

# *TOP* **Youth Workers**

*Coordinated by APPJuventude*

## ***The Future of Youth Work"ers"***

ERASMUS+ | KA220-YOU  
Cooperation partnerships in youth  
2021-1-PT02-KA220-YOU-000029248



**Financiado pela  
União Europeia**



**Agência Nacional  
Erasmus+ Juventude/Desporto  
Corpo Europeu de Solidariedade**



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# Foundations

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- Executive Summary
- European Context & Framework
- What is the TOP Youth Workers Programme
- Target Group & Entry Profiles
- Programme Architecture

## TECHNICAL SHEET & PARTNERS

### Project Coordinator

#### **APPJuventude – Portuguese Association of Youth Workers (Portugal)**

Founded in 2018, APPJuventude is the national body representing youth workers in Portugal. It plays a central role in the recognition, training, and advocacy of youth work professionals, connecting practice with research and policy at national and European levels. APPJuventude is responsible for coordinating the project and ensuring its impact and sustainability across Europe.

### Consortium Partners

- **Estonian Association of Youth Workers (Estonia) – ENK**

The national organisation uniting youth workers in Estonia, both professionals and volunteers. It advocates for recognition, quality standards, and professional development in youth work. ENK brings expertise in policy dialogue and occupational standards for youth workers.

- **BVjong – Beroepsvereniging Kinder- en Jongerenwerkers (Netherlands)**

A professional association that represents over 2,000 Dutch youth workers, particularly in community and street work. BVjong contributes strong expertise in competence profiles, networking, and the daily realities of youth work practice in the Netherlands.

- **NINFEA – National Informal and Non-Formal Education Association (Italy)**

A national organisation focused on youth work, non-formal education and social animation. NINFEA advocates for the recognition of youth work in Italy, promotes quality standards, and develops innovative methodologies. It leads the benchmarking study of pathways across Europe.

- **Hellenic Association of Youth Workers (Greece)**

Established to advocate for the recognition of youth work as a profession in Greece. It develops educational frameworks and pathways for practitioners, aiming to provide legal status, visibility and sustainable training opportunities for Greek youth workers.

- **NAPOR – National Association of Youth Workers (Serbia)**

Founded in 2009, NAPOR gathers more than 60 organisations across Serbia. It has developed vocational standards (Youth Leader, Youth Worker, Specialist for Youth Work and Policy), quality frameworks and codes of ethics. NAPOR brings extensive expertise in standardisation, accreditation and policy advocacy.

- **Union of Youth Work – Sojuz za Mladinska Rabota (North Macedonia)**

A national network of organisations providing youth work services. It led the creation of the first National Occupational Standard for Youth Workers in North Macedonia and runs accredited long-term training programmes. The Union is a key actor in professionalising youth work and aligning practice with policy.

### Integrated Sources of Knowledge

The TOP Youth Workers programme is based on two major intellectual outputs of the project The Future of Youth Work'ers:

- Mapping of Training Practices of Youth Workers (Lead author: Dragan Atanasov) – a comparative study of training practices and recognition across partner countries.
- Becoming a Youth Worker – Benchmark Study of Youth Workers Pathways Compared to European Standards (Author: Alessandra Coppola – NINFEA) – a European analysis of competence development and recognition frameworks.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The TOP Youth Workers programme is the main outcome of the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership The Future of Youth Work'ers (2021–2023). It was created to respond to the urgent need for recognition, quality and innovation in the youth work sector across Europe.

### Why this programme?

Over the last decade, youth work has become increasingly recognised as an essential contribution to young people's personal, social and civic development. However, in many European countries youth work is still not formally recognised as a profession, and training opportunities are uneven or fragmented. Youth workers often lack clear career pathways, while organisations and municipalities struggle to ensure quality standards and visibility for their work.

The **TOP Youth Workers** programme brings a common European framework to this challenge:

- It consolidates evidence from seven countries (through mapping and benchmarking studies).
- It translates these findings into a modular training programme, adaptable to national and local realities.
- It promotes quality, innovation and recognition as core principles of youth work.

### Target group

The programme is designed for:

- Youth workers (municipal, NGO-based, community, or freelance)
- Youth leaders transitioning into professional roles
- Project coordinators, trainers and educators in the youth field
- Policy makers and municipal staff responsible for youth work services

What does it offer?

- A structured learning pathway of 5–6 modules covering ethics, participation, inclusion, project design, digital competences, and recognition.
- A practical methodology based on non-formal education, design thinking, and peer learning.
- Evidence-based tools aligned with the European Training Strategy, Youthpass and the Bonn Process.
- Transferable outputs (portfolios, prototypes, advocacy plans) that participants can implement directly in their organisations or municipalities.

### Expected impact

The programme will:

- Strengthen the competences and identity of youth workers.
- Create a shared European standard adaptable to diverse national contexts.
- Promote advocacy and recognition of youth work as a profession.
- Support municipalities and organisations to design and implement innovative, inclusive and sustainable youth projects.

## EUROPEAN CONTEXT & FRAMEWORK

### A shared European agenda

Youth work is recognised as a key pillar for young people's empowerment in Europe. The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 sets the vision to Engage, Connect, Empower all young Europeans, linking youth work with active participation, social inclusion, education, and democratic life.

The **3rd European Youth Work Convention (2020)** highlighted the urgent need to:

- Strengthen the quality and recognition of youth work across Europe.
- Support national associations of youth workers in building common frameworks.
- Connect youth work practice with policy and research – the so-called Bonn Process.

### Current challenges

Despite progress, youth work still faces:

- Lack of formal recognition as a profession in many countries.
- Unequal training pathways and fragmented qualification systems.
- Gaps in digital competences, green skills, and crisis management.
- Limited visibility and understanding among decision makers and the wider public.

### How this project responds

The project The Future of Youth Work'ers (KA220-YOU) was designed to address these gaps through:

1. Mapping training practices and qualification models (Output 1).
2. Benchmarking national pathways against European standards (Output 2).
3. Co-creating the TOP Youth Workers training programme as a European reference (Output 3).

### Key references

- EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 – “Engage, Connect, Empower”
- Bonn Process – strengthening quality and recognition of youth work
- European Training Strategy (ETS) and Youthpass – competence-based approach
- Europe Goes Local – Charter on Local Youth Work and municipal cooperation

## WHAT IS THE TOP YOUTH WORKERS PROGRAMME

### Definition

TOP Youth Workers is a European modular training programme designed to strengthen the competences, recognition, and identity of youth work professionals. It was created as the final outcome of the project The Future of Youth Work'ers (Erasmus+ KA220-YOU), building on research, benchmarking and co-creation with seven national associations of youth workers.

The programme is not a theoretical framework only. It is a practical training model, adaptable to different national and local contexts, and ready to be implemented by municipalities, NGOs, training centres and youth organisations.

### Core principles

The TOP Youth Workers programme is based on four guiding principles:

1. Quality & Ethics – ensuring high professional standards, safeguarding, and responsible practice.
2. Non-formal Education – learning by doing, reflection, and peer-to-peer exchange.
3. Participation & Co-creation – involving young people in the design and delivery of solutions.
4. Recognition & Advocacy – promoting youth work as a profession and increasing its visibility among decision makers and society.

### What makes it different?

- European scope – developed collectively by national youth worker associations from six EU and CoE countries.
- Modular design – flexible structure (5–6 modules) that can be delivered as an intensive bootcamp or as an extended course.
- Evidence-based – rooted in comparative research and benchmarking across Europe.
- Transferable outputs – every module produces practical tools (e.g. codes of ethics, advocacy plans, project prototypes) that participants take back to their organisations.
- Aligned with EU standards – connected to the European Training Strategy, Youthpass, and the Bonn Process.

### Why “TOP”?

The name reflects both ambition and clarity:

- Training of Professionals (TOP) – a European programme for the continuous professional development of youth workers.
- Top-level competences – equipping youth workers with the skills and recognition needed to act as key agents of change in their communities.

## TARGET GROUP & ENTRY PROFILES

### Who is the programme for?

The TOP Youth Workers programme is open to a wide range of professionals and practitioners in the youth field. It is designed to support those who already work with young people, as well as emerging professionals who wish to strengthen their competences and recognition.

### Main target groups

- Youth workers employed in municipalities, NGOs, youth centres, associations or community projects.
- Youth leaders in transition from voluntary roles to professional youth work positions.
- Project coordinators, trainers and facilitators involved in non-formal education and community work.
- Policy officers and municipal staff responsible for youth participation, youth policies and local services.

### Entry profiles

Participants may come from diverse backgrounds, but should have:

- Experience in youth work (formal or non-formal), or a strong motivation to engage professionally in the sector.
- Commitment to applying what they learn in their own organisation or municipality.
- Openness to collaborative and participatory learning methods.

### Accessibility and inclusion

The programme follows the principle of “Youth Work for All”:

- No academic prerequisites are required.
- Learning is based on competences, not on previous formal qualifications.
- Participants facing barriers (geographical, economic, cultural or social) are encouraged to join, with specific support measures provided by the partner organisations.

### Certification

All participants receive a Youthpass certificate, documenting their learning outcomes across eight key competence areas of the European Training Strategy. This ensures that their progress is recognised at local, national and European level.



## PROGRAMME ARCHITECTURE

### Overall structure

The TOP Youth Workers programme is built as a modular and flexible framework, allowing different organisations and countries to adapt it to their own realities.

- Total workload: approx. 60–72 hours
- Delivery formats:
  - Intensive bootcamp (5 consecutive days / ~40h)
  - Extended course (6–8 weeks / 2–3h sessions per week + assignments)
  - Blended learning (combining online and in-person sessions)

### Core modules (5–6 blocks)

1. **Identity, Ethics & Quality in Youth Work** - *Roles, responsibilities, ethical codes, and quality standards.*
2. **Youth Policy & Local Governance** - *Linking practice with EU Youth Strategy, Bonn Process, and municipal structures.*
3. **Design Thinking & Project Development** - *Practical tools for co-creating and managing youth projects, including prototyping.*
4. **Participation, Inclusion & Mediation** - *Strategies for meaningful youth participation and working with diverse groups.*
5. **Digital Competences & Impact Communication** - *Using digital tools, data and storytelling to increase visibility and impact.*
6. **Recognition & Sustainability** - *Validation of learning outcomes, use of Youthpass, and funding opportunities.*

### Methodology

- Non-formal education: experiential learning, group reflection, peer exchange.
- Design Thinking: applied to real challenges, from empathy to prototyping.
- Project-based learning: each participant develops a concrete output to implement locally.

### Outputs of each module

Every module produces tangible results (e.g. Code of Ethics, Local Youth Policy Canvas, Project Prototype, Advocacy Plan). These outputs ensure that learning is transferable to organisations, municipalities and communities.

# Modules

*Competences for youth workers in practice*

- Module 1 – Identity, Ethics & Quality
- Module 2 – Youth Policy & Local Governance
- Module 3 – Design Thinking & Project Development
- Module 4 – Participation, Inclusion & Mediation
- Module 5 – Digital Competences & Impact Communication
- Module 6 – Recognition & Sustainability

## MODULE 1: IDENTITY, ETHICS & QUALITY

### Objective

To support youth workers in understanding their professional identity, strengthening their ethical responsibility, and applying quality standards in their daily practice with young people. This module lays the foundation for all the others.

### Learning outcomes

**By the end of this module, participants will be able to:**

- Recognise the core values of youth work: voluntary participation, inclusiveness, empowerment, and non-formal learning.
- Describe the different roles of a youth worker (facilitator, mentor, mediator, advocate, educator).
- Apply ethical principles such as confidentiality, respect, equality and safeguarding.
- Use quality indicators to plan, implement and evaluate youth work activities.
- Reflect critically on their own practice and identify areas for growth.

### Key contents

- Identity of youth work in Europe: common elements and national differences.
- Professional roles and boundaries: avoiding role confusion (e.g. youth worker vs. teacher, social worker, volunteer).
- Ethical frameworks: codes of ethics, safeguarding principles, duty of care.
- Quality in youth work: criteria, indicators and tools (local, national and European).
- Continuous professional development: self-assessment and lifelong learning pathways.

### Methodologies

- Icebreaker exercise: “Who am I as a youth worker?” – participants draw/write their identity and share in groups.
- Case studies: discussing ethical dilemmas (e.g. confidentiality vs. safety, inclusion vs. resources).
- Group debate: “What makes youth work different from other professions?”
- Peer reflection: participants exchange feedback on their own professional strengths and challenges.
- Practical exercise: building a simple quality framework for one activity.

### Practical output

- A Code of Ethics drafted collectively, adapted to the local/national context.
- A Quality Checklist to be used when planning and evaluating youth projects.
- A Personal Development Plan (PDP) for each participant, to track their growth throughout the programme.

## MODULE 2: YOUTH POLICY & LOCAL GOVERNANCE

### Objective

To enable youth workers to connect their practice with youth policy frameworks, strengthen cooperation with municipalities, and engage meaningfully in policy dialogue at local, national and European levels.

### Learning outcomes

**By the end of this module, participants will be able to:**

- Explain the main European policy frameworks (EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, Bonn Process, European Youth Work Agenda).
- Identify and describe the key actors in youth policy at municipal, national and EU level.
- Understand how youth work contributes to policy priorities (inclusion, participation, green and digital transitions).
- Develop skills in advocacy and communication with local decision makers.
- Design an Agenda for Local Youth Work with priorities, goals and measurable indicators.

### Key contents

- European frameworks: EU Youth Strategy (Engage, Connect, Empower), the Bonn Process, and the European Training Strategy.
- National and local realities: how municipalities and ministries design youth policies.
- Youth work and governance: the link between practice, research and policy.
- Advocacy in practice: how to present youth workers' perspectives to politicians and institutions.
- Case studies: successful examples of youth work influencing policy in Europe.

### Methodologies

- Policy mapping exercise: participants create a map of youth policy actors (municipalities, youth councils, NGOs, ministries, EU bodies).
- Role-play simulation: “Meeting the Mayor” – youth workers present proposals to a local decision maker.
- Group work: designing a Local Youth Policy Canvas (stakeholders, resources, priorities).
- Interactive lecture: short input on EU frameworks followed by Q&A.
- Peer exchange: comparing policy realities across the participating countries.

### Practical outputs

- A Local Youth Policy Canvas, identifying stakeholders, policy priorities and action points.
- A One-Page Advocacy Note to present to local or national politicians.
- A Stakeholder Map for each participant's municipality or organisation, showing who to engage and how.

## MODULE 3: DESIGN THINKING & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

### Objective

To equip youth workers with practical tools and methods for designing, prototyping and managing youth projects, using Design Thinking as a creative and participatory methodology. This module transforms ideas into concrete actions that respond to real needs of young people and communities.

### Learning outcomes

**By the end of this module, participants will be able to:**

- Understand and apply the Design Thinking cycle: Empathise → Define → Ideate → Prototype → Test.
- Involve young people as co-creators in the design and development of projects.
- Translate challenges into clear problem statements.
- Generate innovative ideas using brainstorming and ideation techniques.
- Develop prototypes and test them quickly with young people and stakeholders.
- Plan project implementation with timelines, roles, resources and evaluation.

### Key contents

- Introduction to Design Thinking and its application in youth work.
- Tools for empathy: interviews, observation, persona mapping.
- Defining challenges: problem trees, reframing techniques, “How Might We...?” questions.
- Ideation methods: brainstorming, mind mapping, world café.
- Prototyping and testing: low-cost, quick feedback approaches.
- Linking design with project management basics: objectives, outputs, timelines, resources.
- From prototype to fundable project (connecting to Erasmus+, local budgets, foundations).

### Methodologies

- Hands-on design sprint (2 days or broken into sessions): teams work on real local challenges.
- Empathy interviews: participants interview young people from their communities.
- Rapid prototyping: building simple models (paper, digital mock-ups, role plays).
- Pitch session: groups present prototypes to peers and receive feedback.
- Reflection: connecting the design process to daily youth work.

### Practical outputs

- A Problem Statement defined collectively with young people.
- A Prototype (service, activity, tool or event) designed during the module.
- A Project Roadmap (timeline, resources, roles) ready for testing or funding application.
- A Pitch Presentation to present the idea to decision makers or funders.

## MODULE 4: PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION & MEDIATION

### Objective

To strengthen youth workers' ability to create inclusive environments, ensure the meaningful participation of all young people, and mediate challenges or conflicts that arise in diverse groups. This module builds the competences needed to make youth work truly accessible and democratic.

### Learning outcomes

#### By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand different models and levels of youth participation (Hart's Ladder, Lundy model, EU Youth Goals).
- Identify barriers that prevent young people from participating (social, economic, cultural, geographical, ability-related).
- Apply strategies for inclusive practice in youth work activities.
- Facilitate diverse groups with sensitivity to culture, gender, background and experience.
- Mediate and resolve conflicts in youth groups using dialogue and non-violent communication.
- Design participatory processes that give young people a real voice in decision making.

### Key contents

- Participation frameworks: from tokenism to genuine co-decision making.
- Inclusion strategies: accessibility (physical, digital, financial, linguistic), outreach to marginalised groups.
- Mediation tools: active listening, conflict resolution, restorative practices.
- Human rights and citizenship education as foundations of inclusive youth work.
- Case studies of participation at local, national and European levels (youth councils, participatory budgets, Erasmus+ projects).

### Methodologies

- Privilege walk / power line exercise: to raise awareness of inequalities.
- Simulation: youth workers and young people negotiating priorities in a municipal youth council.
- World café: exploring barriers and solutions for participation.
- Case clinic: analysing real situations of exclusion and brainstorming inclusive approaches.
- Role-play mediation: practising conflict resolution techniques.

### Practical outputs

- A Participation Plan for one local activity or space (e.g. youth council, youth centre, festival).
- An Accessibility Checklist for events and youth spaces.
- A Mediation Toolkit with at least 3 techniques participants can apply in their daily work.
- A Youth Commitment Statement, co-signed with young people, outlining how participation will be guaranteed in practice.

## MODULE 5: DIGITAL COMPETENCES & IMPACT COMMUNICATION

### Objective

To develop youth workers' skills in using digital tools effectively and in communicating the impact of youth work to young people, stakeholders and the wider community. This module helps youth workers adapt to the digital era and make their work more visible and valued.

### Learning outcomes

**By the end of this module, participants will be able to:**

- Use digital platforms and tools to facilitate learning and participation with young people.
- Apply principles of digital safety, data protection and well-being.
- Collect and use basic data and indicators to show the results of youth work.
- Create simple but powerful impact stories using storytelling techniques.
- Communicate effectively with young people online and offline, using accessible and engaging formats.
- Develop a digital communication strategy for their organisation or project.

### Key contents

- Digital youth work: opportunities, risks and trends.
- Tools for facilitation: collaborative platforms, online whiteboards, quizzes, chatbots.
- Digital inclusion: bridging the gap for young people with fewer opportunities.
- Data and evidence: how to measure impact (reach, participation, change).
- Storytelling for impact: building narratives that connect with emotions and facts.
- Communication strategies: choosing channels (social media, community media, events).
- Ethics online: GDPR, digital footprint, safeguarding young people in digital spaces.

### Methodologies

- Hands-on workshops: exploring digital tools (Miro, Mentimeter, Canva, Typebot).
- Storytelling lab: participants create and share short impact stories.
- Data exercise: building a simple impact dashboard with 3–4 indicators.
- Simulation: crisis communication on social media.
- Peer exchange: sharing best practices in digital youth work from different countries.

### Practical outputs

- A Mini Digital Toolbox for youth workers (selection of tested tools).
- An Impact Story (text, video, or infographic) produced by each participant.
- A Basic Impact Dashboard with simple indicators (e.g. number of young people reached, level of participation, satisfaction rates).
- A Digital Communication Plan for a local project or organisation.



## MODULE 6: RECOGNITION & SUSTAINABILITY

### Objective

To empower youth workers to recognise and validate learning outcomes, promote the recognition of youth work as a profession, and ensure the sustainability of projects and organisations through advocacy and funding strategies.

### Learning outcomes

**By the end of this module, participants will be able to:**

- Use Youthpass and other European tools to validate competences gained through youth work.
- Explain the importance of recognition (personal, social, political, professional) in strengthening the youth work sector.
- Advocate for youth work with decision makers and stakeholders, using clear arguments and evidence.
- Identify and access funding opportunities (Erasmus+, national/local funds, foundations).
- Plan the sustainability of a project or initiative beyond the funding period.
- Build alliances and partnerships to strengthen the visibility and recognition of youth work.

### Key contents

- Recognition dimensions: self-recognition, peer recognition, social recognition, political recognition.
- Youthpass & ETS competence framework: practical use in daily youth work.
- Advocacy strategies: how to influence policy and raise visibility.
- Funding landscape: mapping opportunities and diversifying resources.
- Sustainability models: integrating projects into local policies, creating networks, building long-term partnerships.
- Storytelling for recognition: using impact stories to promote youth work.

### Methodologies

- Youthpass workshop: participants complete parts of their own Youthpass based on the training experience.
- Advocacy pitch: groups prepare and deliver a short presentation to “convince” a mock city council.
- Funding game: simulation of choosing and applying for funding opportunities.
- Peer-to-peer clinic: participants advise each other on sustainability strategies for their projects.
- Recognition mapping: identifying where youth work is already recognised in their country, and where advocacy is needed.

### Practical outputs

- A completed Youthpass for each participant.
- An Advocacy Plan with 2–3 key messages tailored to local or national decision makers.
- A Funding Map identifying at least 3 potential funding sources.
- A Sustainability Strategy for one project or initiative, including partnerships and next steps.



# IMPLEMENTATION & QUALITY

*From methodology to monitoring and impact*

- Methodology, Evaluation & Certification
- Implementation Guide (Step by Step)
- Sustainability & Dissemination
- European Pathways
- Lessons from Mapping
- Training Formats (Bootcamp, Extended, Blended)
- KPIs & Impact Indicators
- Team & Roles
- Monitoring & Quality Assurance
- Implementation Scenarios
- Toolkit & Resources

## METHODOLOGY, EVALUATION & CERTIFICATION

### Methodology

The TOP Youth Workers programme is based on the principles of non-formal education and experiential learning. The approach ensures that participants learn by doing, reflect on their experiences, and transfer knowledge to their own contexts.

#### Key methodological pillars:

- Experiential learning cycle: experience → reflection → conceptualisation → application.
- Design Thinking: empathy, co-creation and innovation as core drivers.
- Peer-to-peer learning: sharing practices, challenges and solutions among youth workers.
- Project-based learning: participants develop concrete outputs that can be implemented locally.
- Inclusive facilitation: using diverse tools to ensure participation of all learners.

### Evaluation

Evaluation is continuous and formative, focusing on individual growth and group progress. It ensures that participants track their learning throughout the programme.

#### Tools used:

- Self-assessment forms (before, during and after the programme).
- Learning diaries or reflection journals.
- Peer feedback sessions after activities.
- Facilitator observations on engagement, collaboration and skills demonstrated.
- Practical outputs (policy canvas, prototypes, advocacy plans) as evidence of competence.

Participants are encouraged to set personal learning goals at the start of the course and revisit them regularly.

### Certification

#### All participants receive:

- Youthpass certificate, documenting their learning outcomes across the eight ETS competence areas.
- A portfolio of evidence, including the practical outputs created during the modules.
- An individual learning record, linking their experience to professional development pathways.

The certification ensures that the programme contributes both to the personal recognition of youth workers and to the wider advocacy for youth work as a profession.

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE (STEP BY STEP)

### Step 1 — Secure commitment

- Gain support from the municipality or organisation leadership.
- Define a small coordination team (1 manager + 1 facilitator).
- Clarify budget, venue, and timeframe (bootcamp or extended).

### Step 2 — Needs assessment

- Run focus groups or surveys with youth workers and young people.
- Identify local challenges (e.g. participation gaps, digital needs, recognition issues).
- Select which modules are most relevant (programme is flexible).

### Step 3 — Participant selection

- Recruit 12–20 youth workers / practitioners.
- Criteria: diversity (age, gender, background, experience) + motivation.
- Encourage participation of those facing geographical, social or economic barriers.

### Step 4 — Prepare logistics

- Choose a safe, inclusive space (accessible building, internet, breakout rooms).
- Provide materials (flipcharts, markers, digital tools).
- Plan coffee breaks and well-being spaces.

### Step 5 — Deliver the programme

- Follow the modular structure (6 modules).
- Use interactive, non-formal methods (workshops, simulations, design sprints).
- Adapt time according to chosen format (bootcamp vs extended).

### Step 6 — Outputs & follow-up

- Ensure each participant creates concrete outputs (policy canvas, prototype, advocacy plan, sustainability strategy).
- Organise a closing session with local stakeholders (youth, decision makers, partners).
- Collect evaluation forms and reflections.

### Step 7 — Recognition & sustainability

- Issue Youthpass certificates to all participants.
- Compile outputs in a portfolio for dissemination.
- Plan follow-up: mentoring, mini-projects, or integration in the municipal youth strategy.
- Explore funding for continuation (Erasmus+, local budget, foundations).

## SUSTAINABILITY & DISSEMINATION

### Sustainability – keeping the programme alive

The impact of TOP Youth Workers goes beyond a single training. To ensure continuity:

- Integration into local strategies: embed the programme in the Municipal Youth Strategy or organisational annual plans.
- Community of Practice: create a network of alumni who exchange practices, mentor newcomers and co-develop projects.
- Annual cycle: repeat the training once per year (bootcamp or extended), updating modules to new realities.
- Institutional partnerships: connect with schools, universities, NGOs and youth councils to reinforce the relevance of youth work.
- Funding roadmap: diversify sources (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, local and regional funds, private foundations).

### Dissemination – making results visible

Dissemination is key for recognition and advocacy. Activities should:

- Showcase outputs: publish participants' prototypes, advocacy plans and success stories.
- Engage decision makers: invite mayors, councillors and municipal staff to closing events.
- Celebrate youth workers: highlight personal journeys and achievements on social media and local media.
- Use digital platforms: share infographics, videos, and short testimonials through websites, newsletters and social networks.
- Multiplier events: organise public sessions or mini-conferences to present results to a wider audience of practitioners and stakeholders.

Practical tools for dissemination

- Impact stories: short narratives (text, video or podcast) that humanise the results.
- One-page briefs: concise summaries of outputs for decision makers.
- Visual materials: infographics and posters explaining the modules and outcomes.
- Policy dialogue sessions: roundtables between youth workers and political representatives.

### Long-term vision

The goal is that the TOP Youth Workers programme becomes a European reference model for professional development in youth work. Sustainability means:

- Youth workers continue to apply the tools in their daily practice.
- Municipalities and organisations see the programme as an investment in quality.
- Policy makers recognise youth work as a profession with standards, ethics and impact.

## EUROPEAN PATHWAYS

### Why compare pathways?

Across Europe, youth work is organised differently: in some countries it is a recognised profession with vocational standards, while in others it remains voluntary and less structured. The Becoming a Youth Worker benchmark study analysed these realities and compared them with European standards and strategies.

The TOP Youth Workers programme builds on this comparison to position itself as a flexible and transferable model for competence development.

### Key European training pathways

- YOCOMO (SALTO-ETS / Erasmus+)

Focus on competence-based learning for youth workers. Strong in personal development and reflection, but less linked to local policy frameworks.

- Training of Trainers (ToT – SALTO-Youth)

Aimed at experienced trainers in non-formal education. Deep focus on facilitation, project design and evaluation, but not accessible for entry-level youth workers.

- ToT HRE (Council of Europe)

Long-term course on human rights education. Strong on inclusion and equity, but narrow in thematic focus.

- TRAYCE (Council of Europe)

Programme for youth worker trainers. Emphasises advocacy, diversity and intercultural learning.

- ENTER! LTTC (Council of Europe)

Long-term training for youth workers working with disadvantaged youth. Centred on social inclusion and human rights at community level.

### What makes TOP Youth Workers unique?

- Practical & adaptable: Designed as a ready-to-use programme for municipalities, NGOs and national associations.
- Policy-linked: Stronger focus on connecting youth work practice to local governance and the EU Youth Strategy.
- Design Thinking approach: Encourages innovation and prototyping of new solutions with young people.
- Recognition & advocacy: Integrates Youthpass, evidence-based impact tools and advocacy training.
- Inclusiveness: Accessible to youth workers with different levels of experience and backgrounds.

### Added value

By combining elements from existing European programmes and filling their gaps, TOP Youth Workers acts as a bridge between practice and policy, offering a common European reference while remaining flexible for local realities.

## LESSONS FROM MAPPING OF PRACTICES

### Why the mapping was important

The first stage of the project (Output 1 – Mapping of Training Practices) analysed how youth worker training is organised in the seven partner countries. It revealed a diverse landscape, with common challenges but also innovative practices that could inspire others. This mapping provided the evidence base for designing the TOP Youth Workers programme.

### Main findings

1. Diversity of recognition
  - In some countries (e.g. Serbia, North Macedonia), youth work has vocational standards and occupational profiles.
  - In others (e.g. Italy, Greece), youth work is not formally recognised, relying heavily on NGOs and voluntary pathways.
2. Unequal training systems
  - Some contexts offer long-term accredited training (formal or vocational).
  - Others depend on short-term projects with no structured follow-up.
3. Common elements across Europe
  - Emphasis on non-formal education and experiential learning.
  - Strong focus on participation, inclusion and empowerment of young people.
  - Use of tools like Youthpass to validate competences, but often inconsistently applied.
4. Challenges identified
  - Lack of career pathways for youth workers.
  - Unequal access to training (urban vs. rural, central vs. peripheral regions).
  - Limited connection between practice and policy frameworks.

### Implications for the TOP Youth Workers programme

- Need for a common European framework that is flexible enough to adapt to local realities.
- Importance of creating a structured, modular programme with clear outputs and recognition tools.
- Necessity to ensure inclusion and accessibility, especially for youth workers with fewer opportunities.
- Stronger links between training, municipal policies, and European strategies.

### Practical inspiration integrated into TOP

- From Estonia and Serbia: structured approaches to occupational standards.
- From Netherlands: strong networking of youth workers through associations.
- From Italy and Greece: grassroots innovation, despite lack of formal recognition.
- From Portugal: growing role of municipalities in supporting youth workers.

### Conclusion:

The mapping confirmed the urgency of a shared European programme. The TOP Youth Workers directly responds by offering a modular, evidence-based and adaptable training model that builds on these lessons.

## EXAMPLE TRAINING FORMATS

The TOP Youth Workers programme is flexible. It can be delivered as an intensive bootcamp or as an extended learning pathway, depending on the needs of the organisation and participants.

### Option 1 — Intensive Bootcamp (5 days / ~40 hours)

Best for: municipalities or organisations wanting a quick, high-energy experience that creates strong group dynamics.

#### Suggested schedule:

- Day 1: Module 1 – Identity, Ethics & Quality + Module 2 – Youth Policy & Local Governance
- Day 2: Module 3 – Design Thinking (Empathise & Define)
- Day 3: Module 3 – Design Thinking (Ideate, Prototype & Test)
- Day 4: Module 4 – Participation, Inclusion & Mediation + Module 5 – Digital & Impact Communication
- Day 5: Module 6 – Recognition & Sustainability + Evaluation & Youthpass Ceremony

#### Strengths:

- High intensity, strong team bonding.
- Immediate outputs (prototypes, policy canvases, advocacy plans).
- Easier logistics (one location, one week).

#### Considerations:

- Demands full-time commitment from participants.
- Works best with residential format or strong local support.

### Option 2 — Extended Pathway (6–8 weeks / 60–72 hours)

Best for: organisations wanting deeper learning and application over time.

#### Suggested schedule:

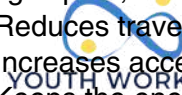
- Week 1: Module 1 – Identity, Ethics & Quality (online or in-person)
- Week 2: Module 2 – Youth Policy & Governance
- Weeks 3–4: Module 3 – Design Thinking Sprint (split into sessions)
- Week 5: Module 4 – Participation & Inclusion
- Week 6: Module 5 – Digital Competences & Impact Communication
- Week 7: Module 6 – Recognition & Sustainability
- Week 8: Final presentations, evaluation, Youthpass Ceremony

### Option 3 — Blended Model

Combines online sessions (short inputs, peer exchange, reflection) with in-person workshops (design sprint, role plays, closing event).

- Reduces travel costs.
- Increases accessibility for remote areas.
- Keeps the energy of in-person interaction.

#### Conclusion:



Financiado pela  
União Europeia



Agência Nacional  
Erasmus+ Juventude/Desporto  
Corpo Europeu de Solidariedade



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PROFISSIONAIS DE JUVENTUDE



## EXAMPLE TRAINING FORMATS

### Strengths:

- Allows participants to apply learning in real time in their organisations.
- More accessible for those unable to commit to a full week.
- Builds continuity and stronger outputs.

### Considerations:

- Requires stable facilitation and participant commitment over weeks.
- Needs good digital and communication tools if partly online.

### Option 3 — Blended Model (mix of online & in-person / 60–72 hours)

Best for: organisations with limited budgets or participants spread across different regions.

### Suggested schedule:

- Weeks 1–2 (online): Module 1 – Identity, Ethics & Quality + Module 2 – Youth Policy & Governance (short sessions + peer exchange).
- Week 3 (in-person workshop): Module 3 – Design Thinking Sprint (Empathise, Define, Ideate).
- Week 4 (online): Reflection + coaching sessions on prototypes.
- Week 5 (in-person workshop): Module 4 – Participation & Inclusion + Module 5 – Digital Competences & Impact Communication.
- Week 6 (online): Mentoring circles and preparation for final presentations.
- Week 7 (in-person closing event): Module 6 – Recognition & Sustainability + Evaluation & Youthpass Ceremony.

### Strengths:

- Reduces travel costs while keeping meaningful in-person contact.
- Increases accessibility for remote or rural participants.
- Keeps the energy and group bonding of face-to-face workshops.
- Allows flexibility and continuity between sessions.

### Considerations:

- Requires good digital infrastructure and facilitation skills for online sessions.
- Demands strong coordination to balance online and offline learning.
- Participants must stay engaged across both formats to ensure consistent learning.



## INDICATORS OF IMPACT (KPIs & SUCCESS MEASURES)

The success of the TOP Youth Workers programme is measured through both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (stories and feedback) indicators. Together, they show the real difference the programme makes for youth workers, organisations, municipalities, and young people.

### Quantitative Indicators (Numbers)

- Participation
  - Number of youth workers trained (target: 12–20 per cycle).
  - Diversity of participants (gender, age, background, rural/urban).
- Outputs created
  - Number of prototypes developed during the Design Thinking modules.
  - Number of policy canvases, advocacy notes, or sustainability plans produced.
- Recognition
  - Number of Youthpass certificates issued.
  - Number of outputs integrated into municipal or organisational strategies.
- Multiplier effect
  - Number of young people involved indirectly through pilot projects.
  - Number of dissemination events or activities organised.

### Qualitative Indicators (Quality & Change)

- Learning & growth
  - Participants' self-assessment shows increased confidence in competences.
  - Each participant identifies at least 3 strengthened competences.
- Organisational impact
  - Organisations adopt new tools and practices created during the training.
  - Municipalities integrate outputs into local youth policies or services.
- Community recognition
  - Positive feedback from young people engaged in prototypes.
  - Evidence of improved cooperation between youth workers and decision makers.

### Tools for Measuring Impact

- Pre- and post-training surveys (skills, motivation, confidence).
- Learning diaries or reflection journals.
- Peer evaluation and group feedback sessions.
- Stakeholder feedback (young people, decision makers, partners).
- Impact stories documenting changes in practice or policy.

### Example Success Measures

- ✓ 80% of participants complete all modules and outputs.
- ✓ 70% report improved ability to advocate for youth work.
- ✓ 50% of prototypes tested are implemented locally within 3 months.
- ✓ Municipalities/organisations commit to running the programme again.

## TEAM & ROLES

The success of the TOP Youth Workers programme depends on a well-prepared and balanced team.

### Core roles

- Coordinator / Project Manager
  - Ensures alignment with objectives, manages logistics and communication.
  - Acts as contact point with the hosting municipality/organisation.
- Lead Facilitator
  - Guides participants through the modules.
  - Responsible for methodology, flow and group dynamics.
- Co-facilitator
  - Supports workshops, manages small groups, energisers and reflection.
  - Ensures inclusion of all voices.
- Mentor / Coach
  - Provides follow-up during and after training.
  - Helps participants apply learning to real contexts.
- Youthpass & Evaluation Officer
  - Supports participants in completing Youthpass.
  - Collects feedback, runs evaluations, and ensures quality standards.

### Optional roles (depending on resources)

- Youth Ambassador(s) – local young people invited to co-create or give feedback.
- Guest Experts – provide input on specific topics (e.g. digital tools, funding opportunities).
- Communications Officer – manages dissemination (social media, storytelling, reporting).

### Ideal team composition

- 1 Coordinator
- 1 Lead Facilitator
- 1 Co-facilitator
- 1 Mentor/Evaluation support

→ This minimum 4-person team ensures smooth delivery and follow-up.

## MONITORING & QUALITY ASSURANCE

### Why quality assurance matters

The TOP Youth Workers programme is more than a training course – it is a European reference model. Ensuring high standards of delivery, transparency and accountability is essential for its credibility and long-term sustainability.

### Monitoring system

- Continuous tracking of activities during each module.
- Pre- and post-training surveys to measure learning progress.
- Observation tools for facilitators to assess participation, teamwork and application of methods.
- Feedback loops with participants after each session.
- Collection of outputs (policy canvases, prototypes, advocacy plans) as tangible evidence of learning.

### Quality assurance principles

1. Relevance – content adapted to local and organisational needs.
2. Consistency – programme follows the modular structure and methodological standards.
3. Inclusiveness – all participants, regardless of background, are supported to fully engage.
4. Transparency – clear communication of objectives, criteria, and expected outputs.
5. Recognition – validation of learning outcomes through Youthpass and portfolios.

### Tools for quality assurance

- Self-assessment checklists for youth workers.
- Facilitator's guide with indicators of quality for each module.
- Peer reviews within the consortium (cross-checking between partners).
- Impact+ tool (Erasmus+ methodology) to measure project impact on youth workers, organisations, and communities.

### Evaluation moments

- Daily reflections and short evaluations during the training.
- Mid-term review (for extended or blended formats).
- Final evaluation workshop with participants.
- External feedback from stakeholders (young people, municipalities, partner organisations).

### Outcomes of monitoring & quality assurance

- Evidence of competence development for each participant.
- Improved training design through continuous feedback.
- Stronger recognition of youth work at local, national and European levels.
- Assurance that the programme is replicable and transferable across contexts.

## IMPLEMENTATION SCENARIOS

The TOP Youth Workers programme can be implemented in different contexts. Its modular design makes it flexible for municipalities, NGOs and networks at local, regional or national level.

### Scenario 1 — Municipality-based training

How it works:

- Integrated into the Municipal Youth Strategy or annual training plan.
- Organised in cooperation with the local youth council or youth services.
- Delivered as a bootcamp for municipal staff, youth centre workers and local NGOs.

Benefits:

- Strengthens cooperation between municipality and youth organisations.
- Creates a pool of trained professionals supporting local youth policies.
- Outputs (policy canvases, advocacy notes) feed directly into municipal planning.

### Scenario 2 — NGO or Association-led training

How it works:

- Implemented by a national or local NGO.
- Participants include staff, volunteers and community youth workers.
- Delivered as an extended pathway, with weekly sessions and mentoring.

Benefits:

- Builds internal capacity of the organisation.
- Creates stronger links between volunteers and professionals.
- Encourages innovation in grassroots projects with young people.

### Scenario 3 — Regional or National Network

How it works:

- Coordinated by a regional youth platform or national youth worker association.
- Participants recruited from multiple municipalities or organisations.
- Delivered as a blended model (online + regional in-person sessions).

Benefits:

- Promotes peer learning and exchange of practices across regions.
- Strengthens national recognition of youth work.
- Creates a shared competence framework among diverse actors.

### Scenario 4 — International Partnership

How it works:

- Delivered through Erasmus+ KA1 or KA2 cooperation.
- Involves youth workers from multiple countries.
- Focus on comparing national contexts and piloting innovative solutions.

Benefits:

- Builds European dimension and intercultural competence.
- Encourages transfer of good practices between countries.
- Increases visibility and recognition of youth work internationally.

## TOOLKIT & RESOURCES

The TOP Youth Workers programme is not just training – it equips participants and organisations with a practical toolkit that they can use immediately in their work.

### Core resources

- Youthpass – tool to document learning outcomes, linked to the ETS (European Training Strategy) competence framework.
- Design Thinking canvases – empathy maps, problem statements, idea canvases, prototype sheets.
- Policy Canvas – to connect youth work practice with local policy priorities.
- Advocacy Note template – one-page format to present youth work proposals to decision makers.
- Accessibility Checklist – practical guide to make youth spaces and activities more inclusive.

### Evaluation & quality tools

- Self-assessment forms (before/after training).
- Learning diaries / reflection journals.
- Peer feedback templates.
- Quality checklist for planning and evaluating activities.
- Impact+ tool (Erasmus+) reference for measuring project impact.

### Digital toolbox

- Collaborative platforms: Miro, MURAL, Mentimeter, Padlet.
- Storytelling tools: Canva, Adobe Express, Biteable.
- Interactive learning: Kahoot, Typebot, Quizizz.
- Communication: simple dashboards and templates for reporting impact.

### Practical outputs (from modules)

Each participant leaves with:

- A Code of Ethics (Module 1).
- A Local Youth Policy Canvas (Module 2).
- A Prototype & Roadmap (Module 3).
- A Participation & Inclusion Plan (Module 4).
- An Impact Story & Communication Plan (Module 5).
- A Recognition & Sustainability Strategy (Module 6).

### Conclusion:

The toolkit ensures that participants do not just attend a course – they bring home practical tools and ready-to-use resources that improve the quality and recognition of youth work in their daily practice.

# ALIGNMENT & FUTURE

*European frameworks and the way ahead*

- European Alignment
- Roadmap for the Future
- Glossary of Terms
- Credits & Legal Disclaimer
- Final Notes

## EUROPEAN ALIGNMENT

The TOP Youth Workers programme is not an isolated initiative. It is fully aligned with the main European strategies and frameworks guiding youth work, ensuring its relevance, legitimacy and transferability.

### EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027

- Core principles: Engage, Connect, Empower.
- Links directly with Youth Goals, especially:
  - #4: Information & Constructive Dialogue
  - #5: Mental Health & Well-being
  - #6: Moving Rural Youth Forward
  - #9: Space and Participation for All
- TOP Youth Workers contributes by strengthening the capacity of professionals to implement these goals.

### Bonn Process – European Youth Work Agenda

- Calls for strengthening quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.
- Promotes national and local action plans for youth work development.
- TOP Youth Workers offers a ready-made training model that can be integrated into such plans.

### Europe Goes Local – Charter on Local Youth Work

- Encourages municipalities to adopt clear standards and supportive environments for youth work.
- TOP Youth Workers provides tools (policy canvas, advocacy notes, sustainability plans) that municipalities can directly apply in their youth strategies.

### European Training Strategy (ETS) & Youthpass

- ETS defines the competence framework for youth workers.
- Youthpass ensures recognition of non-formal learning.
- TOP Youth Workers integrates both, making sure participants document competences and organisations value learning outcomes.

### Council of Europe (CoE) Youth Work Priorities

- Emphasises youth participation, inclusion and human rights.
- The programme's modules (esp. Participation, Mediation, Recognition) respond directly to these priorities.

### Conclusion:

By aligning with EU and CoE frameworks, TOP Youth Workers strengthens the position of youth work in Europe and supports the professionalisation and recognition of youth workers as essential actors in democracy, participation and social inclusion.

## ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

The TOP Youth Workers programme is designed not only as a project result but as a long-term reference model for the professional development of youth workers across Europe.

Short-term (1-2 years)	Medium-term (3-5 years)	Long-term (5-10 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local adoption by municipalities &amp; NGOs.</li> <li>• Delivery of first pilots (bootcamps, extended formats).</li> <li>• Alumni Community of Practice created.</li> <li>• Dissemination via youth councils &amp; Erasmus+ networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National scaling – programme delivered by youth worker associations in at least 10 countries.</li> <li>• Policy recognition – referenced in municipal &amp; national youth strategies.</li> <li>• Digital platform launched (resources, mentoring).</li> <li>• Integration into vocational/higher education pathways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognised as <b>European best practice</b> (Bonn Process, EU Youth Strategy).</li> <li>• Sustainable funding models (Erasmus+, municipal budgets, foundations).</li> <li>• European Alumni Community grows into a <b>network of excellence</b>.</li> <li>• Youth work recognised as a profession with standards, ethics and frameworks.</li> </ul>

### Strategic vision

The ambition is for TOP Youth Workers to become:

- A benchmark training model used across Europe.
- A bridge between youth work practice and youth policy.
- A driver of recognition, giving visibility to youth workers as essential actors in democratic and inclusive societies.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **Youth Work**

A broad term describing social, educational and empowerment activities with and for young people, based on voluntary participation and non-formal learning.

### **Youth Worker**

A professional or practitioner who supports young people's personal, social and civic development through youth work activities. Can be employed by municipalities, NGOs, youth centres, or work as freelancers.

### **Non-formal Education (NFE)**

Learning that happens outside formal school systems. It is voluntary, learner-centred and based on experiential methods (learning by doing, reflection, peer-to-peer).

### **Youthpass**

A European recognition tool to document learning outcomes in youth work projects, linked to the European Training Strategy (ETS) competence framework.

### **ETS – European Training Strategy**

Framework that defines competences needed for youth workers and trainers in Europe. Used as a reference for learning outcomes and professional growth.

### **Bonn Process**

The follow-up to the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (2020), aimed at strengthening the quality, innovation and recognition of youth work across Europe.

### **EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027**

The European Union's framework for youth policy, built around three words: Engage, Connect, Empower. It includes the 11 Youth Goals.

### **Design Thinking**

A creative, user-centred methodology for problem-solving and innovation, structured around five steps: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test.

### **Policy Dialogue**

Structured discussions between young people, youth workers and decision makers to influence policies and decisions that affect youth.

### **Recognition (in youth work)**

The process of validating and valuing the competences developed through youth work. Recognition can be personal (self-confidence), social (community value), political (policy/legal frameworks), or professional (career pathways).

### **Advocacy**

Actions to influence decision makers and institutions, promoting youth work as a valued and recognised profession.

## CREDITS & LEGAL DISCLAIMER

### Project coordination

APPJuventude – Portuguese Association of Youth Workers (Portugal)

### Consortium partners

- Estonian Association of Youth Workers (Estonia – ENK)
- BVjong – Beroepsvereniging Kinder- en Jongerenwerkers (Netherlands)
- NINFEA – National Informal and Non-Formal Education Association (Italy)
- Hellenic Association of Youth Workers (Greece)
- NAPOR – National Association of Youth Workers (Serbia)
- Union of Youth Work – Sojuz za Mladinska Rabota (North Macedonia)

### Sources integrated

- Mapping of Training Practices of Youth Workers (Lead author: Dragan Atanasov).
- Becoming a Youth Worker – Benchmark Study of Youth Workers Pathways Compared to European Standards (Author: Alessandra Coppola – NINFEA).
- Erasmus+ KA220-YOU project application The Future of Youth Work'ers.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all youth workers, trainers, municipalities and organisations who contributed ideas, practices and reflections during the project. Their input made the TOP Youth Workers programme possible.

### Legal disclaimer

This publication was produced in the framework of the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership The Future of Youth Work'ers (2021–2024).

Funded by the European Union under the programme Erasmus+ KA220-YOU.

Disclaimer: The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors. The Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## FINAL NOTES

The TOP Youth Workers programme represents a collective effort of national associations, municipalities, NGOs and European partners. It is more than a training model – it is a commitment to the recognition, quality and sustainability of youth work in Europe.

### **This document brings together:**

- Evidence from research and mapping of practices.
- Comparative studies of pathways across Europe.
- A practical, modular programme ready to be implemented in different contexts.

### **Key message**

Youth workers are agents of change. By investing in their competences, recognition and advocacy, we invest in young people, communities and democracy.

### **A call to action**

We invite municipalities, organisations and decision makers to:

- Adopt and adapt the programme in their own contexts.
- Support youth workers in accessing continuous professional development.
- Promote the recognition of youth work as a profession.

Together, we can ensure that the future of youth work in Europe is strong, innovative and inclusive.