

National Report – Study No. 1

Activity A2.2

**Attitudes and beliefs of organizations towards wellbeing and resilience of
practitioners in youth work**

Developed by NLO

National Report of Study No. 1

Attitudes and beliefs of organizations towards wellbeing and resilience of practitioners in youth work

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Section I: Context and rationale of national study

Despite increasing policy attention to mental health and well-being across Europe, a significant gap persists between policy discourse and everyday organisational practices within youth-serving organisations. While many organisations publicly endorse values related to well-being, inclusion and care, these commitments are not always reflected in organisational cultures, leadership approaches or internal support structures.

In practice, youth work organisations often operate under conditions characterised by project-based funding, limited human resources and high levels of emotional demand. Within such contexts, practitioner well-being and resilience may be implicitly framed as individual responsibilities rather than as organisational concerns requiring structural attention and sustained institutional commitment.

At the same time, the organisational environments in which youth workers operate play a decisive role in shaping professional experiences, coping capacities and long-term engagement in youth work. Research in organisational psychology and occupational health consistently demonstrates that factors such as supportive leadership, psychological safety, access to supervision, participatory decision-making and opportunities for professional reflection significantly influence employees' well-being and resilience.

However, despite this growing recognition, there is still limited transnational evidence on how youth-serving organisations themselves conceptualise practitioner well-being and resilience, how these issues are prioritised internally, and which organisational attitudes and beliefs may facilitate or hinder supportive organisational environments.

Without such evidence, initiatives aimed at improving practitioner well-being risk remaining fragmented or individualised, focusing primarily on personal coping strategies rather than addressing the organisational conditions that shape psychosocial risks and professional sustainability.

In this context, **this study addresses a critical knowledge gap by examining the organisational attitudes and beliefs that influence how youth work organisations interpret and respond to practitioner well-being and resilience.** Understanding these underlying cultural and institutional orientations is essential for identifying both barriers and enabling factors affecting the development of supportive organisational environments.

Drawing on the European policy frameworks outlined above, there is a growing expectation for youth work organisations to foster organisational cultures that promote psychological safety, recognise mental health as a shared responsibility and support practitioners in navigating the emotional demands of youth work. Such cultures are expected to encourage reflective practice, strengthen resilience, prevent burnout and contribute to the sustainability of youth work services. Nevertheless, how these expectations are interpreted, internalised and operationalised at organisational level remains insufficiently explored.

Within this broader context, this study contributes to the POSITIVE: Well-being and Resilience in Youth Work for Social Change project by generating a **foundational evidence base on organisational attitudes and beliefs related to practitioner well-being across the partner countries.** By identifying how organisations perceive, prioritise and address these issues, the study provides essential insights that will inform subsequent project activities aimed at strengthening organisational capacity and promoting positive and supportive youth work environments.

Section II: Objectives and research questions of national study no. 1

Objectives

The overall objective of National Study No. 1 is to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and organisational cultures that shape how youth-serving organisations in the Netherlands understand, prioritise, and address the well-being and resilience of youth workers, practitioners, staff members, and volunteers.

More specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine how practitioner well-being and resilience are understood and valued within Dutch youth-serving organisations.
- Explore whether practitioner well-being is perceived as an individual responsibility or as a shared organisational responsibility.
- Investigate how leadership practices and organisational culture influence the well-being and resilience of practitioners.
- Identify organisational challenges and opportunities related to supportive working environments.
- Identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for organisational learning and improvement related to practitioner well-being.
- Generate evidence that can support the development of more positive and supportive youth work organisations in the Netherlands.

Research questions

- H1: Organisations differ in the extent to which practitioner well-being is recognised as a legitimate organisational concern rather than as an individual matter
- H2: Organisational beliefs influence whether well-being is interpreted as an individual responsibility or a collective organisational obligation
- H3: Leadership attitudes shape organisational openness to discussing emotional labour, stress and professional sustainability
- H4: Supportive organisational cultures encourage psychological safety and open dialogue about well-being-related challenges

- H5: Organisations that are open to reflection and learning are more likely to recognise gaps in supporting practitioner well-being and to consider organisational improvements
- H6: Well-being and resilience emerge from the interaction between leadership practices, organisational culture and institutional responsibility

Section III: Description of how the national study no. 1 was carried out

a. Research design (quantitative/qualitative/mixed)

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This approach enabled the research team to gather both measurable data on organisational attitudes and beliefs regarding practitioner well-being and resilience, as well as more in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives.

b. Implementation stages

The implementation of the study took place between March and April 2026.

As a first step, the questionnaires provided within the project methodology were translated into both English and Dutch. Although English proficiency is generally high in the Netherlands, providing both language options aimed to maximise accessibility and participation.

Participants and organisations were primarily recruited through the partners' existing professional networks. Organisations were encouraged not only to participate themselves but also to share the questionnaires with partner organisations, colleagues, volunteers, and professionals working in the youth sector. This snowball approach helped expand the reach of the study beyond the immediate network of the project partners.

Following the survey distribution, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of youth-serving organisations. In addition, one focus group was

organised with six participants and facilitated by two members of the project team.

c. Methods & instruments used

The study utilised the following research instruments:

- Questionnaire 1 for youth workers and practitioners;
- Questionnaire 2 for organisational leaders and managers;
- Semi-structured interviews with organisational representatives;
- One focus group discussion involving both practitioners and organisational leaders.

The questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms. Interviews were conducted both online and face-to-face, depending on participants' availability and preferences. The focus group was organised in person.

d. Data collection

Two questionnaires were shared. The first was directed towards youth workers and got 19 responses, the second was directed towards leaders and managers of youth organisations and got 25 responses.

e. Ethical considerations (voluntariness, anonymity, consent)

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were free to withdraw from participation at any stage.

Survey responses were collected anonymously. No personal identifying information, such as names or email addresses, was required. At the end of the questionnaires, participants were given the option to provide contact information if they wished to participate in future project activities; however, this was entirely optional and stored separately from survey responses.

Interview and focus group participants were informed about the purpose of the study,

the confidential treatment of their contributions, and the voluntary nature of participation before taking part.

f. Difficulties and limitations encountered

The main challenge encountered during the implementation of the study was achieving the desired number of survey responses. Considerable time and follow-up efforts were required to encourage participation and ensure a sufficient number of completed questionnaires.

A further limitation is that most participating organisations were recruited through the partners' existing networks. This may have introduced a degree of selection bias. However, the networks involved are highly diverse and include individuals with different cultural backgrounds, genders, ages, levels of professional experience, and organisational roles. As a result, the study still benefited from a broad range of perspectives from across the youth sector.

Additionally, although the sample provides valuable insights into organisational attitudes and beliefs regarding practitioner well-being, the findings should not be considered fully representative of all youth-serving organisations in the Netherlands.

Section IV: Specific national legislation related to the study topic

In the Netherlands, there is no single piece of legislation dedicated specifically to practitioner well-being and resilience in youth work. However, a broader legal and

policy framework creates obligations and expectations for organisations regarding healthy, safe, and supportive working environments. These regulations influence how youth-serving organisations understand their responsibility for staff and volunteer well-being, shape organisational culture, and support positive organisational practices.

The legislation most relevant to this study consists primarily of occupational health and safety regulation, labour legislation, and youth-sector governance principles. Together, these frameworks establish that well-being is not solely an individual responsibility but also an organisational and systemic concern.

1. Working Conditions Act (Arbeidsomstandighedenwet – Arbowet)

The Dutch Working Conditions Act (Arbowet) represents the most significant legal framework connected to the themes explored in this study. The Act establishes employers' responsibility to provide safe and healthy working conditions and applies broadly across employment settings, including organisations that work with volunteers and youth practitioners where labour relationships exist (Netherlands Enterprise Agency [RVO], 2025a).

A particularly relevant aspect of the Arbowet is its explicit attention to psychosocial workload (psychosociale arbeidsbelasting - PSA). Dutch legislation requires employers to implement policies aimed at preventing or reducing psychosocial risks in the workplace. These risks include work pressure, stress, bullying, discrimination, aggression, violence, and sexual harassment (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, n.d.).

For youth-serving organisations, this requirement is especially relevant because youth work frequently involves emotional labour, complex interpersonal situations, and exposure to demanding social contexts. The legislation therefore supports an organisational understanding of practitioner well-being rather than framing resilience solely as an individual capacity.

The Act further requires organisations to conduct a Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E) and develop an accompanying action plan addressing identified occupational risks. This obligation encourages organisations to systematically reflect on working

conditions and establish preventive measures that contribute to healthier organisational environments.

2. Working Conditions Decree (Arbeidsomstandighedenbesluit – Arbobesluit)

The Working Conditions Decree operationalises the principles of the Arbowet and introduces more concrete obligations regarding psychosocial risks.

Under the Decree, organisations must assess psychosocial workload as part of their risk evaluation process and implement evidence-informed measures to prevent or reduce these risks. This requirement reinforces organisational accountability for practitioner well-being and creates a legal basis for actions such as supervision structures, workload management, safeguarding procedures, supportive leadership practices, and opportunities for reflection and professional support (Netherlands Labour Authority, n.d.).

Within youth organisations, these obligations align closely with the objectives of both studies by encouraging environments that promote resilience through organisational design rather than relying exclusively on personal coping mechanisms.

3. Working Hours Act (Arbeidstijdenwet)

The Working Hours Act contributes indirectly to practitioner well-being by regulating working time, rest periods, and recovery opportunities (RVO, 2024).

Although youth work often involves flexible schedules, events, evening activities, and volunteer engagement, the Act establishes boundaries intended to prevent excessive workload and long-term exhaustion. Adequate recovery time is recognised as an important factor supporting sustainable participation and reducing burnout risks.

For organisations, this legislation reinforces the principle that practitioner resilience is connected to organisational planning, staffing arrangements, and workload distribution.

4. Equal Treatment and Safe Working Environment Framework

Dutch equality legislation and workplace protection measures also influence

organisational attitudes toward well-being. The legal framework prohibits discrimination and supports the creation of inclusive and psychologically safe environments.

For youth-serving organisations, this is particularly important because organisational culture directly affects practitioners' willingness to discuss stress, seek support, express concerns, and engage in reflective practice. Legal expectations regarding equal treatment and protection from undesirable behaviour therefore contribute to supportive organisational climates.

Dutch equality and anti-discrimination principles are also relevant to the study topic because psychological safety depends on inclusive and respectful organisational cultures. Discrimination, bullying, aggression, violence, and sexual harassment are recognised as forms of undesirable behaviour that can contribute to psychosocial workload (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, n.d.). For youth-serving organisations, this is especially important because many operate around values such as inclusion, participation, diversity, and social justice. A gap between these external values and internal organisational culture can undermine trust, well-being, and professional sustainability. Psychological safety, understood as a shared belief that people can speak up, express concerns, and take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences, is therefore a critical organisational condition (Edmondson, 1999, 2019).

The Dutch legal framework demonstrates that practitioner well-being and resilience are increasingly understood as organisational responsibilities rather than purely individual matters. National legislation encourages organisations to adopt preventive approaches, identify psychosocial risks, and create conditions that support healthy professional functioning.

For Study No. 1 ("Attitudes & Beliefs of Organizations towards Wellbeing & Resilience of Practitioners in Youth Work"), this framework provides important context for interpreting organisational beliefs about responsibility, leadership, and workplace culture. The legislation highlights that positive and supportive organisations are not only desirable practices but are increasingly aligned with national expectations

regarding healthy work environments, psychosocial safety, and organisational sustainability.

Overall, the Dutch legal context supports a shift from individualised approaches to well-being towards preventive and organisational approaches. For youth-serving organisations, this means that practitioner well-being and resilience should be embedded in organisational policies, leadership practices, communication structures, and everyday working culture. A future-oriented approach to youth work therefore requires organisations to treat well-being not as an optional add-on, but as a strategic condition for sustainable, ethical, and high-quality youth work.

Section V: Description of organisations involved in study no. 1

a. Typology of participating organisations

The participants in this study were involved in youth NGOs and NGOs providing

programmes/activities for young people.

b. Field(s) in which organisations operate

Figure 1 shows the field of work of the organisations the questionnaire participants are involved in.

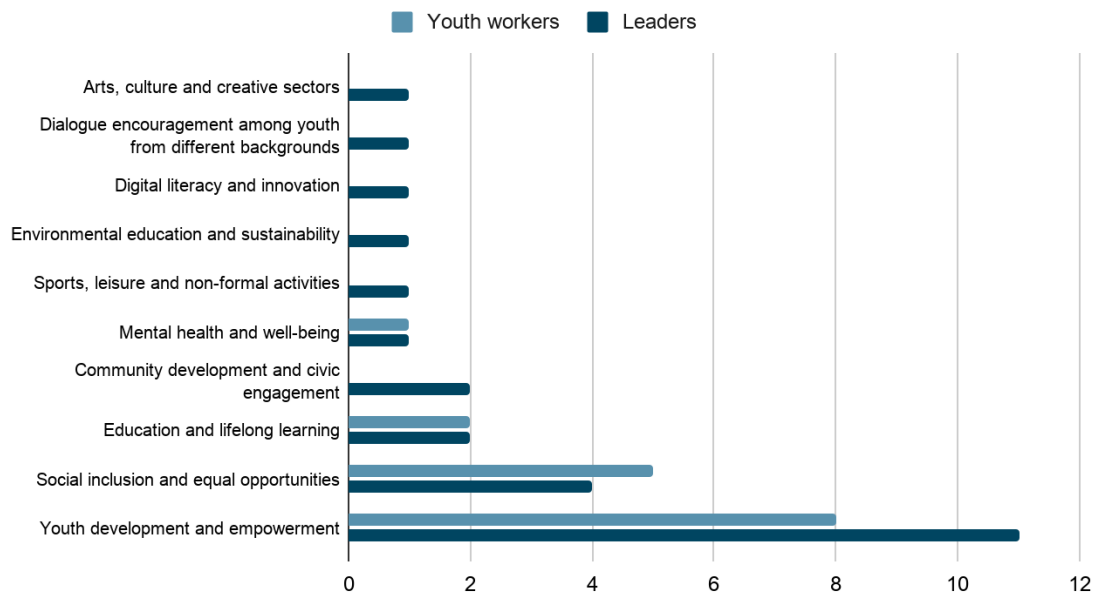


Figure 1. Fields organisations of the youth workers and leaders operate in. Most questionnaire participants belonged to organisations working in youth development and empowerment.

c. Their stage of development

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

Four participants were employed within their organisation, and the remaining 22 were volunteers.

b) Current role when working with young people

Twelve participants were youth workers, six were mentors¹, and eight were project experts/programme staff.

c) Years of experience in working with youth

Eight participants had less than a year of experience in working with youth, fifteen had 1-5 years, and three had 6-10 years.

d) Level of education

Six participants responded having high school as their highest level of education, thirteen responded bachelor's degree, and seven responded master's degree.

e) Age

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

VI. 2 Target group no. 2: leaders and managers within youth organisations

a) Position within the organisation

Four participants were employed within their organisation, two were collaborators, and the remaining were volunteers.

¹ The full category included the roles of mentor, educator, trainer, or counsellor working with young people.

b) Current leadership or management role in organisation

Six were team/department leaders, three were project managers, eleven were board members or were in an administrative leadership role, one was human resources or staff coordinator, two were programme directors, and two were executive directors.

c) Years of experience in a management/coordination position

Four participants had less than a year of experience in management in youth organisations, five had 1-5 years, two had 6-10 years, and one had over 10 years.

d) Level of education

Three participants responded having high school as their highest level of education, seven responded bachelor's degree, and ten responded master's degree.

e) Age

Thirteen respondents were younger than 25 years old, ten in the age range 26-35, and two in the age range 36-50.

Section VII: Key findings – quantitative results and qualitative insights

Figure 2 summarises the quantitative responses of youth workers to all indicator-related questions. Respondents were the most neutral to indicator I4B (psychological safety is essential for effective youth work practice), and agreed most strongly with the points related to indicator 6 (systemic understanding of well-being and resilience). Participants disagreed most strongly with indicator I1B (discussions about stress, emotional demands and well-being are encouraged within organisations).

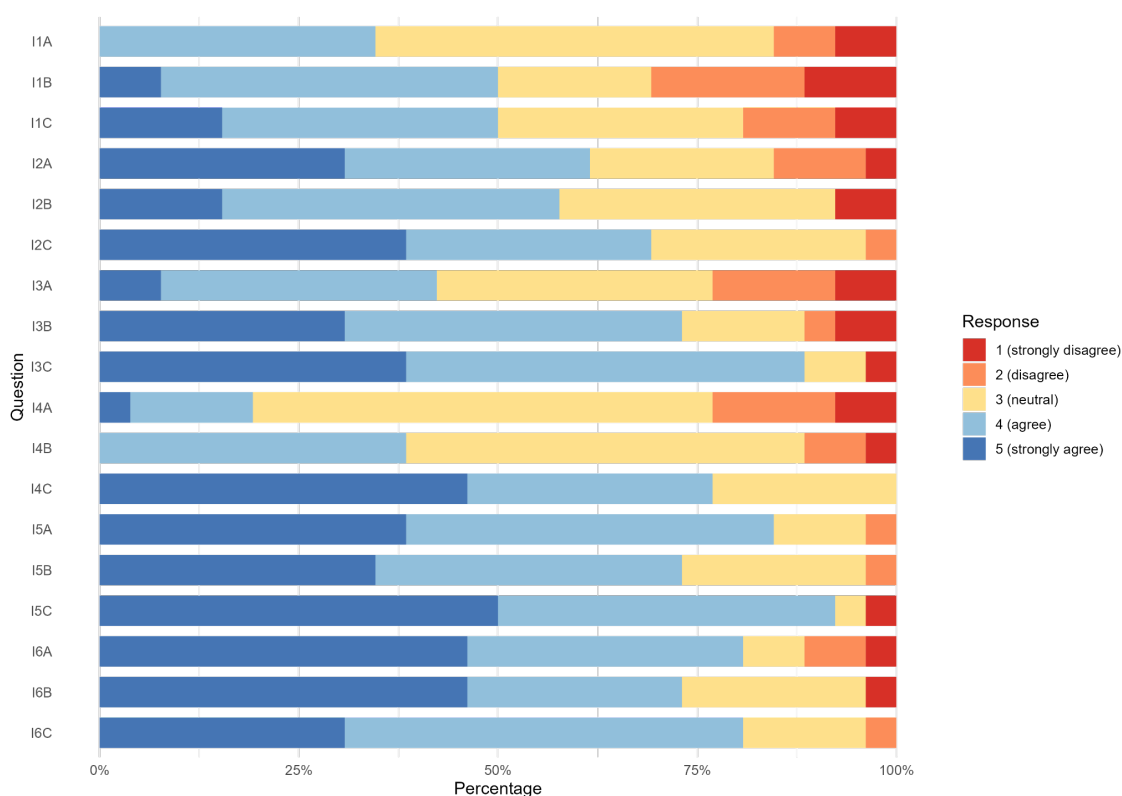


Figure 2. Summary of the responses of youth workers to the indicators of interest. I1A stands for first question of indicator 1, I1B stands for second question of indicator 1, and so on. See Annex 1 for full specification of the indicators.

Indicator 1 – Organisational awareness and strategic recognition of well-being

Focus: How organisations recognise practitioner well-being as an organisational issue.

Key questions addressed:

- Do organisations acknowledge emotional demands in youth work?
- Is practitioner well-being considered an organisational priority?

Findings focus group:

- Participants expressed mixed views about emotional demands being acknowledged in youth work. The level of attention given to staff wellbeing varies significantly between organisations. Some participants felt that wellbeing is often undervalued, particularly in environments influenced by more corporate or demanding work cultures. There can be an implicit expectation that youth work involves less pressure and should therefore be less intense, which may lead organisations to overlook the real emotional and psychological demands placed on staff. Participants said that well-being should be considered an organisational priority due to the belief that a youth worker's wellbeing and resilience is incredibly important for the quality of youth work. Participants shared ideas about what an organisation should do to be a good organisation which shows it's generally acknowledged as an organisational priority.

Findings in depth interviews:

- From the in depth interviews all respondents acknowledge the emotional demands in youth work. For one of the respondents it is even the main reason the organisation exists. Due to "Europe" failing people when it came to situations with refugees and migrants, people were overworked and did not have time for themselves. Within this organisation the main focus is practitioner wellbeing. Others mentioned finding it crucial as well and investing a lot of time in getting to know their team and investing in their bond so work becomes more pleasurable.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative interview responses confirm that practitioner well-being is broadly recognised as a core condition for sustainable and meaningful youth

work. Respondents emphasised that organisations are strongest when they create space for volunteers and practitioners to enjoy the process, learn, develop meaningful connections, and feel a sense of belonging. Well-being was not only described as a supportive element, but as a condition for long-term engagement and social impact.

- At the same time, the responses indicate that this recognition is not always structurally embedded across the youth sector. Some respondents observed that youth organisations may raise awareness about well-being, but that it is not always clear whether this leads to concrete organisational practices. This suggests a gap between recognising the importance of practitioner well-being and translating this recognition into consistent strategies, structures, and measurable outcomes.

Indicator 2 – Organisational responsibility for practitioner well-being

Focus: How organisations interpret responsibility for practitioner well-being.

Key questions addressed:

- Is well-being framed as an individual or organisational responsibility?
- Are support mechanisms discussed within organisations?

Findings focus group:

- Wellbeing is seen as an organisational responsibility based on what participants tell about how an organisation should be. The roles of organisations should be primarily preventive rather than reactive. Instead of waiting for problems to arise, organisations are expected to take proactive steps to support staff wellbeing. Support mechanisms weren't talked about as much but ideally participants shared that regular check-ins and creating space for open communication are necessary.

Findings in depth interviews:

- Support mechanisms are discussed within these organisations. One respondent tells about them doing check-ups before every meeting and also having the possibility to reach out whenever it is needed. One of the respondents even answered: "It's the only thing we do". When asked about the extent of well-being being discussed. Overall the respondents view well-being as an organisational responsibility. They explain the steps that they take within their own organisations to be able to realize what is needed to support the youth workers.
- However two respondents also expressed that some things are out of their control when talking about helping out youth workers because some external situations can put pressure on the practitioners and managers try to make it easier for them but unfortunately this is not feasible at all times.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative responses show that organisations are expected to take an active role in supporting practitioner well-being, but that this responsibility is still interpreted differently across organisations. Respondents stressed the importance of moving beyond an individualised view of resilience, where motivated young practitioners are expected to continue their work without sufficient emotional, mental, or professional support.
- Several organisational responsibilities were highlighted, including creating formal and informal check-ins, developing clearer agreements, providing structured support, and involving practitioners more directly in decision-making. Respondents also pointed out that people with lived experience and practitioners themselves are often insufficiently represented in organisational decision-making. This suggests that organisational responsibility should not only focus on support mechanisms, but also on participation, representation, and shared ownership.

Indicator 3 – Leadership attitudes towards well-being and emotional labour

Focus: Leadership approaches influencing well-being culture.

Key questions addressed:

- Do leaders actively support practitioner well-being?
- How leadership behaviours shape organisational attitudes.

Findings focus group:

- Leadership behaviours were described as a crucial role in shaping how wellbeing and resilience are approached within organisations. Leaders who model inclusive and supportive behaviour set the tone for the entire organisation. When leadership demonstrates these values in practice, staff and participants are more likely to adopt them naturally, without the need for constant reinforcement. Leading by example was seen as especially important.
- At the same time, participants noted that overly strict or hierarchical leadership can have a negative impact. In environments where collaboration and informality are valued, unnecessary rigidity can undermine wellbeing and create distance between staff members.
- Finally, clear communication from leadership was identified as key. When expectations or changes are introduced, it is important that leaders explain the underlying purpose (“the why”) both before and after implementation. This helps staff understand and accept decisions, making it easier to stay engaged and resilient in the face of challenges.

Findings in depth interviews:

- Organisational leaders play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards practitioner well-being according to the answers from respondents. Within one of the organizations, leadership is being described as constantly looking at the budget not only in terms of projects, but also in terms of where resources should go to support people.
- This includes asking questions such as: what new roles are needed, what investments should be made, and what kinds of activities are required to support practitioner well-being.

- For example, they have introduced the role of a *human connector*. This person's responsibility is to regularly reach out to people in the network, asking questions like: "What do you need?", "What does the organisation mean for you?", "Is it valuable?", and "Can I connect you with someone else in the network who might support you?"
- So a clear example is a set of leaders actively supporting their staff and also the ways they influence attitudes.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative responses highlight leadership as a key driver of organisational well-being culture. Leaders were expected to model supportive behaviour, understand the lived realities of practitioners, and create conditions in which people feel valued beyond their outputs. Respondents emphasised that leaders should prioritise people over projects and resist purely performance-driven organisational cultures.
- Leadership was also linked to strategic investment. Examples included making space for reflection, supporting personal development, improving communication, and creating opportunities for practitioners to grow into leadership roles themselves. This indicates that leadership support is not only about responding to stress, but also about proactively shaping organisational environments where practitioners can develop, contribute, and remain resilient.

Indicator 4 – Organisational culture and psychological safety

Focus: Workplace climate and openness to discussing stress and well-being.

Key questions addressed:

- Do practitioners feel safe expressing concerns?
- Are supportive peer relationships encouraged?

Findings focus group:

- Participants described organisational culture as highly variable, with experiences ranging from very open and supportive to restrictive and distrustful.
- Some participants shared examples of environments that felt controlling or even “dictatorial”, where individuals censored themselves and avoided speaking openly. In such contexts, a lack of open communication often led to gossip and tension, even when the project was mostly about inclusion. This highlighted a disconnect between stated values and actual practice.
- In contrast, positive examples were also mentioned. Effective leaders were described as those who understand that individuals have different personalities and needs, and who actively try to support and accommodate them. This kind of leadership fosters trust and encourages people to express themselves more openly.
- Participants emphasized that when communication channels are closed or limited, informal communication such as gossip tends to increase. Creating safe and open lines of communication was therefore seen as essential.
- Additionally, some noted that openness and trust are often underestimated issues, especially in a context where society is becoming more individualistic, partly due to the influence of technology and social media. This makes it even more important for organisations to actively cultivate connection and dialogue.

Findings in depth interviews:

- Based on the answers given the practitioners feel safe to express their concerns and peer supportive relationships are encouraged. One respondent talks about being a safe space and once that is achieved you become a cohesive group where everything can be discussed. They even celebrate birthdays and other important achievements together. Another respondent talks about the home groups and one-on-ones that get set up within their organizations. They introduce monthly meetings and are encouraged to do one-on-ones where they schedule appointments to have dedicated conversations with each other.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative responses strongly underline the importance of organisational culture, psychological safety, and trust. Supportive organisations were described as spaces where practitioners can be themselves, ask for help, discuss difficulties, and build meaningful relationships. Respondents referred to the importance of “safe spaces,” “brave spaces,” and “third spaces” where people do not feel reduced to performance expectations or external labels.
- A supportive culture was also linked to enjoyment, informal connection, and emotional openness. Respondents noted that youth work should create impact, but also allow room for fun, lightness, and human connection. Diversity was another important theme, particularly the need to safeguard cultural and faith-based perspectives. Overall, the findings suggest that psychological safety is strengthened when organisations combine openness, diversity, personal connection, and low-pressure environments.

Indicator 5 – Organisational learning and openness to improvement

Focus: Organisations’ capacity to reflect and improve practices related to well-being.

Key questions addressed:

- Are organisations open to learning from practitioner feedback?
- Are internal practices regularly reviewed?

Findings focus group:

- Participants had limited direct insight into how organisations formally reflect on and evaluate their support for staff wellbeing, with some expressing uncertainty about existing practices.
- However, it was suggested that reflection can take place through structured discussions, similar to this focus group itself, where staff are given space to share their experiences and perspectives. Participants also emphasized the

importance of anonymous feedback mechanisms. Tools such as suggestion boxes or online surveys (e.g. Google Forms) were mentioned as ways to encourage honest input, especially for those who may feel uncomfortable speaking directly to management. In addition, it was noted that not all staff feel safe raising concerns face-to-face. Providing alternative channels, such as going through a trusted intermediary, can help create a safer environment for sharing feedback, particularly on sensitive issues related to wellbeing.

Findings in depth interviews:

- Respondents say that their organisations learn from staff experiences and feedback in several ways. One of them talks about their annual summit where it became clear that they were trying to do too much at once, which placed pressure on staff capacity. Another respondent said constructive criticism is needed to be able to improve the quality and to never give up as an organisation.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative responses show that organisations need stronger learning mechanisms to improve their support for practitioner well-being. Respondents highlighted the importance of constructive criticism, feedback, reflection, and learning from practice. Organisational improvement was linked to the ability to recognise when support is insufficient and to adjust practices before problems escalate.
- Several respondents suggested that organisations should develop better ways to evaluate success. Rather than focusing mainly on quantitative deliverables, organisations should also consider qualitative outcomes such as meaningful connection, practitioner development, sense of belonging, and long-term engagement. This points to a need for more human-centred monitoring and evaluation, where well-being is included as a serious organisational indicator.

Indicator 6 – Systemic understanding of well-being and resilience

Focus: Recognition of well-being as a systemic organisational issue.

Key questions addressed:

- Do organisations recognise links between leadership, culture and practitioner well-being?
- Is well-being understood as part of organisational sustainability?

Findings focus group:

- Wellbeing is definitely understood as a part of organisational sustainability. When youth workers are not feeling well mentally, they may miss important signals or needs among young people. Being in a healthy state of mind enables them to notice subtle but crucial issues and respond appropriately. Secondly, participants highlighted the importance of personal motivation and having a clear sense of purpose (“the why”). Each youth worker may be driven by different motivations, such as leaving a legacy or contributing meaningfully to young people’s lives. When this sense of purpose is clearly understood and shared within an organization, it helps align individual and organizational goals. This alignment supports collaboration, direction, and growth, while still allowing flexibility for individuals to develop in their own way.

Findings in depth interviews:

- Wellbeing is understood as a part of organisational sustainability because without practitioners, there is no youth work. The respondents invest a lot of energy to make their practitioners feel heard and cared for. This influences the working culture.

Integrative findings:

- The integrative responses confirm that practitioner well-being and resilience

are understood as systemic issues shaped by organisational culture, leadership, resources, external pressures, and broader social conditions. Respondents recognised that stress is not always caused by internal organisational factors alone, but can also result from wider pressures such as funding requirements, educational pressure, cost of living, political developments, and social uncertainty.

- At the organisational level, respondents emphasised the importance of planning, clear roles, local partnerships, community engagement, legal awareness, and the strategic use of technology. Some also pointed to the need for stronger data systems, better planning tools, and CRM-like structures to help organisations understand and respond to practitioner needs more effectively. At the sector level, respondents called for more appreciation of youth work and youth workers, and for youth organisations to be understood within a broader European and systemic context.

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

- **Conclusions**

The findings of this national study indicate that youth-serving organisations in the Netherlands broadly recognise the importance of practitioner well-being and resilience, but this recognition is not yet consistently translated into structured organisational practices. Well-being is widely perceived as essential for the quality and sustainability of youth work, particularly given the high emotional demands associated with working with young people.

A key conclusion is the persistence of ambiguity regarding responsibility for well-being. While participants generally agree that organisations should play a proactive role, well-being is still frequently operationalised at the individual level, relying on personal coping strategies rather than embedded organisational systems.

At the same time, the study highlights the important role of leadership and organisational culture in shaping practitioner experiences. Organisations where leaders promote open communication, trust, and regular support mechanisms appear better positioned to foster psychological safety and resilience among practitioners.

The findings also suggest that well-being and resilience are best understood as systemic issues that emerge through the interaction of individual, organisational, and structural factors. Strengthening practitioner well-being therefore requires not only supporting individuals but also creating organisational environments that encourage reflection, dialogue, learning, and sustainable working practices.

- **Recommendations**

To strengthen organisational approaches to practitioner well-being and resilience in the Dutch youth sector, coordinated action is needed at both organisational and sector levels.

At the organisational level, there is a need to move from implicit recognition to explicit strategy. Organisations should integrate practitioner well-being into their core policies and operational frameworks, including the development of clear well-being strategies, regular risk assessments, and action plans addressing psychosocial workload. Well-being should be treated as a shared organisational responsibility rather than an individual concern.

Organisations should establish structured support mechanisms for practitioners. These may include regular one-on-one check-ins, peer support systems, supervision or mentoring structures, and access to professional support where needed. Ideally these support mechanisms would be preventative rather than reactive.

Leadership development should also be prioritised. The findings highlight the significant influence leaders have on organisational culture, psychological safety, and practitioner resilience. Leaders should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise signs of stress, facilitate open communication, model supportive behaviours,

and create environments where practitioners feel safe discussing challenges without fear of judgement or negative consequences.

Furthermore, organisations should actively strengthen cultures of psychological safety and trust. Creating opportunities for open dialogue, reflection, and feedback can help reduce stigma around well-being-related issues and encourage practitioners to seek support when needed. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that organisational values related to inclusion, care, and well-being are reflected in everyday practices.

At the sector level, greater attention should be given to sharing good practices and building organisational capacity around practitioner well-being. Networks, umbrella organisations, and youth work stakeholders can play an important role in facilitating peer learning, developing practical guidance, and promoting awareness of organisational approaches that support resilience and sustainable youth work.

Finally, future initiatives should continue to promote a systemic understanding of well-being and resilience. The findings suggest that practitioner well-being is shaped by the interaction between individual factors, leadership practices, organisational culture, and broader structural conditions. Efforts to strengthen resilience should therefore address not only individual coping capacities but also the organisational environments in which youth work takes place.

Annex 1: full list of indicators

Indicator 1 (Organisational Awareness and Strategic Recognition of Well-being)

Objective: To understand whether organisations recognise staff wellbeing as an important part of their work

I1A Youth organisations recognise practitioner well-being as an important organisational issue.

I1B Discussions about stress, emotional demands and well-being are encouraged within organisations.

I1C Supporting practitioner well-being is considered important for maintaining high-quality youth work.

Indicator 2 (Organisational Responsibility for Practitioner Well-being)

Objective: To explore whether organisations see staff wellbeing as an individual or shared responsibility

I2A Organisations have a responsibility to actively support practitioner well-being.

I2B In many organisations, well-being is still seen primarily as an individual responsibility.

I2C Organisational structures and policies should address psychosocial risks in youth work.

Indicator 3 (Leadership Attitudes towards Well-being and Emotional Labour)

Objective: To understand how leadership attitudes influence organisational responses to stress, emotional labour and practitioner support

I3A Leaders in youth organisations acknowledge the emotional demands of youth work.

I3B Leadership practices influence how comfortable practitioners feel discussing stress or burnout.

I3C Managers should actively promote supportive working environments for practitioners.

Indicator 4 (Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety)

Objective: To examine whether practitioners feel safe to express concerns related to workload, well-being or emotional strain

I4A Practitioners feel safe expressing concerns about workload or well-being in their organisations.

I4B Organisational cultures in youth work encourage mutual support among staff and volunteers.

I4C Psychological safety is essential for effective youth work practice.

Indicator 5 (Organisational Learning and Openness to Improvement)

Objective: To identify organisational openness to change and the capacity to develop more supportive working environments

I5A Youth organisations should regularly reflect on how their practices affect staff well-being.

I5B Organisations should adapt their internal practices when practitioners experience stress or burnout.

I5C Learning from practitioner experiences can improve organisational support systems.

Indicator 6 (Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience)

Objective: To explore whether organisations support staff wellbeing as a collective responsibility rather than relying only on individual coping

I6A Practitioner well-being depends not only on personal resilience but also on organisational conditions.

I6B Organisational culture, leadership and resources strongly influence practitioner resilience.

I6C Sustainable youth work requires organisations to address well-being at a systemic level.

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