

National Report – Study no. 2

The Netherlands

Activity A2.3

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

Developed by NLO

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Section I: Context and rationale of national study

Young people in the Netherlands are growing up in a social environment shaped by rapid digitalisation, performance pressure, housing insecurity, climate concerns, post-pandemic effects and increasing uncertainty about the future. Although the Netherlands has a relatively well-developed youth, welfare and public health infrastructure, recent national evidence shows that youth mental health and wellbeing remain a strategic concern. The Public Health Monitor Young Adults 2024, conducted among more than 135,000 young people aged 16–25 in the Netherlands, found that only 51% assessed their mental health as good or very good, while 35% rated it as moderate and 14% as bad or very bad (RIVM, 2024). This confirms that youth wellbeing in the Netherlands is not only a clinical or individual issue, but also an ecosystem-level challenge requiring preventive, community-based and organisational responses.

Within this context, youth work has a critical role. In the Dutch setting, youth workers provide low-threshold support to young people in their development towards adulthood, including in neighbourhoods, schools and online environments (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, n.d.). Youth work therefore contributes to prevention, social inclusion, participation, resilience and early support, particularly for young people experiencing vulnerability, exclusion, psychosocial stress or limited access to formal support systems. This aligns with the broader understanding of youth work used in the POSITIVE4Youth Work study, where youth work is understood as a field that supports the personal, social, educational and civic development of young people through non-formal and informal learning, empowerment, inclusion and active citizenship.

At the same time, the Dutch youth work and social work landscape is under pressure. Since the decentralisation of youth services, municipalities have had a central role in organising youth support and related services at local level; Dutch municipalities are responsible for making youth help available, including support related to psychological and behavioural problems among children and young people (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). This creates opportunities for locally tailored solutions, but also places strong demands on

organisations working with young people. Youth-serving organisations often need to navigate municipal commissioning structures, changing local priorities, project-based funding, staff shortages, increasing complexity of youth needs and growing expectations around prevention and mental health promotion.

For practitioners, this can translate into high emotional labour, workload pressure, role complexity and exposure to young people's crises. Labour-market evidence shows that the social work and youth care sectors in the Netherlands are already dealing with pressure linked to workload, absenteeism and staff shortages, while personnel shortages are expected to increase in the coming years (AZW, 2024; UWV, 2024). In the broader social work sector, the share of employees who experience workload as high or very high has fluctuated between 30% and 42% in recent years (AZW, 2024). These workforce pressures make practitioner wellbeing a core quality, continuity and sustainability issue for youth work organisations.

Organisations cannot effectively support young people's resilience if their own practitioners are operating in environments that lack psychological safety, supervision, fair workload distribution, inclusive culture, meaningful participation or access to mental health support. In this sense, practitioner wellbeing is a mission-critical condition for sustainable youth work. The POSITIVE4Youth Work methodology explicitly frames youth work as emotionally demanding, relational by nature and often under-resourced, with practitioners facing risks such as burnout, emotional labour, exposure to young people's crises and high expectations with limited structural support.

The national study in the Netherlands is therefore grounded in the need to better understand how ready youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people are to become positive and supportive environments for their own practitioners, staff members and volunteers. A positive organisation is understood as one that enables practitioners and teams to thrive through meaningful work, high-quality relationships, learning, trust and a culture of wellbeing. A supportive organisation is one that creates the physical, psychological and social conditions that allow workers to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing through organisational culture, management practices and participatory processes (World Health Organization, 2010).

The rationale for the Netherlands study is especially relevant because Dutch youth work sits at the intersection of multiple policy and practice agendas: mental health promotion, social inclusion, prevention, local youth policy, community resilience and workforce sustainability. National policy, including the Dutch approach “Mental Health: Of All of Us”, highlights the importance of building a mentally healthy Netherlands, with specific attention to young people and young adults, workers and people in vulnerable positions (Rijksoverheid, 2022). This aligns with the European direction of travel, where mental health, safe working environments, inclusion and wellbeing are increasingly framed as shared responsibilities across education, employment, youth work and wider society (European Commission, 2023).

However, the readiness of organisations to operationalise these principles in day-to-day practice cannot be assumed. Formal values around inclusion, wellbeing or support may exist on paper, but the real maturity test is whether practitioners experience these values in daily work. This includes whether leadership is supportive and consistent, whether supervision and feedback are available, whether staff feel safe to speak up, whether workload and stress are actively managed, whether peer support is embedded, and whether organisations use feedback to adapt and improve. The POSITIVE4Youth Work study therefore focuses on organisational readiness as a multidimensional construct, assessed through both the perceived importance of supportive practices and their current level of implementation.

The Netherlands national study creates a structured evidence base on organisational readiness. It focuses on five key dimensions: leadership, supervision and professional development; organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety; wellbeing, mental health and burnout prevention; communication, participation and interpersonal support; and organisational resources, systems and adaptability. These dimensions make it possible to move beyond generic statements about wellbeing and instead identify concrete strengths, gaps and priority areas for organisational development.

The study is also important because it gives voice to two complementary perspectives: practitioners who experience the organisational climate in their daily work, and leaders or managers who shape internal policies, systems and culture. Comparing these perspectives is valuable because organisational readiness may look different depending

on someone's position in the organisation. Leaders may assess readiness through policies, strategies and available structures, while practitioners may assess it through lived experience, workload, team dynamics, emotional safety and actual access to support.

By focusing on the Netherlands, this study will contribute a national lens to the wider transnational project. It will help identify how Dutch youth organisations currently position themselves in relation to positive and supportive organisational practice, where the main capacity gaps are, and what kinds of external support, tools or development pathways may be needed. It will also support cross-country learning by showing which challenges are shared across the partnership and which are more specific to the Dutch youth work ecosystem.

Overall, the national rationale is clear: strengthening the mental health and resilience of young people requires strengthening the organisational environments of the people who support them. For the Netherlands, this means building youth work organisations that are not only service providers, but resilient, inclusive and future-ready workplaces where practitioners can thrive, stay engaged and deliver high-quality support over time.

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

a. Specific objectives

The overall purpose of Study No. 2 in the Netherlands was to assess the extent to which Dutch youth organisations and organisations working with young people are prepared to function as positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members and volunteers.

More specifically, the study aimed to:

- assess the current level of organisational readiness across five key dimensions associated with positive and supportive organisations;
- identify the gap between the importance assigned to supportive organisational practices and their actual implementation within Dutch youth organisations;
- examine how leadership, organisational culture, wellbeing practices, communication systems and organisational resources influence practitioners' daily experiences;
- compare the perceptions of youth workers, practitioners, leaders and managers regarding organisational strengths, gaps and development needs;
- identify organisational factors that contribute to practitioner wellbeing, resilience, motivation and long-term engagement in youth work;
- explore the main barriers that may prevent Dutch youth organisations from translating positive organisational values into sustainable internal practices;
- identify the forms of organisational-level support that youth organisations may need in order to strengthen their capacity to become more positive, supportive and resilient workplaces;
- generate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening organisational readiness and supporting the development of healthier and more sustainable youth work environments in the Netherlands.

b. Research questions / working hypotheses / targeted indicators

The study was guided by the following central research question:

To what extent are Dutch youth organisations and organisations working with young people prepared to become positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members and volunteers?

The study explored the following operational research questions:

- How effectively do leadership, supervision and professional development practices support practitioners in their daily work?
- To what extent do organisational cultures promote inclusion, psychological safety, trust and respectful relationships?
- How well do organisations address wellbeing, mental health and burnout prevention?
- How effectively do communication processes, participation mechanisms and interpersonal support systems function within organisations?
- Do organisations possess adequate resources, systems and adaptive capacities to sustain supportive organisational environments over time?
- What are the main gaps between the perceived importance of positive and supportive organisational practices and their actual implementation?
- What types of support are needed to strengthen the organisational readiness of Dutch youth organisations?

The study was based on the following working hypothesis:

Although Dutch youth organisations generally recognise the importance of supportive organisational practices and positive organisational values, gaps may continue to exist between organisational intentions and the practical systems, resources, procedures and everyday practices required to sustain practitioner wellbeing, resilience and long-term engagement in youth work.

To investigate this hypothesis, the study assessed organisational readiness through five targeted indicators:

Indicator 1: Leadership, Supervision and Professional Development

Indicator 2: Organisational Culture, Inclusion and Psychological Safety

Indicator 3: Wellbeing, Mental Health and Burnout Prevention

Indicator 4: Communication, Participation and Interpersonal Support

Indicator 5: Organisational Resources, Systems and Adaptability

Together, these indicators provide a comprehensive framework for understanding whether organisations are capable not only of delivering youth work activities, but also of creating the internal conditions that allow practitioners, staff members and volunteers to remain engaged, supported, healthy and effective over time.

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

a. Research design

The Netherlands national study followed a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This approach was selected in order to generate both measurable findings and deeper contextual insights into how youth organisations and organisations working with young people are prepared to function as positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members and volunteers.

The quantitative component consisted of two online questionnaires: one addressed to youth workers and practitioners, and one addressed to leaders and managers. The qualitative component consisted of three in-depth interviews and one focus group involving both practitioners and leaders/managers. This combination made it possible to compare perspectives across different organisational roles and to better understand the practical realities behind the survey results.

b. Implementation stages

The national study was implemented between May and mid-June. The data collection period was extended slightly because obtaining the required number of responses took longer than initially expected.

The implementation process included the following main stages:

- preparation and internal review of the research tools provided within the transnational study framework;
- dissemination of the online questionnaires through social media, WhatsApp networks and direct outreach to relevant organisations and professional contacts;
- continuous follow-up with organisations, youth workers, practitioners, leaders and managers in order to reach the required number of respondents;
- collection of questionnaire responses through Google Forms;

- organisation and implementation of three in-depth interviews;
- organisation and implementation of one online focus group with representatives of both target groups;
- review, systematisation and analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data;
- preparation of the national report based on the findings.

Throughout the implementation stage, considerable effort was invested in contacting people from different organisations and professional networks. The recruitment process required repeated communication and reminders in order to ensure a balanced participation of both practitioners and leaders/managers.

c. Methods and instruments used

The Netherlands study used the research instruments developed within the common methodology of Study No. 2. These included:

- Questionnaire 1, addressed to youth workers and practitioners;
- Questionnaire 2, addressed to leaders and managers;
- the interview guide for leaders and managers;
- the focus group guide for representatives of both target groups.

The questionnaires were implemented online through Google Forms. The research tools were kept aligned with the transnational framework in order to ensure comparability with the other partner countries.

For the Netherlands, the questionnaires were used in English only. This decision was taken because the Dutch context includes a high number of international youth workers, volunteers and professionals, and because English proficiency in the Netherlands is generally high. In the previous study, both Dutch and English versions had been used, but for this study it was considered that an English version was sufficient and more efficient for reaching both Dutch and international respondents.

The qualitative methods were used to deepen the survey findings. The in-depth interviews provided more detailed insights into leadership and organisational perspectives, while the focus group created space for interaction between practitioners and leaders/managers around the key themes of organisational readiness, wellbeing, support and sustainability.

d. Data collection

Data collection took place from May until mid-June. The online questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms and shared via social media channels, WhatsApp networks and direct professional contacts. The recruitment strategy focused mainly on people connected to youth NGOs and non-formal learning organisations.

The quantitative survey collected a total of 52 responses:

- 27 responses from youth workers and practitioners;
- 25 responses from leaders and managers.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, three in-depth interviews were carried out with three different participants. One interview was conducted online, while the other two were conducted on-site.

One focus group was also organised online. The focus group included 6 participants from both target groups and was facilitated by 2 facilitators. The online format made participation more accessible and allowed people from different locations to join the discussion.

Across the overall outreach and implementation process, approximately 30 youth workers/practitioners and 28 leaders/managers were involved or reached through the different research activities and networks. The main organisational profiles represented in the study were youth NGOs and non-formal learning organisations.

e. Ethical considerations

The national study followed basic ethical principles related to voluntary participation,

anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent.

Participation in the questionnaires, interviews and focus group was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the collected data for the project and national report. Questionnaire responses were collected anonymously, and no personal names or identifying details were included in the report.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were given the option to leave their email address if they were interested in participating in further project activities or being contacted again. Providing an email address was completely optional and was not required in order to complete the questionnaire. This ensured that participants could contribute anonymously while still having the opportunity to stay involved if they wished.

For the interviews and focus group, participants were informed about the purpose of the discussion and their contribution to the study. The reporting of qualitative insights was done in a way that protects participants' identities and avoids linking specific statements to identifiable individuals or organisations.

f. Difficulties and limitations encountered

Several challenges were encountered during the implementation of the national study in the Netherlands.

The main difficulty was obtaining enough responses within the planned timeframe. The data collection period had to continue until mid-June because responses came in more slowly than expected. Considerable follow-up was needed through personal networks, WhatsApp groups, social media and direct contact with organisations.

Another challenge was reaching leaders and managers. This target group was more difficult to engage, likely because of busy schedules, workload pressure and limited availability. As a result, additional effort was required to secure enough responses from this group.

A further limitation was that some potential respondents had already been contacted during a previous study in April. Some people initially thought that the questionnaire for

Study No. 2 was the same as the earlier one, which may have affected their willingness to respond or created some confusion during recruitment. This required additional clarification about the purpose of the new study and the difference between the research activities.

The sample was mainly composed of respondents connected to youth NGOs and non-formal learning organisations. While this provides valuable insight into important parts of the Dutch youth work ecosystem, the findings should not be interpreted as fully representative of all youth organisations or all organisations working with young people in the Netherlands.

Finally, the study relied on self-reported perceptions from practitioners, leaders and managers. This is appropriate for assessing organisational climate, perceived readiness and lived experience, but it also means that the findings reflect participant perceptions rather than external organisational audits. Despite these limitations, the combination of questionnaires, interviews and a focus group provides a solid evidence base for understanding the current level of organisational readiness and the main areas for future development

Section IV: Specific national legislation related to the study topic

In the Netherlands, there is no single national law that specifically regulates “positive and supportive organisations” in youth work. However, several legal and policy

frameworks are directly relevant to the topic of this study because they shape the conditions in which youth organisations operate, the responsibilities of organisations working with young people, and the standards related to safe, inclusive and healthy working environments. These frameworks are especially relevant to the study's focus on practitioner wellbeing, psychological safety, inclusion, burnout prevention, organisational support and sustainable youth work practice.

Youth Act / Jeugdwet

The Youth Act / Jeugdwet is one of the most important legal frameworks for organisations working with children and young people in the Netherlands. Since the decentralisation of youth care, Dutch municipalities have been responsible for making youth help available, including support for children and young people with psychological, behavioural or family-related problems (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-a). This decentralised system means that local authorities play a major role in organising, commissioning and supporting services for young people.

For youth organisations and organisations working with vulnerable young people, the Youth Act is relevant because it creates the broader local policy environment in which they operate. Many organisations must work within municipal priorities, local partnerships, funding structures and referral systems. This has a direct impact on organisational stability, workload, available resources and the ability of practitioners to provide consistent support to young people. In relation to this study, the Youth Act is therefore connected to organisational resources, systems and adaptability, as well as to the sustainability of youth work practice.

Social Support Act 2015 / Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015

The Social Support Act 2015 / Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015 gives municipalities responsibility for supporting people to live independently and participate in society for as long as possible (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-b). Although the Wmo 2015 is not limited to youth work, it is relevant for organisations that support young people, young adults and vulnerable groups in relation to participation, independence, social inclusion and community-based support.

For the purposes of this study, the Wmo 2015 is relevant because it reinforces the importance of local support systems, prevention and participation. Organisations working with young people often operate at the intersection of youth work, social support, education, community development and inclusion. The Wmo 2015 therefore provides part of the legal and policy background for understanding how organisations contribute to social participation and how municipal structures influence their work. This connects directly to the study indicators on organisational resources, participation, inclusion and adaptability.

Working Conditions Act / Arbeidsomstandighedenwet

The Working Conditions Act / Arbeidsomstandighedenwet is highly relevant to the study topic because it establishes the responsibility of employers to provide safe and healthy working conditions. In the Dutch context, this includes attention to psychosocial workload, known as psychosociale arbeidsbelasting or PSA. Psychosocial workload refers to stress caused by factors such as high workload, aggression, violence, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment (Arboportaal, n.d.). Employers are expected to take measures to prevent or limit psychosocial workload as part of their occupational health and safety responsibilities (Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie, n.d.).

This is directly connected to the study's focus on mental health, burnout prevention and supportive organisational environments. For youth work organisations, this legal framework is particularly important because youth work can involve emotional labour, complex relational work, exposure to vulnerable young people's difficulties and pressure from limited resources or project-based funding. The Arbowet therefore supports the rationale for assessing whether organisations have adequate systems for workload management, supervision, wellbeing support, psychological safety and burnout prevention.

Equal treatment and anti-discrimination legislation

Dutch equal treatment and anti-discrimination legislation is relevant to the study's focus on organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety. Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution prohibits discrimination, and Dutch equal treatment laws further protect

people against unequal treatment on grounds such as race, religion, gender, age and disability (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-c).

For employers and organisations, this means that practitioners, staff members and volunteers should be treated fairly and should not experience discrimination or exclusion. This legal framework is relevant to youth organisations because positive and supportive organisations are expected to create inclusive, respectful and safe working environments. In the context of this study, equal treatment legislation is therefore linked to the indicator on organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety.

Relevance of the legal framework to the study

Taken together, these legal frameworks create an important foundation for understanding organisational readiness in the Dutch youth work context. The Youth Act and Wmo 2015 shape the decentralised policy and service environment in which youth organisations operate. The Working Conditions Act provides a legal basis for safe and healthy working environments, including the prevention of psychosocial workload. Equal treatment legislation supports inclusive and non-discriminatory organisational cultures. The Mandatory Reporting Code highlights the need for clear safeguarding procedures and professional support. GDPR and the Dutch GDPR Implementation Act provide the ethical and legal basis for responsible data handling.

These laws do not directly define what a “positive and supportive organisation” is. However, they establish minimum standards and responsibilities that are closely connected to the study’s five indicators: leadership, supervision and professional development; organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety; wellbeing, mental health and burnout prevention; communication, participation and interpersonal support; and organisational resources, systems and adaptability. Therefore, the Dutch legal framework supports the relevance of this national study by showing that practitioner wellbeing, safety, inclusion and organisational support are not only organisational development issues, but also part of a wider legal and policy responsibility.

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

- Typology of participating organisations

The participants in this study were involved in youth NGOs and NGOs providing programmes/activities for young people.

- Field(s) in which organisations operate

Most questionnaire respondents belonged to organisations working in youth development and empowerment. The next largest group came from organisations active in social inclusion and equal opportunities. This was followed by organisations working in mental health and wellbeing, as well as sports, leisure and non-formal activities.

- Their stage of development

Among the youth workers, seven were from an early-stage organisation (less than 2 years), fifteen from a developing organisation (2-5 years), two from an established organisation (6-10 years), and three from a mature organisation (more than 10 years). Among the leader participants, three were from an early-stage organisation, twelve from a developing organisation, five from an established organisation, and five from a mature organisation.

Section VI: Description of respondents

VI. 1 Target group no. 1: youth workers and practitioners within youth organisations

a) Position within the organisation

Two participants were employed within their organisation, two were board members, one was a collaborator, and the remaining 22 were volunteers.

b) Current role when working with young people

Fifteen participants were youth workers, six were mentors, four were project experts/programme staff and two were caseworkers supporting young people.

c) Years of experience in working with youth

Eleven participants had less than a year of experience in working with youth, sixteen had 1-5 years.

d) Level of education

Six participants responded having high school as their highest level of education, fifteen responded bachelor's degree, five responded master's degree and one responded doctoral studies.

e) Age

Nineteen respondents were younger than 25 years old, and eight in the age range 26-35.

VI. 2 Target group no. 2

a. position within the organisation

Fifteen participants responded as volunteer, seven employee and three collaborators.

b. current leadership or management role in organisation

Eight responded as team member, seven as Board member or administrative leadership role, five as programme director, three as project manager, one executive director and one in HR.

c. years of experience in a management/coordination position

Thirteen respondents had between 1 and 5 years of experience, ten responded less than a year within their organization and two between 6 and 10 years.

d. level of education

Fifteen responded bachelor's degree, eight responded master's degree and two high school.

e. age

Twelve respondents are below the age of 25, twelve are below the age of 35 and one is between 36-50 years old.

Section VII: Key findings – quantitative results and qualitative insights

Indicator 1: Leadership, Supervision and Professional Development

- ***quantitative results***
 - The survey results show that leadership, supervision and professional development are considered highly important for creating a positive and supportive organisation. The average importance score for this

indicator is 4.41 out of 5, while the current organisational level is evaluated at 3.96. This creates a moderate gap of 0.44, meaning that respondents see leadership and professional support as relevant, but not yet fully embedded in daily organisational practice.

- The strongest perceived existing capacity is the organisation's ability to encourage innovation, creative thinking and idea-sharing, with an average score of 4.22. This suggests that practitioners generally experience some openness to new ideas and creative working methods. However, the lowest current score within this indicator relates to regular mentoring, guidance and professional support, with an average of 3.67. This indicates that while leadership may be supportive in principle, more consistent mentoring and structured guidance are still needed.
- Leadership and management development support was also rated as the most needed type of support in Q15, with an average need score of 3.04. This suggests that organisations would benefit from training and coaching for inclusive leadership, supportive supervision, psychological safety, conflict management and fair workload allocation. Overall, Indicator 1 should be treated as a key development area, especially in relation to structured supervision and regular professional support.

- ***qualitative insights***

- The focus group shows that leadership plays a central role in creating a positive and supportive organisational environment for youth work practitioners and volunteers. Participants emphasised that support should not only be informal or occasional, but structurally embedded in the organisation. Leadership should actively recognise emotional responses, provide regular check-ins, and ensure that practitioners feel seen and supported in their work.
- A key finding is that supportive supervision is especially important when practitioners work with vulnerable groups, such as refugees, migrants,

young people in precarious situations, or people facing socio-economic disadvantage. Participants indicated that practitioners can become desensitised over time, while new workers may experience strong emotional reactions. This highlights the need for leaders and supervisors to normalise reflection, emotional processing, and professional guidance.

- Professional development was also identified as an important organisational capability. Training on wellbeing, communication, psychological safety, and supportive teamwork can help practitioners develop the competencies needed to manage complex work realities. In the next 12–24 months, organisations should invest in leadership models that match the needs and expectations of both paid staff and volunteers, while also creating consistent supervision structures.
- The in-depth interviews show that leadership is experienced as both practical and relational. Leaders often support practitioners by coordinating meetings, solving conflicts, answering questions, and creating opportunities for brainstorming and knowledge exchange. In stronger examples, leadership includes onboarding, mentoring, feedback moments, and regular dialogue. However, the interviews also show that support is sometimes dependent on individual leaders rather than formal systems. This means that professional development exists, but it could become more sustainable through clearer structures, role continuity, and shared leadership practices.

- ***short integrated interpretation***

- The in-depth interviews show that leadership is a key enabling factor for positive and supportive organisations. Respondents described good leadership as practical, relational and developmental: leaders support daily coordination, solve problems, encourage brainstorming and help others grow into their roles. A major strength is that some organisations already provide mentoring, onboarding, knowledge exchange and feedback moments. However, the interviews also show that leadership support is not always structurally embedded. In volunteer-based or

student-led organisations, leadership continuity can be fragile because people change roles frequently. A key priority is therefore to strengthen leadership structures, improve handover processes and create clearer systems for mentoring, task division and professional support.

Indicator 2: Organisational Culture, Inclusion and Psychological Safety

- ***quantitative results***

- Indicator 2 receives the highest importance score across all indicators, with an average of 4.56. The existing organisational level is also rated relatively high, at 4.26, creating the smallest gap of 0.30. This suggests that respondents see organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety as both highly important and relatively well developed in their organisations.
- The strongest importance scores are linked to inclusive, anti-discrimination and equal-opportunity practices, as well as safe, inclusive and respectful work environments. Current organisational capacity is also rated positively across all three sub-areas: safe and respectful environment, inclusive practices, and organisational stability/psychological safety. There are no very low ratings in the current-level responses for this indicator, which shows that respondents generally experience this area as a strength.
- At the same time, organisational culture and inclusion support received the strongest average ranking in Q16, with an average rank of 2.33, where 1 means most important. This means that even though culture and inclusion are already perceived positively, respondents still see them as strategically important for further organisational development. The organisation should therefore maintain this strength while continuing to formalise inclusive policies, psychological safety frameworks and respectful workplace practices.

- ***qualitative insights***

- The focus group strongly underlines the importance of organisational culture, inclusion, and psychological safety. Participants described positive and supportive organisations as spaces where practitioners feel safe, listened to, and able to express concerns without fear of negative consequences. A key insight was that “safety” and “feeling safe” are not the same: organisations may have formal safeguarding structures, but practitioners also need to experience trust, openness, and emotional security in daily practice.
- Inclusion is particularly relevant in youth work and NGO contexts, because many practitioners and volunteers may come from migrant backgrounds, precarious employment situations, or voluntary roles. Participants noted that when people have limited work options, they may feel forced to accept unsupportive environments. This makes it even more important for organisations to create fair, inclusive, and empowering cultures.
- Psychological safety can be strengthened through anonymity, confidentiality, visible safeguarding roles, and clear follow-up when people raise concerns. Participants also highlighted that if someone speaks up, they should genuinely be listened to. Therefore, organisational culture should move beyond “box-ticking” and become a lived practice across all levels of the organisation.
- The interviews confirm that inclusion and respect are important organisational values. Respondents described diverse teams, international environments, interreligious dialogue, and efforts to collaborate with different communities. Personal connection was also seen as important for creating trust and making it easier for people to express opinions. At the same time, psychological safety is not always fully guaranteed. Some organisational or executive decisions remain unclear, which can create uncertainty or gossip. This shows that inclusive culture is a strength, but transparency and clear boundaries are still needed to make psychological safety more consistent.

- ***short integrated interpretation***

- The interviews highlight organisational culture as one of the strongest assets. Respondents described diversity, shared values, personal connection and inclusion as important strengths. A positive and supportive environment is built through trust, clear organisational values and a sense that people know each other beyond their formal roles. At the same time, psychological safety still needs further development. In some cases, openness depends strongly on personal relationships rather than formal safeguards. The interviews also point to the need for clearer boundaries, codes of conduct and transparent decision-making. In the next phase, organisations should protect their inclusive culture while making psychological safety more explicit and consistent.

Indicator 3: Wellbeing, Mental Health and Burnout Prevention

- ***quantitative results***

- Indicator 3 shows the largest gap between importance and existing organisational capacity. The average importance score is 4.17, while the current level is 3.65, creating a gap of 0.52. This makes wellbeing, mental health and burnout prevention the clearest priority for improvement in the survey data.
- Respondents rate fair workload distribution to prevent burnout as the most important sub-area within this indicator, with an importance score of 4.33. However, the weakest current-level score across the whole survey is access to mental health resources and wellbeing support services, with an average of 3.30. This shows that organisations may recognise wellbeing as important, but practical wellbeing infrastructure is still underdeveloped.
- The data suggests that organisations need to move from general awareness of wellbeing toward concrete systems. These could include workload monitoring, emotional support during high-pressure situations, wellbeing check-ins, access to mental health resources, and

clearer procedures for preventing burnout. This indicator is the main “growth gap” in the data and should be prioritised in the next phase of organisational development.

- ***qualitative insights***

- Wellbeing and mental health emerged as one of the most urgent themes in the focus group. Participants stated that emotional support for youth workers is often underestimated or forgotten. Mental health should not be treated as a separate topic or occasional add-on, but as an integrated part of organisational functioning.
- Practitioners working with vulnerable groups may face emotional strain, compassion fatigue, and burnout risks. The focus group showed that organisations need to recognise these pressures and provide structured support. This includes regular check-ins, access to wellbeing resources, destress activities, informal moments, and signposting to further professional support where needed.
- Burnout prevention also requires realistic expectations. Participants warned against toxic positivity and stressed the importance of being positive while remaining realistic. Organisations should therefore create a culture where people can talk honestly about stress, workload, and emotional impact. Concrete actions could include anonymous feedback tools, regular wellbeing conversations, team-building activities, and reflective practices such as emotional check-ins or creative exercises.
- Wellbeing is addressed mostly through informal flexibility, realistic deadlines, workload redistribution, and open dialogue. In volunteer-based organisations, respondents emphasised that people understand each other’s study, work, and personal responsibilities. However, mental health support is often not formalised. There may be openness to discuss wellbeing, but there is not always a dedicated person, system, or resource for mental health concerns. This creates a risk that wellbeing support depends too much on whether individuals speak up or whether leaders notice problems early enough.

- ***short integrated interpretation***

- The interviews confirm that wellbeing is often supported informally through flexibility, realistic deadlines, workload redistribution and personal understanding. Respondents valued organisations where people are aware of each other's limits and where planning takes mental health into account. However, wellbeing support is still not always formalised. There are often no dedicated wellbeing roles, mental health procedures or clear support pathways. This means that support can depend too much on whether individuals speak up or whether leaders notice signs of stress. A key priority is to integrate wellbeing into organisational planning through regular check-ins, flexible workframes, access to psychological support and prevention-oriented workload management.

Indicator 4: Communication, Participation and Interpersonal Support

- ***quantitative results***

- Indicator 4 is also rated as highly important, with an average importance score of 4.52. The current organisational level is 4.19, creating a gap of 0.33. This indicates that communication, participation and interpersonal support are already relatively strong, but still need structured improvement to become more consistent.
- The survey shows strong importance scores for clear, consistent and transparent communication, collaboration and teamwork, and interpersonal support systems. The current-level scores are also positive, especially for communication, peer support and team cohesion. The ability to involve practitioners in meaningful decision-making processes scores slightly lower than the other areas, with an average of 4.11, but remains relatively strong.

- The findings suggest that organisations should continue investing in transparent communication and participatory structures. This includes involving practitioners and volunteers in decision-making, strengthening team-based reflection, and creating spaces for peer learning. Organisational participatory structures were also ranked as an important support need, with an average rank of 2.52. This shows that respondents value networks, communities of practice and knowledge-sharing spaces as part of a supportive organisational climate.

- ***qualitative insights***

- Communication was identified as a key driver of a positive organisational climate. Participants emphasised that “talking in general” is important for feeling supported, both about positive and difficult experiences. Open communication helps practitioners feel connected, valued, and less isolated.
- Participation is also crucial. Participants suggested that organisations should communicate more transparently about what the board discusses and how decisions are made. This would help reduce distance between leadership and practitioners or volunteers. Involving staff and volunteers in conversations about wellbeing, workload, and organisational development can increase ownership and trust.
- Interpersonal support can be strengthened through team-building activities, meetups, informal moments, and spaces where people can share experiences. Participants also suggested online formats, such as show-and-tell sessions or creative reflection tools, to support emotional expression in remote or hybrid settings. These practices can help build a more functional team where people feel able to raise topics, support each other, and collaborate across projects.
- Communication and participation are generally organised through meetings, WhatsApp groups, email updates, brainstorming sessions, and informal conversations. Respondents described a culture where ideas are encouraged and discussed collectively, especially when

collaborations or decisions may involve risk. Interpersonal support is strengthened through personal relationships, team bonding, and informal moments outside of work. However, participation could be improved by making decision-making more transparent and by ensuring that communication does not only happen casually, but is also supported by clear systems.

- ***short integrated interpretation***

- Communication and interpersonal support are important strengths in the interviews. Respondents mentioned meetings, informal conversations, WhatsApp groups, in-person gatherings, brainstorming and external collaboration as ways to stay connected and involved. Personal connection was seen as essential because it helps people feel safe enough to share concerns or ideas. However, communication can still be too informal or dependent on a small group of active people. Participation would become stronger if organisations created clearer routines for decision-making, feedback and internal updates. A future priority is to combine informal team bonding with more structured participation mechanisms, so that practitioners and volunteers feel both connected and meaningfully involved.

Indicator 5: Organisational Resources, Systems and Adaptability

- ***quantitative results***

- Indicator 5 has an average importance score of 4.32 and a current-level score of 3.98, creating a gap of 0.35. This suggests that organisational resources, systems and adaptability are seen as important, but not yet fully optimised.
- The most highly rated importance item within this indicator is recognising, valuing and celebrating practitioners' contributions, with an average score of 4.37. Current scores are moderately positive, with

recognition scoring 4.07, continuous assessment and adaptation scoring 3.96, and resource allocation scoring 3.89. This indicates that respondents experience some organisational capacity in this area, but resources and feedback systems could be strengthened.

- Organisational development and sustainability support received an average need score of 2.85 in Q15 and an average rank of 2.81 in Q16. This suggests a moderate but relevant need for consultancy or support around resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, feedback systems and organisational adaptability. For the next 12–24 months, organisations should focus on building more sustainable internal systems that help them listen to practitioners, adapt based on feedback and allocate time, tools and space more effectively.

- ***qualitative insights***

- The focus group highlighted that organisational resources and systems are essential, but often limited in NGO and volunteer-based contexts. Participants mentioned budgets, financial resources, and necessary tools as major barriers. Because many people engage in youth work or volunteering alongside another job, organisations also need systems that recognise dual work identities, limited time, and varying levels of motivation.
- Resources alone do not automatically create a positive organisation, but they do enable better support structures. For example, funding can make it easier to provide training, supervision, wellbeing activities, and practical tools. However, participants also suggested that organisations need adaptive systems that can respond to changing needs, rather than only relying on fixed structures.
- Adaptability should include learning from best practices, collecting volunteer testimonials, creating anonymous feedback mechanisms, and ensuring consistent follow-up. Organisations should also develop systems for workload management, communication, and participatory decision-making. Over the next two years, the most important internal

capacities will be stable support systems, integrated check-in culture, transparent communication, and flexible wellbeing practices that work both offline and online.

- A major finding across the interviews is that resources and systems remain a key challenge. Respondents mentioned limited funding, lack of dedicated resources, voluntary work structures, and dependence on a small number of people. Some organisations are adaptive on a personal or informal level, but they lack stronger systems for continuity, planning, task division, and feedback. Looking ahead, interviewees prioritised clearer structures, more people, stronger funding opportunities, regular check-ins, codes of conduct, and more accessible support systems. This shows that adaptability is present, but it needs to move from informal flexibility to a more structured organisational model.

- ***short integrated interpretation***

- The strongest gap across the interviews relates to resources, systems and sustainability. Respondents described limited funding, limited people, voluntary work structures and lack of dedicated resources as major barriers. Several organisations are adaptive on a personal level, but do not yet have stable systems for planning, task division, feedback, continuity or organisational memory. The interviews show that success in the next 2–3 years would mean more structure, clearer agreements, annual planning, stronger funding opportunities, more people to divide tasks and more accessible support systems. This indicator is therefore central to long-term readiness: organisations need to move from informal flexibility to sustainable systems that can support practitioners consistently over time.

Section VIII: General conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions: what we learned

The findings show that Dutch youth organisations and NGOs working with young people generally recognise the importance of becoming positive and supportive environments for practitioners, staff members and volunteers. Across the five indicators, respondents rated supportive organisational practices as highly important. This confirms that wellbeing, inclusion, leadership, communication and sustainable organisational systems are not seen as optional add-ons, but as core conditions for effective and future-proof youth work.

At the same time, the study confirms that a gap still exists between organisational values and everyday implementation. Organisations often have strong intentions, motivated teams and inclusive cultures, but these are not always supported by formal structures, consistent procedures or dedicated resources. Support is frequently present at an informal or interpersonal level, especially through personal relationships, flexibility and peer support. However, this also makes organisational readiness dependent on individual leaders, team dynamics or volunteer motivation.

The strongest area appears to be organisational culture, inclusion and psychological safety. Respondents generally experience youth organisations as inclusive, respectful and open to diversity. However, the qualitative findings show that psychological safety requires more than shared values. It also depends on transparency, clear boundaries, confidentiality and visible follow-up when concerns are raised.

The most urgent development area is wellbeing, mental health and burnout prevention. The quantitative findings show the largest gap in this indicator, while the qualitative findings confirm that emotional support is often underdeveloped or informal. Practitioners working with vulnerable young people may face emotional pressure, workload challenges and exposure to difficult situations, yet access to mental health resources, structured check-ins and burnout prevention systems remains limited.

Leadership, supervision and professional development also emerge as strategic leverage points. Leaders play a key role in shaping team culture, workload distribution, emotional support and professional growth. However, mentoring, supervision and feedback are not always consistent or formalised. This is especially relevant in organisations with many volunteers, young practitioners or changing board structures, where continuity can be fragile.

Communication and interpersonal support are generally seen as strengths, particularly through meetings, WhatsApp groups, informal conversations and team bonding. Still, the findings indicate that participation could become more structured. Practitioners and volunteers want clearer communication about decisions, more transparent board-level information and meaningful opportunities to contribute to organisational development.

Finally, organisational resources, systems and adaptability remain a structural challenge. Many participating organisations operate with limited funding, limited staff capacity and strong dependence on volunteers. This affects their ability to provide stable support, plan ahead, divide tasks fairly and adapt based on feedback. The overall readiness picture is therefore positive but still developing: Dutch youth organisations have strong values and motivation, but need more embedded systems to make support sustainable.

Recommendations: what should be done

Youth organisations should prioritise the development of structured wellbeing and burnout prevention systems. This could include regular wellbeing check-ins, workload monitoring, clear escalation pathways, access to mental health resources, and practical guidance for responding to emotional stress. Wellbeing should be integrated into daily operations and planning, rather than treated as a separate or occasional topic.

Organisations should strengthen supportive leadership and supervision. Leaders, board members and coordinators would benefit from training in inclusive leadership, psychological safety, conflict resolution, emotional support and fair workload distribution. Supervision should become more consistent through mentoring, feedback

moments and reflective practice sessions, especially for new practitioners and volunteers.

Organisations should formalise psychological safety practices. This includes creating anonymous feedback channels, confidentiality procedures, clear codes of conduct and visible safeguarding or wellbeing contact persons. Speaking up should be followed by concrete action, so that practitioners experience psychological safety as a lived practice rather than only an organisational value.

Communication and participation should be made more transparent and systematic. Organisations can improve internal trust by sharing board-level updates, explaining decisions, involving practitioners in relevant planning processes and creating regular spaces for dialogue. Participation should not depend only on informal conversations, but should be built into organisational routines.

Youth organisations should invest in peer support and team cohesion. Team-building activities, intervision sessions, communities of practice, informal meetups and online reflection formats can help practitioners feel connected and supported. These low-threshold actions are especially realistic for volunteer-based organisations and can have a strong impact on motivation and belonging.

Organisations should improve resource planning and task division. Clear role descriptions, annual planning, task calendars, handover documents and committee structures can reduce dependency on a small number of people. This is particularly important in student-led or volunteer-based organisations where turnover is high and organisational memory can easily be lost.

Funders, municipalities and sector-level partners should recognise practitioner wellbeing as part of youth work quality. Funding frameworks should allow organisations to allocate time and resources to supervision, training, team development, safeguarding and mental health support. Positive and supportive organisations cannot be built only through goodwill; they require structural capacity.

At sector level, practical tools should be developed and shared. These could include wellbeing policy templates, burnout risk assessment tools, supervision guides,

onboarding formats, feedback tools, codes of conduct and examples of good practice from other youth organisations. This would help smaller and developing organisations professionalise their internal support systems without creating excessive administrative burden.

In the next 12–24 months, the main priority should be to move from informal support to embedded organisational practice. Dutch youth organisations already show strong commitment to inclusion, social impact and practitioner support. The next step is to make this commitment more sustainable through clear structures, reliable leadership practices, accessible wellbeing support and adaptive systems that allow practitioners to stay healthy, motivated and effective over time.

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