

National Report – Study no. 2

COUNTRY POLAND

Activity A2.3

”Ready for positive&supportive organizations for practitioners in Youth Work?”

Developed by

SOWA

Section I: Context and rationale of national study

In Poland, organisations working with young people have undergone significant changes over the last decade. Alongside their traditional educational, civic engagement and community-building roles, they have increasingly become spaces where young people seek support, understanding and stability in times of uncertainty.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of the war in Ukraine, rising concerns about mental health, economic pressures and growing social polarisation have all influenced the realities in which young people live and develop. As a result, youth organisations are often among the first actors responding to emerging needs, particularly at local level. Many organisations have expanded their activities beyond project implementation to include psychosocial support, community resilience initiatives, inclusion programmes and informal educational opportunities.

These developments have also transformed the role of youth workers and practitioners. Their work increasingly requires emotional engagement, adaptability and the ability to respond to situations that are often complex and unpredictable. At the same time, many organisations continue to operate in conditions shaped by short-term project funding, limited human resources and increasing administrative demands. While these challenges are widely recognised within the sector, much less attention is paid to how they affect the people responsible for delivering youth work on a daily basis.

The Polish youth sector is characterised by considerable diversity. Large and well-established organisations operate alongside small local associations, informal groups and community initiatives. Their capacities, resources and internal systems vary significantly. Consequently, the extent to which organisations are able to provide supportive working environments, opportunities for professional development, psychological safety and wellbeing-oriented practices also differs considerably.

In recent years, discussions around mental health and wellbeing have become increasingly visible in public debate in Poland. However, these discussions primarily focus on young people themselves, while the wellbeing of professionals and volunteers working with young people remains a less explored area. Yet the quality and sustainability of youth work depend to a large extent on whether practitioners feel supported, valued and able to cope with the demands of their roles.

“Ready for Positive and Supportive Organisations for Practitioners in Youth Work?” study aims to examine how prepared youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland are to create environments that support the wellbeing,

resilience and long-term engagement of their staff and volunteers.

Rather than focusing exclusively on organisational policies or formal structures, the study seeks to understand how support is experienced in everyday organisational life. It explores whether practitioners and leaders perceive their organisations as places where people can develop professionally, openly communicate challenges, participate in decision-making processes and receive adequate support when facing difficult situations.

The findings will contribute to a better understanding of organisational strengths and development needs within the Polish youth sector and will provide evidence-based insights for building healthier, more sustainable and more supportive youth work environments.

Section II: Objectives and research questions of national study no. 2

a. specific objectives

The overall objective of the national study is to assess the level of readiness of youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland to become positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members, and volunteers.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine how youth workers, practitioners, leaders, and managers perceive the current level of organisational readiness to support wellbeing, resilience, and sustainable engagement in youth work.
- To identify strengths and areas for improvement in organisational practices related to leadership, supervision, professional development, organisational culture, wellbeing, communication, participation, and organisational support.
- To explore differences and similarities between the perspectives of practitioners and organisational leaders regarding the quality and availability of supportive organisational practices.
- To assess the extent to which wellbeing-oriented structures, policies, and practices are currently embedded within youth organisations operating in Poland.
- To identify perceived gaps between the importance of positive and supportive organisational practices and their actual implementation.
- To provide evidence-based insights and recommendations that can support the development of healthier, more resilient, and more supportive youth work organisations.

b. research questions/working hypotheses/targeted indicators for the main theme of the study

The national study seeks to explore the readiness of youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland to become positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members, and volunteers.

RQ1. To what extent do leadership, supervision, and professional development practices contribute to organisational readiness to become a positive and supportive environment?

RQ2. To what extent are inclusion, trust, and psychological safety embedded in everyday organisational culture and practices?

RQ3. How effectively do organisations address practitioner wellbeing, mental health, and burnout prevention through organisational policies and support mechanisms?

RQ4. How do communication processes, participation opportunities, and interpersonal support influence perceptions of organisational support and cohesion?

RQ5. To what extent do organisational resources, internal systems, and adaptability support the sustainability of positive and supportive organisational practices?

RQ6. How do the interactions between these organisational dimensions shape overall organisational readiness?

The study is guided by the working hypotheses established in the common methodological framework:

H1. Organisational readiness to become a positive and supportive environment is shaped by the extent to which leadership, supervision, and professional development practices are experienced as coherent, consistent, and responsive to the emotional and professional demands of youth work.

H2. Organisational readiness is contingent upon the degree to which inclusion, trust, and psychological safety are embedded in everyday organisational interactions rather than existing only as formal values or policies.

H3. Organisational readiness to support practitioner wellbeing depends on the organisation's capacity to address mental health and burnout risks proactively and systematically.

H4. Organisational readiness is strongly influenced by the quality, reciprocity, and perceived fairness of internal communication and participatory processes.

H5. The sustainability of positive and supportive organisational practices depends on the alignment between available resources, internal systems, and the organisation's capacity for reflection, learning, and adaptation.

H6. Overall organisational readiness is an emergent and relational construct arising from the interaction and alignment of multiple organisational dimensions rather than from the strength of any single indicator in isolation.

The study examines organisational readiness through five key indicators:

1. Leadership, Supervision and Professional Development.
2. Organisational Culture, Inclusion and Psychological Safety.
3. Wellbeing, Mental Health and Burnout Prevention.
4. Communication, Participation and Interpersonal Support.
5. Organisational Resources, Systems and Adaptability.

These indicators provide the analytical framework for assessing organisational readiness and identifying strengths, gaps, and development needs within youth organisations in Poland.

Section III: Description of how the national study no. 2 was carried out

a. research design (quantitative/qualitative/mixed)

The national implementation of Study No. 2 in Poland followed the common methodological framework developed within the POSITIVE4Youth Work! project. Given the multidimensional nature of organisational readiness, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

The quantitative component provided insight into the perceptions of practitioners and organisational leaders regarding the current level of organisational readiness to become positive and supportive environments. The qualitative component complemented these findings by exploring participants' experiences, reflections, and interpretations in greater depth.

By combining survey data with interviews and focus group discussions, the study aimed to capture both measurable trends and the contextual factors influencing organisational practices within youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland.

b. implementation stages

The implementation of the study was carried out through several consecutive stages:

- review of the common methodological framework and preparation of national research activities;
- adaptation and configuration of research tools, including two online questionnaires developed through Google Forms;
- identification and outreach to youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people across Poland;
- dissemination of information about the study and recruitment of participants representing both target groups;
- collection of quantitative data through the online questionnaires;
- recruitment of participants for the qualitative phase of the study;
- implementation of semi-structured interviews with organisational leaders and managers;
- organisation and facilitation of a focus group involving representatives of both

target groups;

- compilation, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative findings;
- preparation of the national report and contribution to the transnational research process.

c. methods&instruments used

Three complementary research tools were employed during the study.

a) Online Questionnaires

In accordance with the project methodology, two online questionnaires were administered through Google Forms.

The first questionnaire targeted youth workers and practitioners directly involved in working with young people. The second questionnaire was addressed to organisational leaders, managers, and individuals responsible for organisational development and decision-making processes.

The questionnaires explored perceptions related to leadership, organisational culture, psychological safety, wellbeing, communication, participation, organisational support, and overall readiness to become a positive and supportive organisation.

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three organisational leaders and managers representing youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people.

The interviews followed a common interview guide while allowing participants sufficient flexibility to discuss organisational realities, challenges, examples of good practice, and areas requiring further development.

c) Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was organised with representatives of both target groups on 15th of June. The discussion provided an opportunity to explore collective experiences, validate emerging findings, and gain additional insight into organisational

readiness, support mechanisms, and challenges faced by practitioners and leaders.

The focus group also enabled participants to exchange perspectives and reflect on factors that contribute to positive and supportive organisational environments within the Polish youth sector.

d. data collection

Quantitative data were collected through two online questionnaires distributed among youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people operating in Poland.

A total of 42 valid responses were collected through the questionnaires, including 22 responses from youth workers and practitioners and 20 responses from organisational leaders and managers.

Qualitative data were gathered through three semi-structured interviews conducted with organisational leaders and managers representing different organisations within the youth sector. The data collection process was further enriched by a focus group discussion involving representatives of both target groups. Originally planned for an earlier date, the focus group had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen organisational circumstances affecting participant availability. The session was subsequently conducted online on 15 June 2026, ensuring the participation of both practitioners and organisational leaders and providing valuable contextual insights that supported the interpretation of the survey and interview findings.

e. ethical considerations (voluntariness, anonymity, consent)

Participation in all stages of the study was voluntary. Prior to their involvement, participants received information about the purpose of the study, its objectives, and the intended use of the collected data.

All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. Informed consent was obtained before participation in interviews and the focus group discussion. Participants were also informed about data protection measures, confidentiality procedures, and the use of anonymised information for research and reporting purposes. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed during the analysis and reporting stages. Findings are

presented in an aggregated form, preventing the identification of individual participants or organisations.

f. difficulties and limitations encountered

Several challenges were encountered during the implementation of the national study. As in many studies involving civil society organisations, recruiting participants required continuous outreach and follow-up communication. Many organisations operate with limited human resources, intensive project schedules, and competing priorities, which affected the availability of both practitioners and organisational leaders to participate in research activities.

An additional challenge concerned scheduling the focus group discussion. Due to unforeseen circumstances affecting participant availability, the session had to be postponed and rescheduled. Although this resulted in a slight delay in the data collection process, the focus group was successfully conducted on 15 June 2026.

The study is also subject to limitations commonly associated with self-reported data. The findings reflect participants' perceptions and experiences, which may not always correspond fully to formal organisational policies or practices. Furthermore, the study captures organisational realities at a specific point in time and therefore does not account for future organisational changes or developments.

Despite these limitations, the combination of questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions provided a comprehensive and balanced understanding of organisational readiness within youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland.

Section IV: Specific national legislation related to the study topic

The topic of organisational readiness to become a positive and supportive environment for practitioners is influenced by a broader legal and policy framework that shapes working conditions, organisational responsibilities, participation, equality, health protection, and the functioning of civil society organisations in Poland. Although Polish legislation does not specifically regulate the concept of a “positive and supportive organisation”, several legal acts and strategic documents provide important foundations for creating organisational environments that promote wellbeing, inclusion, psychological safety, and sustainable engagement.

The Labour Code (Kodeks pracy)

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19740240141/U/D19740141Lj.pdf>

The Labour Code (Act of 26 June 1974, as amended) constitutes the principal legal framework regulating employment relationships in Poland. It establishes employers' obligations regarding safe and healthy working conditions, equal treatment, non-discrimination, respect for employee dignity, and protection against workplace harassment and mobbing. These provisions are directly relevant to the concept of supportive organisations, as they promote organisational responsibility for creating working environments that protect both physical and psychological wellbeing.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (Bezpieczeństwo i Higiena Pracy - BHP)

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19971290844>

Polish occupational health and safety regulations require employers to identify workplace risks and implement preventive measures aimed at protecting employees' health and safety. Contemporary approaches to occupational safety increasingly recognise psychosocial risks, including chronic stress, excessive workload, burnout, workplace conflict, and emotional strain. Such considerations are particularly relevant in youth work settings, where practitioners often engage in emotionally demanding and relationship-based work.

Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteer Work

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20030960873/U/D20030873Lj.pdf>

The Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteer Work provides the legal framework for the operation of many youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable groups in Poland. The Act regulates cooperation between public institutions and civil society organisations while also defining the rights of volunteers and the responsibilities of organisations involving volunteers in their activities. It emphasises the obligation to ensure safe working conditions, appropriate organisational support, and adequate preparation for voluntary engagement. Given the significant role of volunteers within the youth sector, this legislation contributes to creating organisational conditions that support participation, inclusion, and wellbeing.

National Mental Health Protection Programme

<https://www.gov.pl/web/zdrowie/narodowy-program-ochrony-zdrowia-psychicznego01>

The National Mental Health Protection Programme (Narodowy Program Ochrony Zdrowia Psychicznego) serves as the main strategic framework for mental health promotion and prevention activities in Poland. Although the programme does not specifically address youth organisations, it reflects the growing recognition of mental health as a public policy priority and promotes actions aimed at strengthening psychological wellbeing, prevention, early intervention, and access to support services. These priorities are consistent with the principles underpinning positive and supportive organisational environments.

Standards of Youth Work in Poland

<https://niw.gov.pl/krajowa-koalicja-na-rzecz-pracy-z-mlodzieza-opracowala-standard-y-pracy-z-mlodymi-osobami/>

An important reference point for the development of the youth sector is the Standards of Youth Work in Poland (Standardy Pracy z Młodzieżą), developed by the National Coalition for Youth Work with the support of the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for Civil Society Development (NIW-CRSO). The Standards promote principles related to participation, inclusion, quality, safety, ethical practice, professional

development, and meaningful engagement of young people. Although they are not legally binding, they provide guidance for organisations seeking to strengthen organisational quality and improve working conditions for practitioners involved in youth work. The Standards also contribute to the ongoing professionalisation of the youth work sector and encourage organisations to reflect on leadership, organisational culture, and support mechanisms for staff and volunteers.

The Polish legal and policy framework provides important foundations for safe, inclusive, and responsible organisational practice. However, existing legislation focuses primarily on minimum legal obligations related to employment, health and safety, volunteering, and equal treatment.

The concept of a positive and supportive organisation goes beyond formal compliance. It includes organisational culture, psychological safety, wellbeing-oriented leadership, participation, communication, and support systems that are often shaped by internal organisational practices rather than by legal requirements.

For this reason, the present study seeks to explore how youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people in Poland translate these broader principles into everyday organisational realities and how prepared they are to create environments in which practitioners can thrive, develop, and remain sustainably engaged in their work.

Section V: Description of organisations involved in study no. 2:

a. typology of participating organisations

Questionnaire 1, completed by youth workers and practitioners (n = 22), was dominated by NGOs providing programmes or activities for young people, which accounted for 81.8% of represented organisations (n = 18). The remaining 18.2% (n = 4) were youth NGOs.

Questionnaire 2, completed by leaders and managers (n = 20), showed a similar organisational profile. NGOs providing programmes or activities for young people represented 90.0% of organisations (n = 18), while youth NGOs accounted for 10.0% (n = 2).

Overall, organisations providing programmes and activities for young people constituted 85.7% of all organisations represented in the study (n = 36), whereas youth NGOs accounted for 14.3% (n = 6).

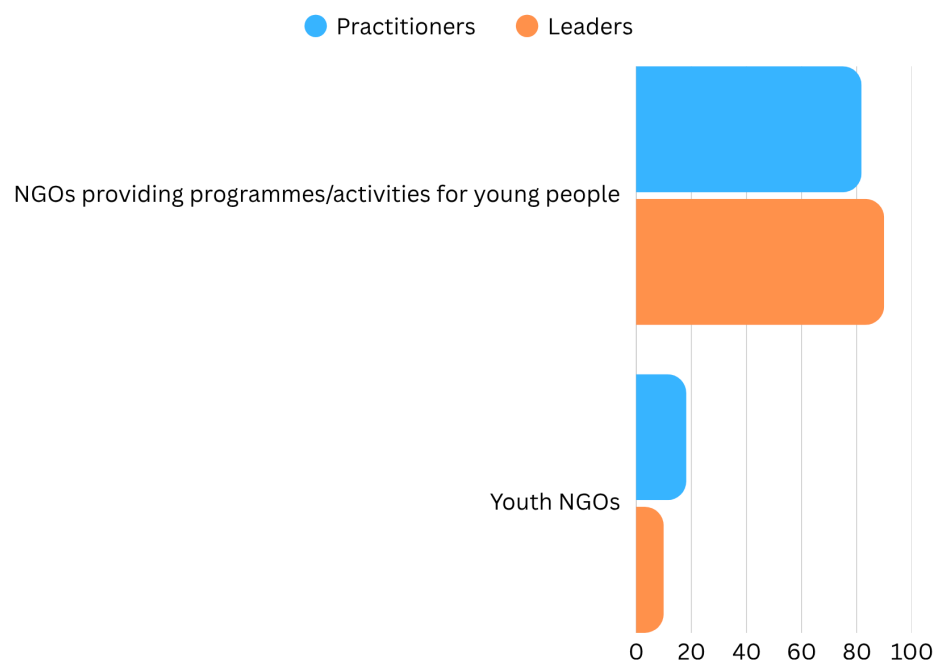


Chart 1. Typology of participating organisations (in percent)

b. field(s) in which organisations operate

The organisations represented in Study No. 2 operate across a diverse range of youth-related fields, reflecting the multifaceted nature of contemporary youth work in

Poland. The strongest representation was observed in the area of education and lifelong learning, followed by social inclusion, youth development, community engagement, and mental health and wellbeing.

Questionnaire 1, completed by youth workers and practitioners (n = 22), was characterised by a strong focus on education and lifelong learning (22.7%), social inclusion and equal opportunities (18.2%), and youth development and empowerment (18.2%). Other represented fields included mental health and wellbeing (13.6%), community development and civic engagement (9.1%), digital skills and innovation (4.5%), entrepreneurship and employment (4.5%), sport and recreation (4.5%), and media education (4.5%).

Questionnaire 2, completed by leaders and managers (n = 20), showed a similarly diverse profile. Education and lifelong learning was the most frequently represented field (30.0%), followed by arts, culture and creative sectors (20.0%). Community development and civic engagement, environmental education and sustainability, and social inclusion and equal opportunities each accounted for 10.0% of responses. Smaller proportions of respondents represented organisations working in sport and recreation (5.0%), youth empowerment (5.0%), mental health and wellbeing (5.0%), and digital skills and innovation (5.0%).

Across both questionnaires (N = 42), education and lifelong learning emerged as the dominant field of activity, representing 26.2% of all organisations. Social inclusion and equal opportunities accounted for 14.3% of represented organisations, while community development and civic engagement, arts and culture, and mental health and wellbeing each represented 9.5%. The remaining organisations operated in areas such as youth empowerment, environmental sustainability, digital innovation, sport and recreation, entrepreneurship, and media education, illustrating the broad diversity of the youth-work sector represented in the study.



Chart 2. Field(s) in which organisations operate (in percent)

c. their stage of development

The organisations represented in Study No. 2 reflect a diverse range of developmental stages, from newly established initiatives to mature organisations with extensive experience in youth work. Overall, the sample was characterised by a relatively high level of organisational maturity, with most respondents representing organisations that had been operating for more than six years.

Questionnaire 1, completed by youth workers and practitioners (n = 22), was dominated by mature organisations operating for more than ten years (45.5%, n = 10). Established organisations with 6-10 years of experience accounted for 27.3% (n = 6), while developing organisations operating for 2-5 years represented 18.2% (n = 4). Only 9.1% of respondents (n = 2) represented early-stage organisations that had been active for less than two years.

Questionnaire 2, completed by leaders and managers (n = 20), showed a comparable distribution. Mature organisations accounted for 45.0% of responses (n = 9), while established organisations represented 30.0% (n = 6). Developing organisations operating for 2-5 years constituted 15.0% (n = 3), and early-stage organisations represented 10.0% (n = 2).

Across both questionnaires (N = 42), mature organisations operating for more than ten years constituted the largest group (45.2%, n = 19), followed by established organisations with 6-10 years of experience (28.6%, n = 12). Developing organisations accounted for 16.7% of represented organisations (n = 7), while early-stage organisations represented 9.5% (n = 4).



Chart 3. Stage of development of participating organisations (in percent)

Section VI: Description of respondents

VI. 1 Target group no. 1

a. position within the organisation

The youth workers and practitioners participating in the study occupied a variety of positions within their organisations, reflecting different levels of involvement in organisational activities and service delivery. The majority of respondents were employed as staff members, accounting for 72.7% of the sample ($n = 16$). Volunteers represented 18.2% of participants ($n = 4$), highlighting the important role of voluntary engagement within the youth sector. A smaller proportion of respondents held positions as board members (4.5%, $n = 1$) or collaborators/associates (4.5%, $n = 1$).

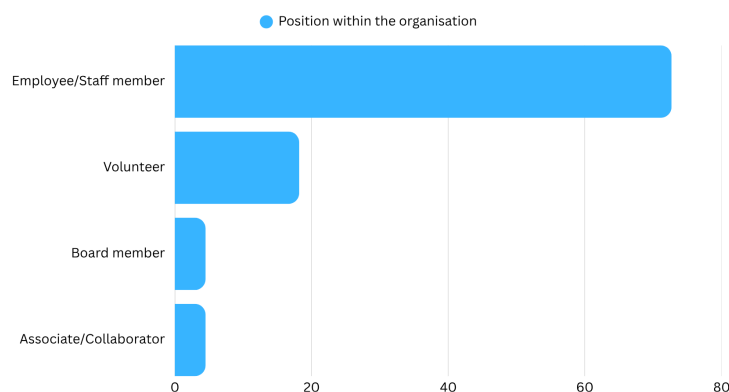


Chart 4. Position within organisation (in percent)

b. current role when working with young people

The largest group of respondents identified themselves as youth workers, accounting for 40.9% of the sample (n = 9). A further 27.3% (n = 6) worked as project experts or programme staff members responsible for the design and implementation of youth-focused initiatives. Mentors, educators, trainers, and counsellors working directly with young people represented 22.7% of respondents (n = 5), while youth support specialists or caseworkers accounted for 9.1% (n = 2).

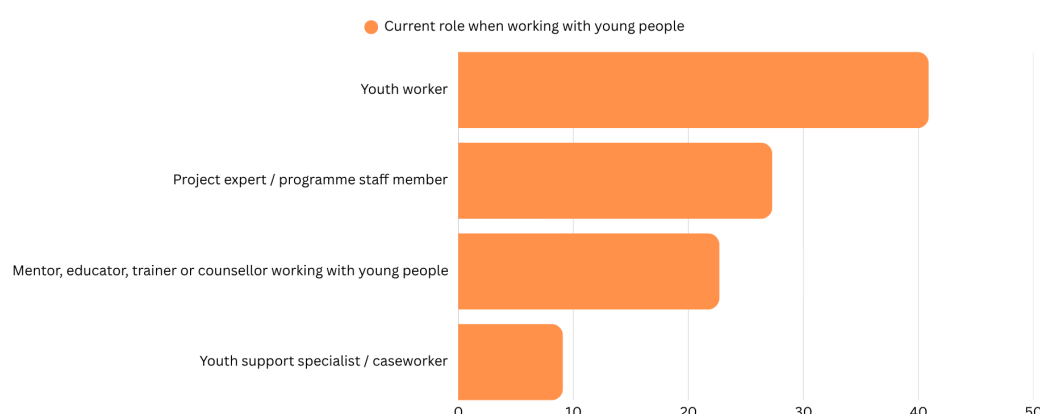


Chart 5. Current role when working with young people

c. years of experience in working with youth

More than two-thirds of respondents (68.2%, n = 15) reported having between one and five years of experience in working with young people. Respondents with less than one year of experience accounted for 13.6% of the sample (n = 3), while an equal proportion (13.6%, n = 3) reported between six and ten years of experience. Only one respondent (4.5%) had more than ten years of experience in youth work.

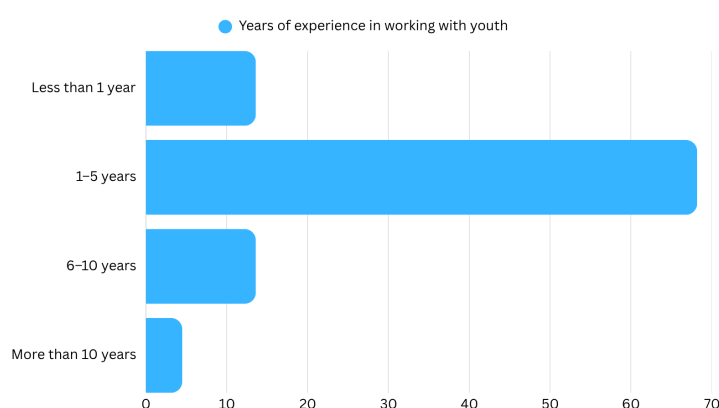


Chart 6. Years of experience in working with young people (in percent)

d. level of education

The youth workers and practitioners participating in the study were generally highly educated, with the majority holding tertiary-level qualifications.

More than half of respondents (54.5%, $n = 12$) held a Master's degree, while a further 31.8% ($n = 7$) had completed a Bachelor's degree. Respondents with secondary education accounted for 13.6% of the sample ($n = 3$).

Overall, 86.3% of participants ($n = 19$) possessed higher education qualifications, indicating a relatively high level of educational attainment among youth workers and practitioners represented in the study.

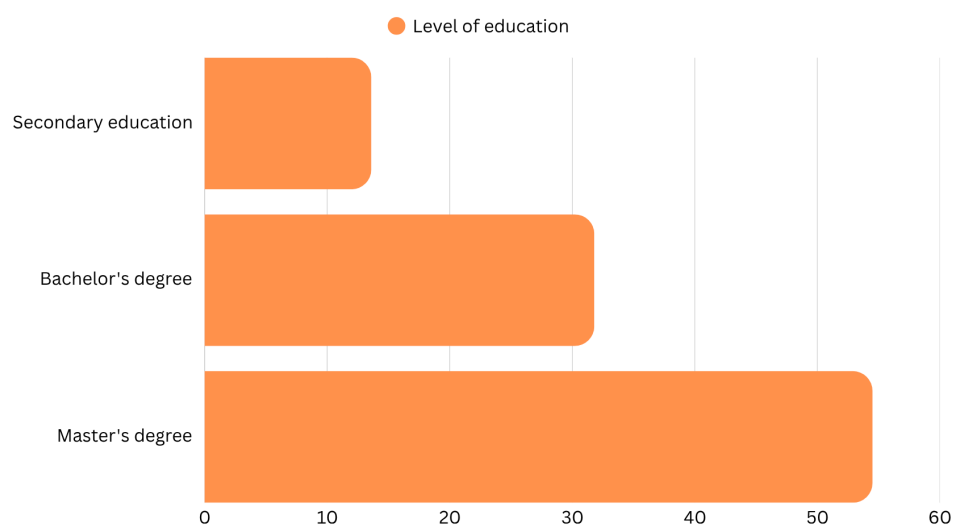


Chart 7. Level of education (in percent)

e. Age

The youth workers and practitioners participating in the study were predominantly young adults, reflecting the strong involvement of younger generations in youth work and youth-focused organisations. Half of all respondents (50.0%, $n = 11$) were under the age of 25, while a further 36.4% ($n = 8$) were between 25 and 35 years old. Respondents aged 36–50 accounted for 9.1% of the sample ($n = 2$), and one respondent (4.5%) was aged between 51 and 60 years. No participants were over the age of 60. Overall, 86.4% of respondents ($n = 19$) were under the age of 35, indicating that the study primarily reflects the perspectives of younger youth workers and practitioners.

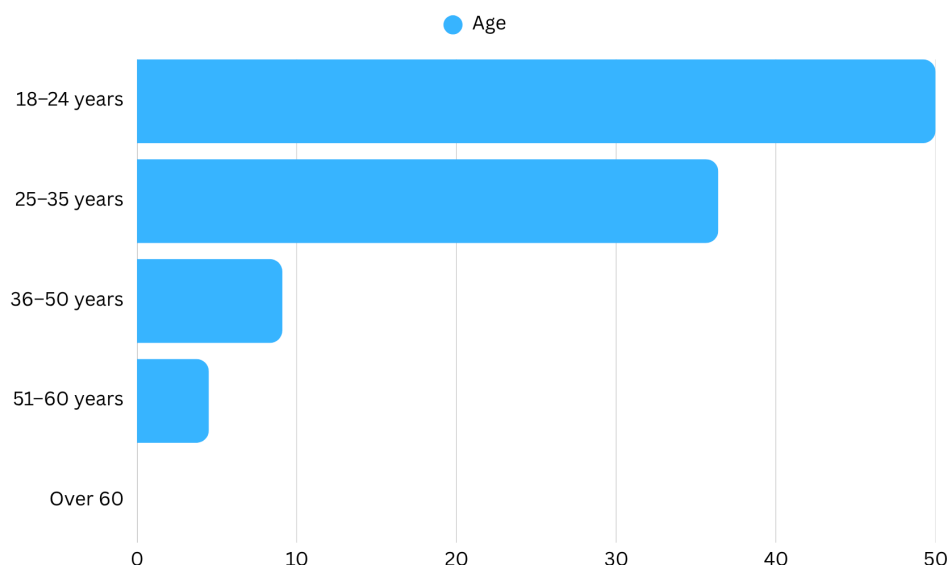


Chart 8. Age (in percent)

VI. 2 Target group no. 2

a. position within the organisation

Most respondents (90.0%, n = 18) reported being employed as staff members within their organisations. A smaller proportion of participants were involved as associates or collaborators (5.0%, n = 1), while one respondent (5.0%, n = 1) reported serving as a volunteer.

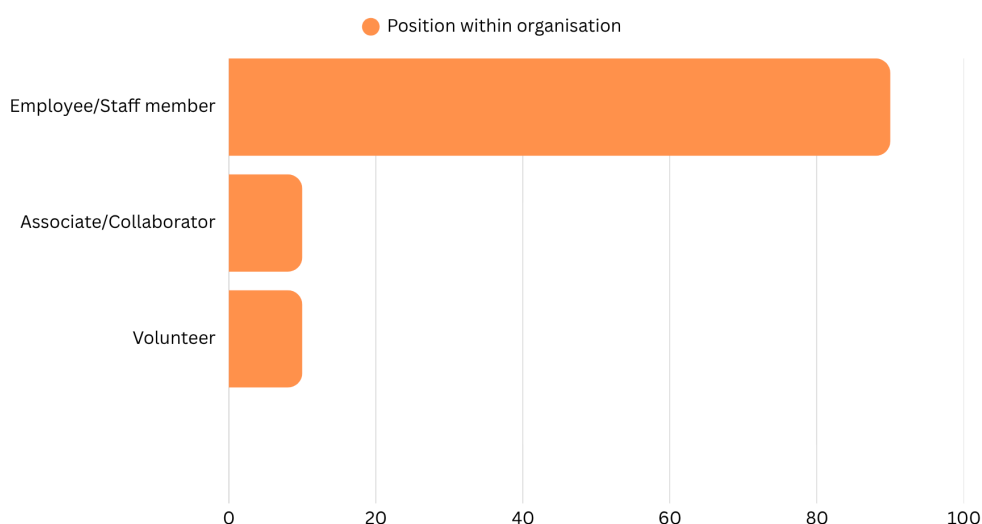


Chart 9. Position within organisation (in percent)

b. current leadership or management role in organisation

The largest group of respondents served as Project Managers, accounting for

35.0% of the sample (n = 7). A further 25.0% (n = 5) held positions as Board Members or fulfilled administrative governance functions, while 20.0% (n = 4) worked as Team Leaders responsible for coordinating staff and organisational activities. Programme Directors represented 10.0% of respondents (n = 2). Smaller proportions of participants occupied roles as HR or Staff Coordinators (5.0%, n = 1) and Executive Directors (5.0%, n = 1).



Chart 10. Current leadership or management role in organisation (in percent)

c. years of experience in a management/coordination position

Half of all respondents (50.0%, n = 10) reported having between one and five years of experience in a management or coordination position. A further 25.0% (n = 5) had between six and ten years of leadership experience, while 15.0% (n = 3) reported more than ten years of experience in managerial roles. Respondents with less than one year of experience accounted for 10.0% of the sample (n = 2). Overall, 40.0% of respondents (n = 8) had more than five years of experience in management or coordination positions, indicating that the study includes perspectives from both emerging and experienced organisational leaders.



Chart 11. Years of experience in a management/coordination position (in percent)

d. level of education

The leaders and managers participating in the study were highly educated, with the overwhelming majority holding tertiary-level qualifications.

Three-quarters of respondents (75.0%, $n = 15$) held a Master's degree, making it the most common educational qualification within the sample. Bachelor's degree holders accounted for 15.0% of respondents ($n = 3$), while one participant (5.0%) reported having completed secondary education. An additional 5.0% ($n = 1$) held a doctoral degree (PhD).

Overall, 95.0% of respondents ($n = 19$) possessed higher education qualifications, including Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degrees.

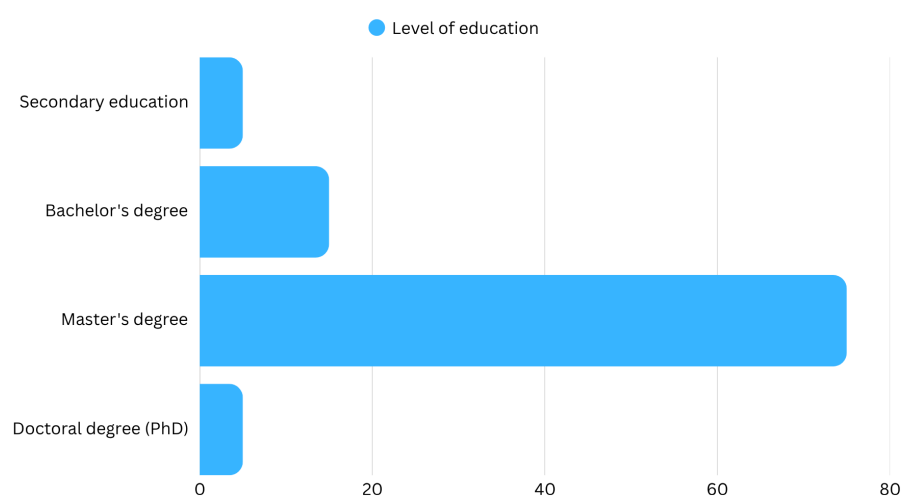


Chart 12. Level of education (in percent)

e. Age

The leaders and managers participating in the study represented a relatively diverse age profile, although the sample was predominantly composed of individuals in early and mid-career stages.

The largest group of respondents (45.0%, $n = 9$) was aged between 25 and 35 years. Participants aged 36–50 years accounted for 35.0% of the sample ($n = 7$), while respondents under the age of 25 represented 10.0% ($n = 2$). An additional 10.0% ($n = 2$) were aged between 51 and 60 years. No respondents were over the age of 60.

Overall, 55.0% of participants ($n = 11$) were under the age of 35, while 45.0% ($n = 9$) were aged 36 or above.

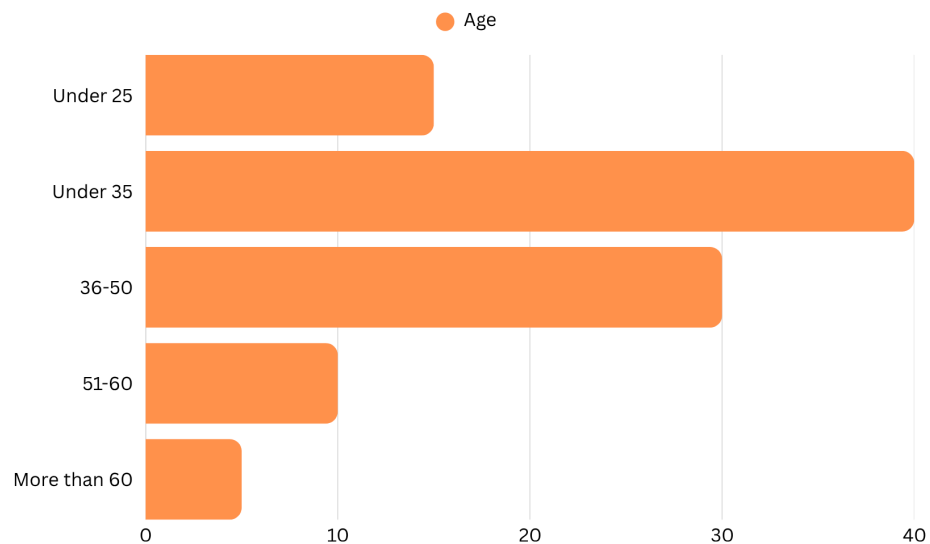


Chart 13. Age

Section VII: Key findings – quantitative results and qualitative insights

Indicator 1: Leadership, Supervision and Professional Development

Across both groups, leadership, supervision and professional development were perceived as important components of a positive and supportive organisation. Youth workers reported an average importance score of 3.77 out of 5, while leaders and managers assigned a slightly higher average importance score of 4.05 out of 5. However, assessments of the current organisational level were consistently lower, with an average score of 3.41 out of 5 among youth workers and 3.64 out of 5 among leaders and managers. This resulted in an implementation gap of 0.36 points for youth workers and 0.41 points for leaders and managers, suggesting that current organisational practice does not yet fully match the importance attributed to this area.

Among youth workers, the highest importance ratings were recorded for continuous learning, training and skills development (3.86/5) and innovation, creativity and the exchange of ideas (3.86/5), followed by supportive supervision and constructive feedback (3.73/5) and mentoring and professional guidance (3.64/5). Current organisational assessments followed a similar pattern, with the strongest ratings assigned to supportive supervision (3.45/5) and innovation and idea-sharing (3.45/5). Continuous learning and skills development received a score of 3.41/5, while mentoring and professional guidance received the lowest rating (3.32/5).

Among leaders and managers, the highest importance score was recorded for innovation, creativity and exchange of ideas (4.45/5), followed by supportive supervision and constructive feedback (4.25/5). Mentoring and professional guidance and continuous learning and skills development both received an importance rating of 3.75/5. Current organisational assessments were again lower than importance ratings, with innovation (4.00/5) and supportive supervision (3.75/5) receiving the strongest evaluations. Continuous learning and skills development was rated at 3.55/5, while mentoring and professional guidance emerged as the weakest area (3.22/5).

The largest implementation gap among youth workers was observed in continuous learning and skills development (0.45 points), followed by innovation, creativity and exchange of ideas (0.41 points). Among leaders and managers, the largest implementation gap was recorded for mentoring and professional guidance

(0.53 points), followed by supportive supervision and constructive feedback (0.50 points) and innovation, creativity and exchange of ideas (0.45 points). The smallest gaps were recorded for supportive supervision among youth workers (0.28 points) and continuous learning and skills development among leaders and managers (0.20 points). These findings suggest that although all dimensions show room for improvement, organisations appear relatively more successful in providing day-to-day supervision and encouraging innovation than in ensuring structured mentoring and broader opportunities for professional development.

Dimension	Youth Workers importance	Youth Workers Current Level	Gap	Leaders importance	Leaders Current Level	Gap
Regular mentoring, guidance and professional support	3.64	3.32	0.32	3.75	3.22	0.53
Continuous learning, training and competence development	3.86	3.41	0.45	3.95	3.55	0.40
Supportive supervision and constructive feedback	3.73	3.45	0.28	4.25	3.75	0.50
Innovation, creative thinking and exchange of ideas	3.86	3.45	0.41	4.45	4.00	0.45
Overall Indicator 1	3.77	3.41	0.36	4.10	3.63	0.47

The qualitative findings provide important context for understanding the survey results. Across all interviews and the focus group discussion, leadership emerged as

one of the most influential factors shaping organisational culture, employee wellbeing, motivation, and retention.

Participants rarely defined good leadership in terms of hierarchy, authority, or control. Instead, they consistently described effective leaders as approachable, empathetic, trustworthy, and willing to listen. The ability to create open communication, provide support during challenging situations, and recognise individual needs was repeatedly identified as a defining characteristic of positive leadership. One focus group participant described the relationship with their manager in the following way: “We have never felt unheard by him. We can always talk to him about our problems and tell him directly what we would like to change.”

Leadership was also strongly associated with learning and development. Interview participants highlighted a range of opportunities that supported personal and professional growth, including training courses, international mobility projects, peer learning, job shadowing, and increasing responsibility within organisational activities. Several respondents emphasised the importance of feedback as a tool for development and confidence-building. As one interview participant explained: “It is important that there is feedback for every task so that people are not left with uncertainty.”

Another recurring theme concerned personalised support. Rather than applying a standard approach to staff development, many leaders described adapting responsibilities and learning opportunities to individual strengths, interests, and capacities. This suggests that development processes are often relationship-based and tailored to individual needs.

At the same time, the qualitative data revealed important challenges. In several organisations, leadership support appeared to depend heavily on the commitment, experience, and availability of individual leaders rather than on formal supervision systems or organisational procedures. Participants from smaller organisations, in particular, noted that mentoring and guidance were often informal and difficult to maintain when workloads increased.

Some respondents also highlighted a tension between autonomy and support. While employees valued trust, independence, and freedom to implement their own ideas, this autonomy was not always accompanied by sufficient guidance or structured

supervision. As organisations grow, this may create risks related to uncertainty, uneven support, or professional isolation.

The combined findings suggest that leadership is one of the key strengths of the organisations represented in this study. Participants generally experience leaders as supportive, accessible, and committed to creating opportunities for learning and development. Trust, feedback, open communication, and encouragement of initiative appear to be important features of organisational life across many participating organisations.

At the same time, both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that professional development and supervision are often implemented through informal practices rather than embedded organisational systems. The lower ratings for mentoring and the recurring references to limited guidance suggest that support is not always experienced consistently by all staff members. Strengthening structured supervision, mentoring programmes, and professional development pathways could help organisations build on their existing strengths and ensure that supportive leadership practices become sustainable organisational capacities rather than relying primarily on individual leaders.

Indicator 2: Organisational Culture, Inclusion and Psychological Safety

Organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety were regarded as highly important components of a positive and supportive organisation by both groups of respondents. Youth workers reported an average importance score of 4.10 out of 5, while leaders and managers assigned a slightly higher average importance score of 4.20 out of 5. Assessments of the current organisational situation were lower than importance ratings in both groups. Youth workers reported an average current organisational score of 3.76 out of 5, resulting in an implementation gap of 0.34 points. Leaders and managers assessed the current organisational level at 3.75 out of 5, resulting in a larger implementation gap of 0.45 points. These findings suggest that organisational culture and psychological safety are considered highly important, but current practice does not yet fully meet expectations.

Among youth workers, the highest importance rating was assigned to the organisation's ability to create and maintain a safe, inclusive and respectful working

environment (4.27/5). This was followed by organisational stability, psychological safety and a secure working climate (4.09/5), while inclusive, anti-discriminatory and equal-opportunity practices (3.95/5) received a slightly lower, though still positive, importance rating. Current organisational assessments followed a similar pattern, with the strongest rating given to a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment (3.86/5), followed by organisational stability and psychological safety (3.73/5). The lowest current assessment was recorded for inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices (3.68/5).

Among leaders and managers, the highest importance rating was also assigned to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment (4.30/5). This was followed by inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices (4.20/5) and organisational stability, psychological safety and a secure working climate (4.10/5). Current organisational assessments were lower across all three dimensions. The strongest current rating was assigned to a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment (3.95/5), followed by inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices (3.75/5). Organisational stability, psychological safety and a secure working climate received the lowest current assessment (3.55/5).

The largest implementation gap among youth workers was observed in relation to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment (0.41 points). Smaller but still notable gaps were found for organisational stability and psychological safety (0.36 points) and inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices (0.27 points). Among leaders and managers, the largest implementation gap was observed for organisational stability, psychological safety and a secure working climate (0.55 points), followed by inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices (0.45 points) and a safe, inclusive and respectful working environment (0.35 points). Overall, the findings indicate that while organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety are viewed as highly important across both groups, both youth workers and leaders perceive room for further improvement in practice, particularly in relation to psychological safety, organisational stability and inclusive organisational practices.

Dimension	Youth Workers importance	Youth Workers Current Level	Gap	Leaders importance	Leaders Current Level	Gap
Safe, inclusive and respectful work environment	4.27	3.86	0.41	4.30	3.95	0.35
Inclusion, anti-Discrimination and equal Opportunity policies/practices	3.95	3.68	0.27	4.20	3.75	0.45
Organisational stability, psychological safety and secure work climate	4.09	3.73	0.36	4.10	3.55	0.55
Overall Indicator 2	4.10	3.76	0.34	4.20	3.75	0.45

The qualitative findings strongly reinforce the survey results and position organisational culture as one of the most significant strengths identified in the study. Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants consistently described organisational environments characterised by trust, openness, respect, and a strong sense of belonging.

A recurring theme was the importance of creating spaces where people feel accepted, valued, and able to contribute regardless of their background, experience, or personal circumstances. Inclusion was not described merely as a formal organisational principle but as a practical approach embedded in everyday interactions and decision-making processes. One interview participant described this approach in a particularly direct way: “We are simply open to everyone.”

Several respondents highlighted that inclusion often involves adapting organisational processes to individual needs rather than expecting individuals to adapt to existing structures. This reflects a flexible and person-centred understanding of inclusion that is particularly relevant within youth work environments.

Psychological safety emerged as another central theme. Participants frequently emphasised the importance of feeling comfortable expressing opinions, sharing concerns, making mistakes, and discussing challenges without fear of judgement or negative consequences. Trust-based relationships were repeatedly identified as essential for creating supportive workplaces. One respondent explained: “There is a high level of trust in the organisation, which translates into psychological safety.”

The focus group findings further highlighted the importance of belonging and community. Participants frequently described positive organisational culture as a feeling of being part of something meaningful and being recognised as an important contributor to collective goals. As one participant noted: “It’s the feeling that people are needed, that they are important, that they are doing something meaningful.”

Another important finding concerns the close relationship between organisational culture and leadership. Participants frequently linked psychological safety to leadership behaviours such as active listening, transparency, empathy, and responsiveness. In organisations where leaders created space for dialogue and participation, employees appeared more likely to report feelings of trust and belonging.

At the same time, the qualitative data also revealed several challenges. Some organisations working in international or geographically dispersed environments reported communication difficulties resulting from cultural differences, remote working arrangements, and limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction. While these challenges did not undermine overall perceptions of organisational culture, they highlighted the need for ongoing efforts to maintain inclusion and connection within diverse teams.

The findings suggest that organisational culture, inclusion, and psychological safety represent the strongest area of organisational functioning among the participating organisations. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicate that employees generally experience their workplaces as respectful, inclusive, and supportive environments characterised by trust, openness, and meaningful relationships.

The data suggest that many organisations have successfully translated values such as inclusion, participation, and respect into everyday practice. Employees

frequently reported feeling heard, valued, and able to contribute their ideas and perspectives. These qualities appear to provide an important foundation for employee wellbeing, collaboration, and organisational effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that maintaining positive organisational culture requires continuous attention. Challenges related to remote collaboration, cultural diversity, and organisational growth may place pressure on existing relationships and communication practices. Future efforts should therefore focus on deepening psychological safety, strengthening opportunities for meaningful participation, and ensuring that inclusive practices remain consistently embedded as organisations evolve and expand.

Indicator 3: Wellbeing, Mental Health and Burnout Prevention

Well-being, mental health and burnout prevention were regarded as important elements of a positive and supportive organisation by both youth workers and leaders. Youth workers reported an average importance score of 3.68 out of 5, while leaders and managers reported a similar average importance score of 3.65 out of 5. Assessments of the current organisational situation were lower in both groups, averaging 3.27 out of 5 among youth workers and 3.43 out of 5 among leaders and managers. This resulted in an implementation gap of 0.41 points for youth workers and 0.22 points for leaders, indicating that existing organisational practices do not fully meet expectations regarding staff well-being and mental health support.

Among youth workers, the highest importance rating was assigned to the organisation's ability to provide emotional and practical support during difficult or stressful situations (3.82/5). This was followed by ensuring a fair and appropriate distribution of workload to prevent burnout (3.68/5) and providing access to mental health resources and well-being support services (3.55/5). Current organisational assessments showed a slightly different pattern. The highest rating was recorded for fair workload distribution and burnout prevention (3.45/5), followed by emotional and practical support in difficult situations (3.27/5). The lowest current assessment was assigned to access to mental health resources and well-being support services (3.09/5).

Among leaders and managers, the highest importance rating was given to fair

and appropriate workload distribution to prevent burnout (4.00/5). Both access to mental health and well-being support resources (3.50/5) and emotional and practical support during stressful situations (3.45/5) were also regarded as important. Current organisational assessments were lower in most areas, although emotional and practical support received a slightly higher current rating than its perceived importance. Both emotional support in difficult situations (3.50/5) and workload distribution and burnout prevention (3.50/5) received the highest current ratings, while access to mental health resources and well-being services (3.30/5) was evaluated least positively.

The largest implementation gap among youth workers was observed in relation to emotional and practical support during difficult or stressful situations (0.55 points). Substantial gaps were also found for access to mental health resources and well-being services (0.45 points) and workload distribution and burnout prevention (0.23 points). Among leaders and managers, the largest implementation gap concerned fair workload distribution and burnout prevention (0.50 points), while smaller gaps were observed for access to mental health resources and well-being services (0.20 points). Notably, leaders reported virtually no implementation gap in relation to emotional and practical support during difficult or stressful situations, with the current assessment slightly exceeding the importance rating by 0.05 points. Overall, the findings suggest that while well-being, mental health and burnout prevention are considered important organisational priorities, both groups perceive opportunities for further improvement, particularly in relation to access to mental health resources and ensuring a sustainable distribution of workload.

Dimension	Youth Workers importance	Youth Workers Current Level	Gap	Leaders importance	Leaders Current Level	Gap
Emotional and practical support in difficult or high-stress situations	3.82	3.27	0.55	3.45	3.50	-0.05
Fair and	3.68	3.45	0.23	4.00	3.50	0.50

realistic workload distribution to prevent burnout						
Access to mental health resources and wellbeing support services	3.55	3.09	0.45	3.50	3.30	0.20
Overall Indicator 3	3.68	3.27	0.41	3.65	3.43	0.22

The qualitative findings strongly reinforce the survey results and reveal that wellbeing, mental health, and burnout prevention are among the most pressing concerns facing youth work organisations. Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants frequently referred to high workloads, emotional demands, limited resources, and difficulties maintaining a healthy balance between commitment to the organisation and personal wellbeing.

A recurring theme was the emotionally demanding nature of youth work itself. Participants described their work as highly meaningful and rewarding, but also associated with significant responsibility, emotional labour, and pressure. In many cases, organisational commitment and passion for the mission appeared to blur the boundaries between work and personal life.

The focus group discussion provided particularly strong evidence of burnout-related challenges. Several participants described exhaustion, declining motivation, and increasing stress levels within their organisations. One participant commented: “Almost all of our staff are at the point of a minor breakdown.”

Others highlighted the lack of accessible professional mental health support and the difficulties employees face when seeking psychological assistance. Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of supervision, counselling, and opportunities for reflection as mechanisms that help reduce emotional burden and prevent burnout. Where supervision was available, it was consistently described as highly beneficial.

At the same time, the interviews revealed a more nuanced picture. Several organisations demonstrated a strong awareness of wellbeing and actively attempted to support staff through flexible working arrangements, mutual understanding, open

communication, and informal support systems. In some organisations, wellbeing was deeply embedded in organisational values and everyday practices. One interview participant explained: “After intensive periods, we know that time for regeneration is necessary.” Similarly, another respondent highlighted the importance of recognising personal limits and maintaining balance: “Wellbeing is particularly important to me.”

However, the findings suggest that wellbeing support often remains dependent on organisational culture and individual goodwill rather than formal organisational policies. Several participants noted that support is usually provided when problems emerge, but fewer examples were identified of proactive and preventive wellbeing strategies. As a result, burnout prevention often appears reactive rather than systematic.

The interviews also highlighted structural challenges that contribute to wellbeing risks, including limited staffing capacity, concentration of responsibilities among a small number of individuals, project-based funding arrangements, and uncertainty regarding long-term organisational sustainability. These factors frequently increase workload pressures and reduce organisations’ capacity to invest in dedicated wellbeing initiatives.

The findings indicate that wellbeing, mental health, and burnout prevention constitute the most significant area for improvement among the participating organisations. While many organisations demonstrate strong awareness of wellbeing issues and provide valuable informal support through positive relationships, trust, and flexibility, these efforts are often not supported by sufficiently developed organisational systems.

The data suggest that employees frequently rely on supportive organisational cultures and individual leaders rather than formal wellbeing policies, structured supervision, or preventative burnout strategies. Although respondents recognise the importance of wellbeing and mental health, current organisational capacities often struggle to keep pace with increasing workloads, emotional demands, and resource limitations.

Strengthening this area will require moving beyond reactive responses to individual difficulties and towards more systematic approaches that integrate wellbeing into organisational strategy, leadership practices, workload management, supervision

structures, and staff development processes. Given the consistently lower ratings across both quantitative and qualitative data, improving wellbeing support is likely to have a significant positive impact on employee satisfaction, retention, resilience, and the long-term sustainability of youth work organisations.

Indicator 4: Communication, Participation and Interpersonal Support

Communication, participation and interpersonal support were perceived as important elements of a positive and supportive organisation by both youth workers and leaders. Youth workers reported an average importance score of 3.92 out of 5, while leaders and managers assigned a slightly higher average importance score of 4.08 out of 5. Assessments of the current organisational level were somewhat lower, averaging 3.71 out of 5 among youth workers and 3.68 out of 5 among leaders and managers. This resulted in an implementation gap of 0.21 points for youth workers and 0.40 points for leaders, indicating that current organisational practice does not fully meet expectations, particularly from the perspective of organisational leadership.

Among youth workers, the highest importance rating was assigned to fostering collaboration, teamwork and peer support among staff (4.36/5). This was followed by ensuring clear, consistent and transparent communication (4.05/5), building strong interpersonal support systems (3.73/5) and engaging staff in meaningful decision-making processes (3.55/5). Current organisational assessments showed the strongest performance in fostering collaboration, teamwork and peer support (3.95/5) and providing clear and transparent communication (3.82/5). Building interpersonal support systems received a score of 3.77/5, while staff involvement in decision-making processes received the lowest rating (3.32/5).

Among leaders and managers, the highest importance ratings were recorded for clear, consistent and transparent communication (4.40/5) and collaboration, teamwork and peer support (4.35/5). These were followed by staff involvement in decision-making (3.90/5) and interpersonal support systems (3.65/5). Current organisational assessments were lower across all dimensions. The highest ratings were assigned to clear communication (3.90/5) and collaboration and teamwork (3.80/5). Staff participation in decision-making received a score of 3.60/5, while interpersonal support systems were evaluated least positively (3.40/5).

The largest implementation gap among youth workers was observed in fostering collaboration, teamwork and peer support among staff (0.41 points). Smaller gaps were found in clear and transparent communication (0.23 points) and staff participation in decision-making processes (0.23 points). Notably, the current assessment of interpersonal support systems (3.77/5) slightly exceeded the importance rating (3.73/5), resulting in a small negative gap (-0.04 points) and suggesting that this area may be performing slightly above expectations.

Among leaders and managers, the largest implementation gap was observed in fostering collaboration, teamwork and peer support among staff (0.55 points), followed by clear, consistent and transparent communication (0.50 points). Smaller gaps were found in staff participation in decision-making processes (0.30 points) and interpersonal support systems (0.25 points). Overall, the findings suggest that communication, participation and interpersonal support are considered important organisational priorities, but both groups identify opportunities for improvement, particularly in strengthening collaboration, teamwork and employee involvement in organisational processes.

Dimension	Youth Workers importance	Youth Workers Current Level	Gap	Leaders importance	Leaders Current Level	Gap
Clear, consistent and transparent communication	4.05	3.82	0.23	4.40	3.90	0.50
Collaboration, teamwork and support between colleagues	4.36	3.95	0.41	4.35	3.80	0.55
Solid interpersonal support systems and team cohesion	3.73	3.77	-0.04	3.65	3.40	0.25
Practitioner	3.55	3.32	0.23	3.90	3.60	0.30

involvement in relevant decision making processes						
Overall Indicator 4	3.92	3.71	0.21	4.08	3.68	0.40

The qualitative findings strongly support the survey results and highlight communication as one of the central pillars of positive and supportive youth work organisations. Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants consistently linked effective communication with trust, collaboration, problem-solving, and organisational wellbeing.

Communication was frequently described not simply as an operational process but as a fundamental condition for building supportive relationships and maintaining healthy organisational environments. Several participants emphasised that open communication enables employees to seek support, share concerns, resolve conflicts, and participate meaningfully in organisational life. As one focus group participant stated: “Communication is the key to everything.”

Many respondents highlighted the importance of regular opportunities for discussion, consultation, and collective reflection. Monthly meetings, team check-ins, online discussions, and informal conversations were all identified as practices that strengthen cooperation and help maintain a sense of connection within organisations.

The interviews also revealed a strong commitment to participatory approaches. Participants described organisations where staff, volunteers, and young people are encouraged to contribute ideas, co-create projects, and influence decisions affecting their work. Participation was viewed not only as a democratic value but also as a mechanism that increases motivation, ownership, and commitment. One interview participant explained: “People involved in activities should have a real influence on decisions.”

Similarly, another organisation described project development as a collaborative process involving shared responsibility and collective decision-making. This suggests that participation is often embedded within organisational culture rather than limited to formal consultation mechanisms.

Interpersonal support emerged as another important theme. Participants

repeatedly referred to the value of teamwork, peer support, and having colleagues who are available to provide advice, encouragement, and practical assistance. Strong relationships between team members were described as an important protective factor, particularly during periods of high workload or organisational uncertainty.

At the same time, the qualitative findings identified several communication-related challenges. Respondents from larger, geographically dispersed, or rapidly growing organisations reported difficulties maintaining effective communication across teams and departments. Remote working arrangements, limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction, and unclear responsibilities occasionally created misunderstandings and reduced opportunities for collaboration.

Some participants noted that communication gaps can have direct consequences for organisational effectiveness and employee wellbeing. Difficulties in information sharing, coordination, and role clarity were described as sources of frustration that may increase stress and reduce feelings of support.

The findings therefore suggest that communication functions both as a strength and as an ongoing organisational challenge that requires continuous attention and adaptation.

The findings indicate that communication, participation, and interpersonal support constitute one of the strongest dimensions of organisational life within the participating youth organisations. Employees generally experience supportive relationships, collaborative working environments, and opportunities to contribute ideas and perspectives. Open communication and peer support appear to play an important role in fostering trust, engagement, and organisational commitment.

At the same time, the qualitative evidence demonstrates that effective communication cannot be taken for granted. As organisations expand, become more geographically dispersed, or operate through increasingly complex structures, maintaining strong communication and participation mechanisms becomes more challenging. The findings suggest that organisations would benefit from creating more systematic opportunities for dialogue, cross-team collaboration, knowledge sharing, and employee participation in decision-making processes.

Overall, communication appears to be both a key organisational strength and a critical enabling factor that supports many other dimensions identified in this study,

including wellbeing, psychological safety, leadership effectiveness, and organisational resilience.

Indicator 5: Organisational Resources, Systems and Adaptability

Organisational resources, systems and adaptability were considered important elements of a positive and supportive organisation by both youth workers and leaders. Youth workers reported an average importance score of 3.83 out of 5, while leaders and managers reported a slightly higher average importance score of 4.03 out of 5. Assessments of the current organisational level were lower in both groups, averaging 3.61 out of 5 among youth workers and 3.62 out of 5 among leaders and managers. This resulted in an implementation gap of 0.22 points for youth workers and 0.41 points for leaders, indicating that organisational structures and systems are not yet perceived as fully meeting expectations.

Among youth workers, the highest importance rating was assigned to the organisation's ability to recognise and celebrate employees' contributions and achievements (3.91/5). This was followed by continuous evaluation, reflection and adaptation of organisational practices based on staff feedback (3.86/5) and the allocation of necessary resources such as time, tools and space to support staff work effectively (3.73/5). Current organisational assessments showed a slightly different pattern. The highest rating was assigned to recognising and celebrating staff contributions (3.68/5), followed by continuous evaluation and adaptation of organisational practices (3.59/5) and the allocation of necessary resources (3.55/5). Although current assessments were generally positive, all three areas scored below their perceived importance.

Among leaders and managers, the highest importance rating was recorded for recognising and celebrating employees' contributions and achievements (4.25/5). This was followed by allocating necessary organisational resources (4.00/5) and continuous evaluation and adaptation of organisational practices (3.85/5). Current organisational assessments were noticeably lower. The strongest evaluation was assigned to recognising and celebrating staff contributions (3.75/5), followed by allocation of resources (3.65/5) and continuous evaluation and adaptation of practices (3.45/5).

The largest implementation gap among youth workers was observed in relation to continuous evaluation, reflection and adaptation of organisational practices based on staff feedback (0.27 points), followed by recognising staff contributions and achievements (0.23 points) and allocation of resources (0.18 points). Among leaders and managers, the largest gap was found in recognising and celebrating staff contributions and achievements (0.50 points), while substantial gaps were also observed for continuous evaluation and adaptation of organisational practices (0.40 points) and allocation of resources (0.35 points). Overall, the findings suggest that organisational resources, systems and adaptability are viewed as important organisational strengths, but both groups perceive opportunities for improvement, particularly in recognising staff contributions and ensuring that organisational practices are regularly reviewed and adapted in response to employee feedback.

Dimension	Youth Workers importance	Youth Workers Current Level	Gap	Leaders importance	Leaders Current Level	Gap
Allocation of necessary resources: time, tools and space	3.73	3.55	0.18	4.00	3.65	0.35
Evaluation, reflection and adaptation based on staff feedback	3.86	3.59	0.27	3.85	3.45	0.40
Recognition and celebration of practitioners' work and contributions	3.91	3.68	0.23	4.25	3.75	0.50
Overall Indicator 5	3.83	3.61	0.22	4.03	3.62	0.41

The qualitative findings provide important context for understanding the survey results and reveal that organisational resources and systems remain one of the most significant structural challenges facing youth organisations. Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants consistently referred to issues related to funding, staffing capacity, organisational sustainability, and the long-term development of support systems.

A recurring theme was the impact of financial uncertainty on organisational functioning. Many participants described operating within project-based funding environments, where organisations often rely on short-term grants and face difficulties planning beyond immediate funding cycles. This uncertainty was frequently linked to challenges in retaining staff, developing long-term strategies, and investing in organisational development. As one focus group participant explained: “It is difficult to maintain a stable team of professionals when you do not know in February whether there will be funding in May.”

Similarly, interview participants highlighted the challenges associated with limited organisational capacity and dependence on a small number of highly committed individuals. Several organisations reported operating with small teams, where responsibilities are concentrated among founders, coordinators, or key staff members. While this often enables flexibility and quick decision-making, it also creates risks related to overload, continuity, and organisational resilience. One respondent reflected on this challenge by stating: “Only one person is employed on a permanent basis in this area despite the growing number of projects.”

At the same time, the findings reveal considerable organisational adaptability. Despite resource constraints, many organisations demonstrated an ability to respond creatively to challenges, build partnerships, seek external support, and continuously learn from experience. Participants described organisations that actively reflect on their practices, adjust their approaches when necessary, and remain open to innovation and development.

Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of organisational learning and gradual professionalisation. Emerging organisations, in particular, described being in the process of developing internal systems, procedures, and support mechanisms. While these structures were not always fully established, respondents demonstrated a

strong awareness of organisational needs and a willingness to strengthen their capacity over time.

Another important theme concerned recognition and appreciation. Participants noted that organisational support is not only determined by financial resources but also by whether employees and volunteers feel valued and acknowledged for their contributions. Informal recognition, opportunities for growth, and involvement in organisational development were often viewed as important forms of support, particularly in contexts where financial resources are limited.

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that many organisations operate successfully despite structural constraints, largely due to their adaptability, commitment, and strong organisational values. However, the sustainability of these approaches may be difficult to maintain without greater investment in organisational infrastructure and long-term capacity-building.

The findings suggest that participating organisations have developed a reasonable level of organisational capacity and adaptability despite operating within often challenging resource environments. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that staff generally recognise the existence of organisational structures that support their work, while also acknowledging important limitations related to funding, staffing, and long-term sustainability.

A particularly significant finding is the strong consistency between practitioners' and leaders' perceptions, suggesting a shared awareness of organisational realities across different levels of responsibility. While organisations demonstrate considerable flexibility, resilience, and willingness to learn, many continue to rely heavily on individual commitment and project-based resources. This creates vulnerabilities that may affect organisational stability and staff wellbeing over time.

Strengthening organisational systems, securing more sustainable funding arrangements, investing in staff capacity, and developing long-term support structures would help organisations build on their existing strengths and enhance their ability to create positive and supportive working environments. The findings suggest that improvements in this area could have a positive impact across all other dimensions explored in the study, including wellbeing, leadership, participation, and organisational effectiveness.

Section VIII: General conclusions and recommendations – as they resulted from the interpretation and synthesis of key findings (quantitative results and qualitative insights).

The findings reveal a generally positive picture of organisational life within the participating youth organisations. Across both quantitative and qualitative data, respondents described workplaces characterised by strong interpersonal relationships, a commitment to inclusion, and a shared desire to create supportive environments for both staff and volunteers. However, the findings also indicate that positive organisational cultures are not always matched by equally strong organisational systems and resources.

One of the most significant findings is the central role of organisational culture in shaping positive work experiences. Organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety emerged as the strongest area across all indicators. Employees and leaders alike described environments characterised by trust, respect, openness, and meaningful participation. The qualitative findings further demonstrated that many organisations actively promote inclusion and create spaces where individuals feel valued, heard, and able to contribute. These cultural strengths appear to provide an important foundation for organisational resilience and employee engagement.

Communication, participation, and interpersonal support also emerged as significant organisational strengths. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of teamwork, peer support, and opportunities to contribute to organisational decision-making. Effective communication was frequently described as a prerequisite for trust, collaboration, and wellbeing. The findings suggest that many organisations have developed strong relational capacities that help employees navigate challenges and maintain a sense of belonging.

Leadership was identified as another important factor contributing to positive organisational environments. Respondents generally described leaders as supportive, approachable, and committed to staff development. Effective leadership was associated with listening, providing feedback, creating opportunities for learning, and

fostering trust-based relationships. At the same time, the findings indicate that leadership support is often dependent on individual leaders rather than embedded within formal organisational systems. Structured supervision, mentoring, and professional development opportunities remain unevenly developed across organisations.

The study also highlights a clear distinction between cultural strengths and structural capacity. While many organisations demonstrate strong values, commitment, and adaptability, they frequently operate under significant resource constraints. Funding insecurity, limited staffing capacity, project-based financing, and dependence on a small number of key individuals were identified as common challenges. These factors can limit organisations' ability to implement long-term strategies, invest in staff development, and establish comprehensive support systems.

The most important concern emerging from the study relates to wellbeing, mental health, and burnout prevention. This indicator received the lowest ratings across the survey and was repeatedly identified in interviews and the focus group as an area requiring urgent attention. Participants described increasing workloads, emotional demands, and difficulties maintaining healthy boundaries between work and personal life. Although many organisations demonstrate a strong awareness of wellbeing issues and provide informal support through positive relationships and flexible practices, wellbeing support often remains reactive rather than preventive. Formal mechanisms such as supervision, mental health support, workload monitoring, and burnout prevention strategies are not yet consistently available.

Taken together, the findings suggest that participating organisations have succeeded in creating positive and supportive cultures despite often challenging operating conditions. Their greatest strengths lie in relationships, trust, inclusion, communication, and shared values. However, ensuring long-term sustainability will require greater investment in organisational systems, leadership development, staff wellbeing, and organisational capacity-building. The challenge facing many organisations is not the absence of positive values, but rather transforming these values into consistent and sustainable organisational practices.

Recommendations (What Should Be Done)

1. Make staff wellbeing a strategic organisational priority

The findings indicate a clear need to strengthen organisational approaches to wellbeing, mental health, and burnout prevention. Organisations should move beyond responding to difficulties when they arise and adopt more proactive and preventive approaches. This may include regular wellbeing check-ins, workload monitoring, access to supervision, mental health support services, and dedicated recovery periods following intensive projects or activities.

2. Strengthen supervision, mentoring and professional development

While employees generally value the support provided by leaders, the findings suggest that opportunities for mentoring and professional development are not always structured or consistently available. Organisations should develop clearer pathways for learning and growth through regular supervision, mentoring programmes, peer-learning opportunities, training plans, and professional development strategies that are accessible to both staff and volunteers.

3. Invest in leadership development

Leadership emerged as a key factor influencing organisational culture, employee wellbeing, and professional growth. Organisations should invest in leadership development programmes that strengthen skills related to supportive supervision, communication, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, coaching, and team development. Particular attention should be given to helping leaders balance organisational performance with staff wellbeing.

4. Protect and strengthen organisational culture

The strong results related to inclusion, trust, and psychological safety should not be taken for granted. Organisations should continue to invest in practices that foster belonging, participation, openness, and respect. As organisations grow or become more geographically dispersed, deliberate efforts will be needed to maintain the strong interpersonal connections that currently represent one of their greatest strengths.

5. Create more opportunities for participation and shared decision-making

The findings show that employees value having a voice in organisational processes and decisions. Organisations should continue to create structures that enable meaningful participation, consultation, and co-creation. Greater involvement of staff, volunteers, and young people in organisational planning can strengthen ownership, motivation, and commitment.

6. Strengthen organisational capacity and sustainability

Many challenges identified in the study are linked to limited resources and unstable funding environments. Organisations should invest in strengthening internal systems, staffing capacity, succession planning, knowledge management, and organisational infrastructure. Where possible, efforts should be made to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on short-term project funding.

7. Promote organisational learning and adaptability

The findings demonstrate that organisations with strong learning cultures are better positioned to respond to changing circumstances and staff needs. Organisations should regularly collect feedback from employees and volunteers, evaluate organisational practices, and use evidence to inform decision-making and organisational development.

8. Encourage sector-wide collaboration and support

Many of the challenges identified in this study are shared across the youth sector and cannot be addressed by individual organisations alone. Networks, communities of practice, peer-learning initiatives, shared supervision schemes, and collaborative wellbeing initiatives could help organisations exchange knowledge, build capacity, and strengthen the overall quality and sustainability of youth work environments.

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