, active listening, and empathy exercises to enhance these soft skills.

Understanding the developmental stages of youth is vital for tailored interventions. Training programs should include comprehensive education on **child and adolescent psychology**, including how to work with youngsters facing trauma or other psychodynamic challenges.

Awareness of the latest policies, regulations, and standards is necessary for effective and compliant youth work. Training should cover relevant laws, policies, and best practices to ensure youth workers are informed and able to advocate effectively for young people.

Understanding the basic principles of **project cycle phases**, though identified by a smaller portion of participants, is important for managing youth work projects effectively. Training should cover project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

5.6. Conclusion

By focusing on these key areas, youth work can be significantly improved, leading to better outcomes for young people. Targeted education and tooling initiatives will equip youth workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of their roles, ultimately fostering a more supportive and effective environment for youth development.

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DRUŠTVO ZA IZOBRAŽEVANJE IN POVEZOVANJE OTROK

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