

Integrated Action Plan Oulu

NextGen Youth Work



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Interreg



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IAP Section 1: Context, Needs, and Vision

Introduction

What is the IAP and why was it created?

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Digital Youth Work within the Oulu Youth Services is a strategic document developed as part of the URBACT project. The project involved cities belonging to the URBACT NextGen YouthWork network, collaborating to address challenges in urban environments.

The City of Oulu's IAP has been designed to respond to local development needs and challenges, such as the development of digital youth work and the strengthening of social inclusion. The IAP brings together perspectives from various stakeholders, including youth workers, young people, city officials, and NGOs.

The aim of the action plan is to integrate these changes into the long-term strategy for Oulu Youth Services. The IAP follows a sustainable, inclusive, and evidence-based approach.

The IAP is linked to the development of digital youth work within the Oulu Youth Services and builds on practices already proven effective in youth work. The City of Oulu's youth work is guided by an integrated and multidisciplinary approach, where different actors collaborate to promote the well-being of children and young people. This approach is reflected both in strategic planning and in everyday activities – with the goal of creating a coherent and impactful youth work framework.

Youth Work in the City of Oulu

In Oulu, **youth work is preventive educational work** carried out both regionally and through centralized services. Its objective is to support children and young people in growing into responsible global citizens who care for themselves, others, and the environment, maintain healthy lifestyles, and have the opportunity and ability to participate in and influence their own lives and societal matters. Young people are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services, which strengthens their inclusion and agency.

Multidisciplinary collaboration with different municipal departments, schools, organizations, and other actors enables comprehensive support for young people. This cooperation is a key element of the Integrated Action Plan and its success.

Digital services, such as online youth spaces, reach also young people in remote areas, but our objective is to further develop digital services to meet today's standards and the needs of young people. Environmental responsibility and sustainable development are considered in all activities. The aim of youth work is the well-being of young people – all services emphasize mental health support and stigma-reducing practices.

This Integrated Action Plan contributes to building the future of youth work, where every young person is recognized as a valuable individual and an active member of society. Through collaboration and the use of digital tools, we can create a sustainable and inclusive environment for young people in the City of Oulu.

City Context and Vision

Brief History

The City of Oulu was officially founded on April 8, 1605, by decree of King Charles IX of Sweden. However, the area had been inhabited since the late Stone Age and served as a trading post as early as the 16th century. In the 17th century, Oulu developed into an industrial and commercial hub, particularly due to the export of salmon and tar. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Oulu grew into a significant shipbuilding and trading city and has evolved from a traditional marketplace into today's modern technology center with a strong university tradition. Throughout its history, the city has faced numerous fires and periods of rebuilding but has always managed to continue its growth and development. Over the centuries, Oulu has become a center of technology and innovation, with a strong focus on the future.

Geographical Features

The City of Oulu is located in the region of Northern Ostrobothnia, on the shores of the Gulf of Bothnia at the mouth of the Oulujoki River. It serves as the regional capital of Northern Ostrobothnia. Oulu is also the largest city in Northern Finland and acts as an important regional hub, particularly in education, technology, and culture.



AREA	km ²
Total	3 818
Land	2 973
Water	845

Demographics and City Characteristics

The City of **Oulu is Finland's fifth-largest city** by population. At the end of 2024, the city had 216,152 inhabitants. It boasts a strong ecosystem of universities, research institutions, and technology companies, making it one of the most dynamic urban areas in the Nordic countries. Oulu is also one of Finland's largest student cities, offering opportunities to study in a wide range of fields.

Residents

Population: **216 152**



Women **50 %**
Men **50 %**



Children born
1 883

Average age is **39.9** years

In Finland, the average age of population is 44 years.



Foreign residents **10 198**

In Finland: 411 101



OULU

Different nationalities in Oulu, over **100**

INFOGRAPHIC: Oulu's population on 31 December 2024

Oulu is a year-round cycling city. It has over 900 kilometers of maintained walking and cycling routes, providing northern landscapes, vibrant neighbourhoods, and diverse mobility options. As the European Capital of Culture in 2026, Oulu will offer a wealth of events, activities, culture, and well-being for its residents and visitors.

The City of Oulu Vision

By 2030, the City of Oulu will be a northern, sustainably growing international hub with 230,000 inhabitants. It will combine a human-centered and positive atmosphere with cutting-edge technology, entrepreneurship, and a distinctive, innovative, and intelligent culture. Oulu will have a skilled workforce, high-quality educational opportunities, and a young population. Education will be the foundation of Oulu's development. Together, we will create international success stories and boldly harness the opportunities of digitalization. The goal is a net increase of 2,000 jobs per year.

According to the City of Oulu's vision, **OULU 2030 – Cultural Climate Change Now!**, Oulu will be “a degree better” place to live, study, work, and do business. Cultural climate change represents a new sense of togetherness, the Oulu attitude, and a unique way of working.

City Strategy and values guide our activities

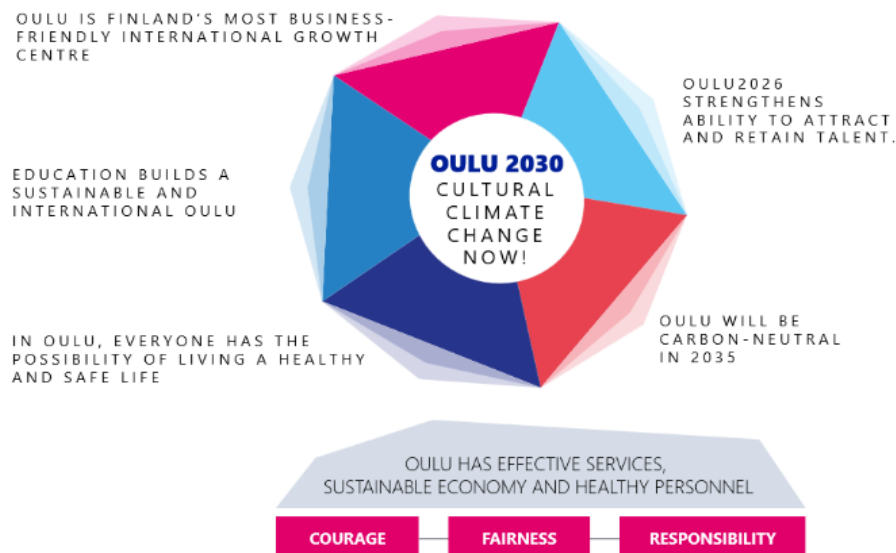


CHART: The strategy and values of the City of Oulu

Well-being of Residents as a Priority

The city strongly invests in digitalization, sustainable development, and the well-being of young people. It aims to support the holistic well-being of individuals and communities, provide diverse opportunities for participation and influence, leverage the possibilities offered by digitalization in multiple ways, promote the growth of Oulu residents as global citizens, strengthen conditions for international cooperation, and advance sustainable development in all areas of life.

Socioeconomic Challenges Facing Young People in the City of Oulu

As the largest city in Northern Finland, Oulu attracts young people from across the region, either seeking new opportunities in life or studying. This is one of the reasons why Oulu has a high average youth unemployment rate. If a young person arrives in Oulu without a study place, a job, or an established social network, there is a significant risk of social exclusion.

Youth employment in Oulu has been challenging for several years. Across Finland, the unemployment rate among 15–24-year-olds in June 2025 was 14.3%. In Oulu, the unemployment rate for those under 25 was significantly higher at 17.8%. It is important to note that Finland's **Compulsory Education Act (1214/2020)** obliges authorities to reach out to young people aged 16–18 who are outside education and guide them toward schooling or services.

In addition to poor employment prospects, young people's work-life skills have declined compared to previous years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, young people had to work remotely both at school and in work placements, and the effects of this are now visible in the workplace, where young employees lack basic working life skills. This is particularly evident among those who already face other challenges in adapting to working life.

The pandemic also had a profound impact on young people's lives and their perception of well-being. Youth satisfaction dropped sharply during the pandemic and has remained low since. Currently, young people's satisfaction with their lives is only moderate, at level 6 on a scale of 0–10. Only 63% of young people are at least fairly satisfied with their lives, while as many as 37% are dissatisfied. This highlights the importance of investing in leisure activities and opportunities for young people.

Although most young people are doing well, research shows that their confidence in the future has weakened. According to the Youth Barometer (2025), it has even collapsed over the past year. Belief in the future influences young people's life choices in education, work, and family formation. In the long term, these choices affect the development, resilience, and vitality of society as a whole.

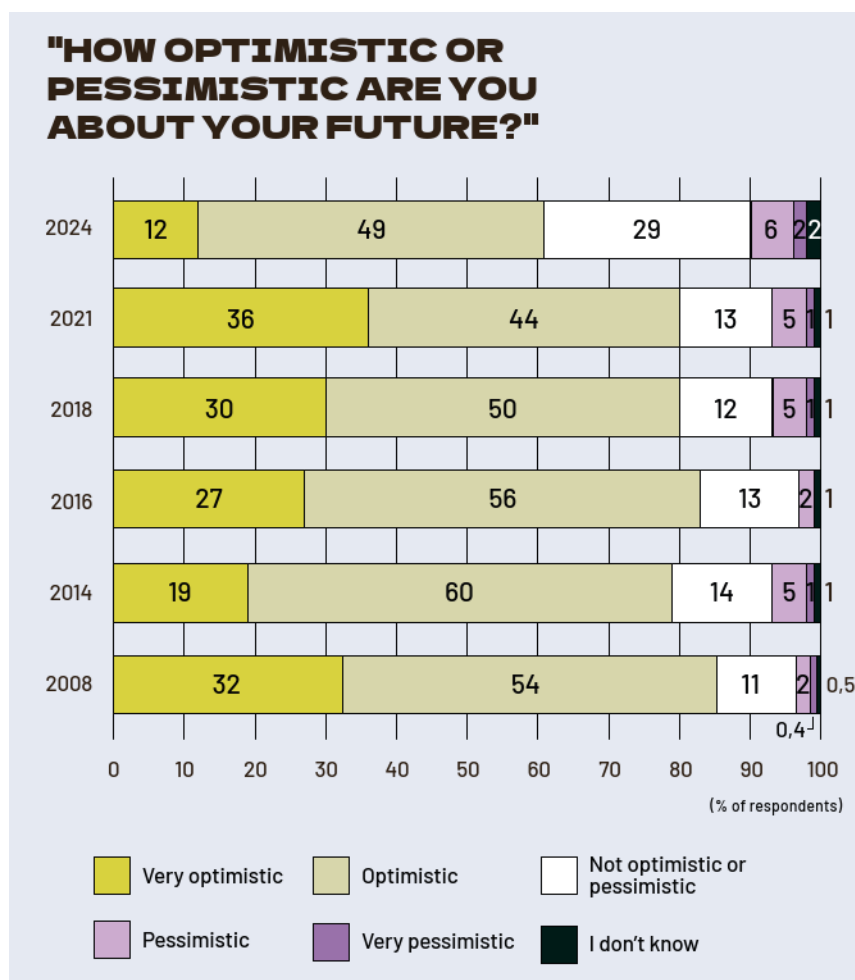


CHART: How Optimistic or pessimistic are you about your future? (Youth Barometer, 2025)

Problems tend to accumulate for some young people. Mental health issues are particularly common, and those whose lives do not progress at the same pace as their peers need services that help them stay connected to society. Although general health and well-being have improved in Finland in recent decades, the plight of young people has grown proportionally more.

Studies (e.g. Finnish Red Cross, 2025) show that two-thirds of 16–24-year-olds in Finland regularly experience loneliness. The lack of communities and weak sense of belonging have increased among young people. Socioeconomic inequality among youth has deepened further, and disadvantage continues to accumulate across generations.

Youth Services in the City of Oulu

The Oulu Youth Services provides a wide range of services for young people under the age of 29. Administratively, the services are divided into three units: Services for young adults, Supporting services for youth work and District based youthwork.

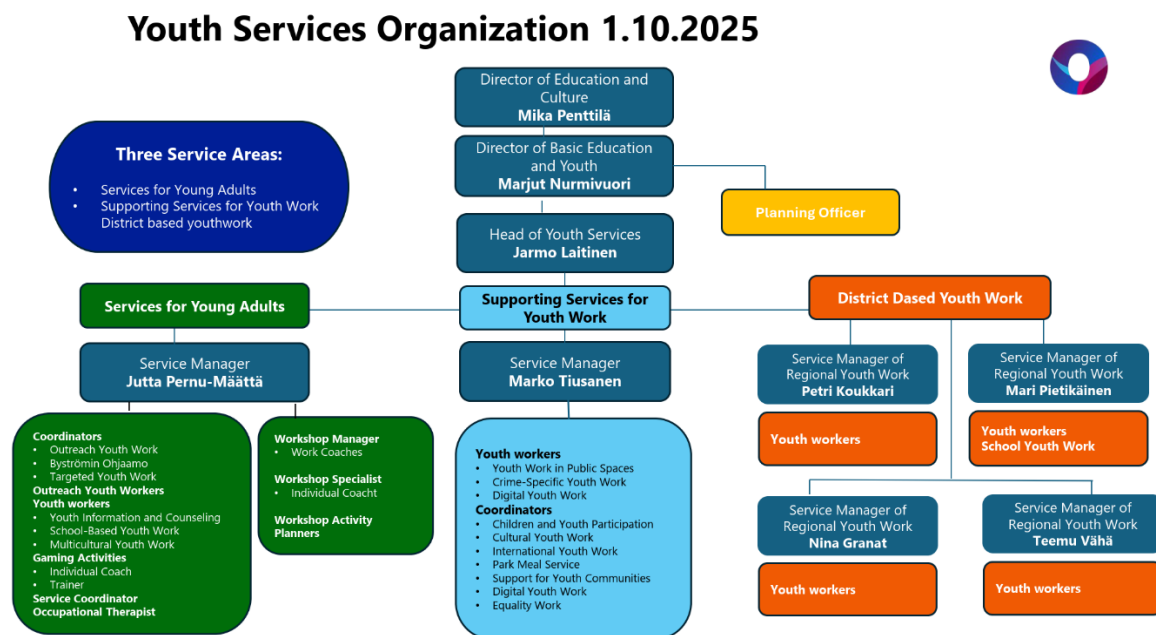


DIAGRAM: Organizational chart for Youth Services in 2025

Services for Young Adults

These services support the life management, education, and employment of young people aged 17–29 living in Oulu. All services are free of charge and operate on a low-threshold principle.

- **Byströmin Ohjaamo**, Byström One-Stop Guidance Centre, is a multidisciplinary service centre where young people receive support for issues such as educational

choices, job search, housing, health, and everyday challenges. Approximately 50 professionals from different fields work at Byström, and services are available without an appointment. Within Youth Services, this includes outreach youth work, youth information and counselling, school-based youth work, and guidance for multicultural youth.

- **Youth Workshop Activities** offer young people the opportunity to explore education or employment options at their own pace and learn new skills for future needs. Youth workshops provide unemployed young people in Oulu with the chance to participate in work trials, work-based learning, or activities organized by Youth Services. A workshop period includes practical work tasks, guidance, nature excursions, physical activities, and community-based activities. There are 12 separate workshop units operating in the City of Oulu.

Supporting Services for Youth Work

Supporting Services for Youth Work provide resources both internally within Youth Services and to residents. The activities are diverse and include:

- **Supporting Youth Participation:** Promoting the activities of regional youth participation groups and guiding the operations of the youth council ONE. Participation activities foster democracy and the growth of young people as active citizens.
- **Support for Youth Communities:** Assisting youth groups and associations through grants and access to facilities. For example, coordinating the NERO funding program, which supports young people's own ideas and projects.
- **Cultural Youth Work and Event Production:** Aiming to promote and develop leisure activities for young people in collaboration with youth and other stakeholders. This includes developing holiday activities and coordinating events, camps, courses, and excursions.
- **Coordination of International Youth Work:** Aiming to promote intercultural understanding and global citizenship while strengthening youth workers' competence in international topics. Opportunities are provided for young people and youth workers to participate in international exchanges, camps, and projects both in Finland and abroad.
- **Outreach Youth Work and Youth Work in Public Spaces:** Youth workers meet young people in their own environments, such as on the streets, at events, concerts, and shopping centers. The aim is to prevent social exclusion and strengthen young people's well-being. Outreach work is often carried out in cooperation with other services, such as the NURRI Activities (Preventing juvenile recidivism).

District Based Youth Work

District Based Youth Work provides young people with safe meeting places and activities across the City of Oulu.

- **Youth Spaces:** There are 23 youth spaces in Oulu, along with an online youth space. The Youth spaces are primarily open to young people aged 7–17, but facilities such as Nuorten Bysis and Nurkka also serve older youth. These spaces offer guided activities, hobby opportunities, events, and group programs. Some centers also include band and gaming rooms as well as the city's own studio.
- **Regional Youth Work Activities:** Implemented in cooperation with schools, parishes, and NGOs. The work is multidisciplinary and locally tailored. Youth workers are present in young people's daily lives, providing support individually and in groups. Activities may include open events, closed groups, trips, camps, and projects.

Laws, Policy Programs, and Action Plans

Local Strategies and Recommendations

The strategy of the Oulu Youth Services and the Basic Plan for Youth Work will be renewed by spring 2026. Digital Youth Work 2.0 holds a special position in the evolving strategy of Youth Services and in the city-wide renewal of the service network. The development of digital youth work is one part of a future-oriented, location-independent service package that includes youth work in public spaces as well as outreach and mobile youth work.

The activities of Youth Services are also guided by the City of Oulu's strategy, **Oulu 2030 – Cultural Climate Change Now!**, which extends until 2030. The vision of the strategy is that by 2030, Oulu will be a northern, sustainably growing international hub with approximately 230,000 inhabitants. The atmosphere in Oulu is characterized by humanity, cutting-edge technology, entrepreneurship, and a distinctive, innovative, and intelligent culture. The city boldly exploits the opportunities offered by digitalization.

The city's strategy is also being updated, and in the revised version, the role of youth work is described as follows: **"Strengthening young people's attachment to meaningful communities that support participation, well-being, and growth."** This includes a wide range of communities that young people can join, including digital communities.

The priorities of the City of Oulu's strategy are reflected in Youth Services in many ways. For example, to promote cultural climate change, youth spaces and events create a sense of community and opportunities for leisure activities, promoting the Oulu attitude and cultural appeal in line with the strategy. The city's strategy focus on boldly embracing digitalization is reflected in Youth Services as the extensive development of digital youth work: online youth

spaces, Discord communities, and digital guidance services bring youth-oriented services together and improve accessibility, even in sparsely populated areas.

Youth Services as part of Education and Culture Services

Oulu Youth Services are part of the city's educational and cultural services, which is why the City of Oulu's "**Oulu Oivaltaa (Oulu Realizes) educational program for 2023–2026**" is also one of the documents that guides the activities of youth services. The priorities of the education program, which are also central to the activities of youth services, are well-being, participation, digitalization, internationality, and a sustainable future. The goal is to create an active, diverse, and inclusive community where all Oulu residents can realize their potential and achieve their goals.

Youth Services also take into account the **City of Oulu's Well-being Plan**, which is prepared for each council term. Its aim is to promote the well-being and safety of residents of all ages in a communal living environment. The plan is based on the city's strategy and includes measures for various aspects of well-being, such as improving community spirit, ensuring smooth everyday life, promoting healthy lifestyles, and providing opportunities for participation. Youth work is also guided by **the Oulu city's annual budget and action plan**, as well as binding objectives set by the City Council and committees.

In digital youth work, special attention is given to the City of **Oulu's Digitalization Program, Smart City Oulu 2024–2028**, which guides the development of the city's digital services. The program's themes include working methods and operating models, increasing staff competence, utilizing data, and fostering collaboration, networks, and internationality. For example, the **Nuorten Oulu (Oulu for young people) online service** brings together services aimed at young people and operates under a multi-provider model that utilizes search engines and chatbot technology, thus responding to the program's principles of customer orientation and ease of use.

National Laws, Strategies, and Recommendations

Youth Work in Finland

The aim of youth policy is to improve young people's growth and living conditions and to enhance interaction between the generations through intersectoral cooperation. The objective of youth work is to support young people in growing and transitioning into independent life and to promote their participation in society.

In Finland, **the Ministry of Education and Culture** is responsible for the overall administration, coordination, and development of national youth policy. The work to promote the wellbeing of young people requires the participation of many sectors. Local administrative tasks related to youth work and policy are the responsibility of the **Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI)**.

Municipalities are responsible for local youth work, such as maintaining youth facilities, supporting youth organizations and groups, and providing specialized youth work. There are also associations and NGOs engaged in youth work in municipalities. The Ministry of Education and Culture supports municipal youth work with state subsidies and grants.

Youth Act

In Finland, **the Youth Act (1285/2016)** defines the objectives of youth work, such as promoting participation, equality, and community spirit. The objectives of the Act is to promote young people's social inclusion and opportunities for exerting an influence; improve their skills and capabilities to function in society; support their growth, independence and sense of community and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, adoption of skills and pursuit of free-time hobbies and activities in civic society; as well as to promote non-discrimination and realisation of civic rights while improving young people's growth and living conditions. According to the Youth Act, youth work and youth policy are municipal responsibilities.

National Youth Policy Program (VANUPO)

The National Youth Policy Program (VANUPO) is the key strategic document for youth work and youth policy in Finland. It is approved every four years and is based on the Youth Act (1285/2016) and the **Decree on Youth Work and Youth Policy (211/2017)**. The current program (2024–2027) focuses on strengthening young people's well-being through multidisciplinary measures. The target group includes young people under 29, especially those aged 12–25. The objectives are to improve young people's growth and living conditions, promote cross-sectoral cooperation (education, health, employment, etc.), strengthen youth participation and inclusion, and support mental health and overall well-being.

Other Laws and Regulations

Youth work is also governed by the Local Government Act and the Non-Discrimination Act. Section 24 of **the Local Government Act (1285/2016)** stipulates that young people's opportunities for participation and influence must be ensured through the youth council. According to the Act, the youth council must be given the opportunity to influence the planning, preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the activities of various municipal sectors in matters that are important to the well-being, health, studies, living environment, housing, or mobility, as well as other matters that the youth council considers significant for children and young people. The youth council must be involved in the development of the participation and consultation of children and young people in the municipality.

Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) includes a specific prohibition of discrimination, which also applies to youth work. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, health status, disability, sexual orientation, or any other reason related to the person. The law also obliges public service providers to assess how their activities affect different population groups and how equality is otherwise implemented in their activities.

EU Strategies and Programmes

European Youth Strategy 2019–2027

The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 provides the framework for cooperation in the youth sector within the EU. It supports young people's democratic, social, and civic participation. In addition, it aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to participate in society. In Finland, this strategy is implemented as part of EU-level cooperation. In accordance with the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme (VANUPO), Finland is implementing the European Union Youth Strategy (2019–2027).

In 2017–2018, a dialogue was held with European youth, resulting in the development of 11 European Youth Goals. These objectives identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and highlight related challenges. The EU Youth Strategy aims to support the implementation of this vision for young people.

European Youth Goals

The European Youth Goals, developed through dialogue between young people and EU decision-makers, cover areas such as connections to the EU, gender equality, inclusive societies, mental health, progress for young people in rural areas, quality employment, quality learning, and a sustainable green Europe. These goals are supported by actions under the EU Youth Programme.

The Oulu Youth Services implement the European youth objectives in many ways. Among other things, the Oulu Youth Council and participation groups offer young people the opportunity to influence and participate in decision-making, which supports the strengthening of ties with the EU.

The Basic Plan for Youth Work in Oulu emphasizes equality and gender sensitivity in all activities, youth spaces, and workshops. Oulu has 23 youth spaces and an online youth space that offer safe environments for young people during their leisure time. Outreach youth work and Byström One-Stop Guidance Centre reach out to young people facing challenges and support their participation. Nuorten Oulu online service provides reliable information and discussion channels (e.g., Discord), and youth information and counselling services support critical evaluation of information. Youth workshops aim to enhance young people's employability and work-life skills, as well as support non-formal learning.

The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030

The EU's Digital Decade Policy Programme sets common EU targets for digitalization by 2030. The programme requires Member States to prepare national roadmaps to achieve these objectives.

The Oulu Youth Services develop digital youth work in line with the goals of the EU Digital Decade. Our aim is to strengthen young people's digital skills through various measures. This supports the EU target that 80% of citizens should have basic digital skills by 2030. In

addition, the skills of youth workers are being strengthened by providing them with the necessary training and tools to ensure the implementation of high-quality digital youth work.

Secondly, Youth Services promote digital accessibility by offering online youth spaces and hybrid events that reach young people in sparsely populated areas. This is in line with the EU's infrastructure goal of achieving gigabit network and 5G coverage in all areas. At the same time, we strive to pay attention to data security and privacy in youth services, taking into account the EU's cybersecurity guidelines.

In the future we are aiming to further digitalize youth services: appointment booking, chat services, and Discord communities are already in use. In the future, we may explore whether these could be integrated with national and EU electronic identification solutions. Thus, youth services also contribute to the EU vision that all key public services will be online by 2030.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, UN member states agreed on the Agenda2030 action plan, aiming to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development from an environmental, economic, and human perspective. Finland is committed to achieving these goals by 2030 and will report progress to the UN in 2025. Finland's strengths include trust, democracy, education, and equality, while challenges remain in ecological sustainability and reducing violence against women.

Oulu Youth Services support Agenda2030 by promoting well-being, equality, and high-quality learning environments. The focus is on strengthening gender equality, reducing inequality, and addressing climate change. Development areas include environmental responsibility and sustainable lifestyles, such as reducing carbon footprints of events, recycling, and organizing climate-themed camps and workshops.

In Finland, there is no significant gender inequality in the use of digital services. The difference lies more in the services that young people use. Training and digital youth work can strengthen equality and the use of sustainable technology. In this way, youth services support the well-being of young people and build a sustainable future in the spirit of Agenda 2030.

Barents Youth Programme 2025–2027

The Barents Youth Program 2025–2027 (BRYC) aims to strengthen the voice of young people, promote cross-border cooperation, and ensure the vitality of the region. The program's priorities cover culture, sports and health, education and career opportunities, human rights and equality, the environment, community development, transport and infrastructure, indigenous peoples, international relations, and the future of Barents cooperation. Each year, the themes emphasize climate awareness, sustainable management of natural resources, and the perspectives of indigenous peoples.

The Oulu Youth Services respond to these priorities in a variety of ways. Among other things, the promotion of culture and health is reflected in leisure activities and events, while workshops and Byström One-Stop Guidance Centre, support education and employment. The

development of digital youth work supports diversity and accessibility, especially in sparsely populated areas.

Securing education and career opportunities, affordable housing, vibrant communities, and accessible services is crucial to ensuring that northern regions remain attractive and offer young people a good and meaningful life.

Identified Development Needs

In Finland, several studies concerning youth are published annually. The most common and well-known among them are the Youth Barometer, published annually by the Finnish Youth Research Society and the State Youth Council, which measures the values and attitudes of young people in Finland, and the School Health Promotion study by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), which provides biennial monitoring data on children's and young people's experiences related to health, well-being, schooling, and lifestyle. Both studies offer valuable insights into the living conditions and well-being of young people.

In addition, understanding and knowledge of young people's circumstances are gained locally through observations made while working with youth. In the Oulu region, surveys on various topics related to young people's lives are occasionally conducted, complementing the overall picture and understanding of their life situations.

Local Challenges as a Basis for Developing Digital Youth Work

Every year, a large number of young people enter the labour market after completing their education, and ensuring employment for all in the Oulu region is challenging. This is one of the reasons why **youth unemployment in Oulu is higher than the national average**. The population structure and related forecasts up to 2040 confirm that this mismatch between education and jobs is likely to continue in the Oulu region.

Alongside rising youth unemployment and weak societal attachment, one key phenomenon among young people is increasing socioeconomic inequality, which affects their opportunities for education, hobbies, and participation in society. This trend increases the risk of social exclusion and weakens young people's well-being and future prospects. Addressing this issue requires targeted measures and cooperation between different actors.

Oulu is geographically large city, and young people living in its peripheral areas often do not have equal access to services compared to those living in urban centres. Another significant trend is **the growing need among young people for leisure activities** that promote well-being and reduce loneliness. High-quality and accessible leisure opportunities are an important part of young people's everyday lives and play a significant role in supporting social relationships and mental well-being. In these situations, digital services can provide meaningful content and connect young people to communities that are not available in the physical environment.

Some young people transitioning to independence face greater challenges; problems related to education and employment are compounded by financial concerns, lack of life management skills, and a sense of hopelessness about the future. This can lead to **feelings of insecurity and social exclusion** and may facilitate involvement in groups that glorify crime and violence, resulting in gang formation. Stopping and preventing these phenomena requires developing new methods and approaches that enable early intervention, support for young people, and identification of risk groups.

Preventive work and multidisciplinary cooperation are essential in combating these issues. Young people who idolize criminal lifestyles are particularly at risk of drifting onto digital platforms where criminal activities are openly practiced, such as drug dealing, sharing violent videos, or recruiting youth into these activities. The challenge lies in identifying and locating platforms and environments where these at-risk youth can still be reached, as well as obtaining information about local side phenomena in young people's social media groups, such as Telegram. In the coming years, this will be one of the key development challenges in Oulu's digital youth work, where digital outreach and preventive work in online environments will play a crucial role.

Strengthening Youth Workers' Competence

The digital solutions should increase accessibility, provide low-threshold services for young people, and create new forms of community to strengthen youth well-being and participation. The goal is to find agile and responsive solutions that allow us to respond flexibly to future phenomena and needs, solutions that evolve over time and enable us to work in the present moment.

The introduction of new digital practices, such as digital outreach and digital preventive work, as well as the adoption of new platforms, requires youth workers to acquire new types of digital competence. All youth workers should have at least basic digital skills, and in addition, those responsible for digital youth work, a strong expertise in working with young people in digital environments. Both groups of employees need sufficient and regular training to maintain their professional skills.

Local Strengths and Opportunities

Digital Youth Work in Oulu – Towards the Digital Youth Work 2.0 Model

Developing digital youth work through practical measures is particularly important, as no new research has been conducted on the topic for a long time, even though the work is carried out daily. Practical activities allow us to gather valuable information about young people's needs and develop practices that support their everyday lives and well-being.

In Oulu, digital youth work is already an established part of youth services, enabling us to reach young people through various channels. Our goal, however, is to further develop digital services to better meet the needs of the times and young people, while responding more flexibly and quickly to emerging trends. During the project, we implemented five testing actions to test different digital models for delivering services.

Testing Actions

Testing Action 1 – Workshops: How to Improve Digital Youth Work in Oulu?

Several workshops during autumn 2024 and spring 2025 were organized for young people to collect their wishes and views on developing digital youth work.

Ideas and insights from young people on improving digital youth work:

Social media use: Young people suggested more diverse use of social media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat and Discord to reach a wider audience and provide up-to-date information and service guidance.

Media literacy and source criticism: Training in media literacy and source criticism was considered important. It was proposed that young people receive training in social media use, either by youth workers or external trainers.

Youth services and game streams: Game streams and direct messaging services by youth services were seen as useful for reaching young people who cannot attend physical events. More online gaming was requested.

Humour and entertainment: Adding humour and entertainment to social media content, especially on TikTok, was considered important to attract young people's interest.

Other suggestions: Faster updates of current topics on websites were also proposed ("More dynamic online services").

Testing Action 2 – Interactive Broadcast for Young People

Based on the workshops in Testing Action 1, this broadcast focused on source criticism, misinformation, and disinformation. The Iha Just Imus duo hosted the event interactively, and the comment section was very active during the live stream. The broadcast was a success, and young people especially appreciated the way *Iha Just Imus* addressed the topic, considering it an excellent way to learn new things. They requested more sessions like this.

By the next day, the broadcast had already reached around 3,500 views – a new record for the NuortenOulu YouTube channel. Subscriber numbers also grew by over 25%. Such activities, even when the topic is serious and scheduled in the evening, are recommended for digital youth work. We may organize more of these in the future. The video is available at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPQM0TD08_A



Testing Action 3 – Digital Youth Exchange Project

Objective: Enable digital interaction between young people from Oulu (aged 18–29) and youth from other countries.

Duration: 2–3 hours per session.

Themes: Cultural exchange, language immersion, food culture, showcasing national strengths, and sharing easy recipes.



Structure:

- 30 min: Introductions and icebreakers
- 45 min: Cultural exchange
- 15–30 min: Free discussion
- 60–90 min: Exploring food culture and summary

Administration: Staff from the NGO Oulu YMCA, organized at their premises.

Platform: Agreed with partners (Zoom and Teams; Discord with Tampere).

Schedule: Four digital meetings in February, aiming for international exchange.

Outcome: Create a model for digital youth exchange and produce a guiding report.

Countries involved: Finland, Kenya, Kosovo

Testing Action 4 – National Fortnite League for Youth Centres

Concept:

- A national league for youth centres where participants from different cities compete for the title of the best Fortnite team. The league lasts six months and culminates in a final event where teams meet face-to-face. Based on the workshops in Testing Action 1.

Objectives:

- Increase community spirit.
- Provide guided gaming activities and meaningful participation for young people
- Promote experiences of success and shared development
- Increase the use and visibility of youth centres

Practical Implementation:

1. Games are played at youth centres or spaces equipped with at least 2 PS5 consoles or 2 computers



2. Weekly gaming event, duration 2 hours each
3. Each youth centre appoints a “coach” responsible for organizing games and communication
4. Game mode: Mini Battle Royale, played in pairs. Each location needs at least two participants
5. A shared Discord server is used for schedules, rankings, and other league-related information. Discord also serves as a communication channel for young people.

Final Event:

- Includes an award ceremony, exhibition match, opportunities to meet other players, and free gaming in the Gaming Lounge

Testing Cities:

- Oulu, Vaasa, Tampere, and Lappeenranta

URBACT Local Group

The youth work sector in Finland operates in close cooperation. Strong national collaboration supports youth work also in Oulu, and digital youth work is developed from both local and national perspectives. Since youth work actors in Finland work closely across municipal borders, we established the URBACT Local Group (ULG) with this in mind. The group included local decision-makers, youth workers, NGOs, and partner cities and organizations.

URBACT Local Group Members:

- Jarmo Laitinen, Head of Youth Services / Youth Services, City of Oulu
- Marko Seppälä, Planning Officer (ICT team)/ Education and Cultural Service, Oulu
- Jutta Pernu-Määttä, Head of Service / Youth Service, City of Oulu
- Juha Saarela, ICT Service Manager / Digital and ICT Unit, City of Oulu
- Marko Tiusanen, Head of Service / Youth Service, City of Oulu
- Tarja Rönkkö, Coordinator / Youth Service, City of Oulu
- Kati Hopiavuori, Project Coordinator / Tietolähde Project
- Jukka Etu-Seppälä, Director / Youth Service, City of Tampere
- Juha Leskinen, Centre of Expertise for Municipal Youth Work Kanuuna
- Akseli Hinkkala, Oulu YMCA

We invited different actors and stakeholders to collaborate around various activities rather than forming a fixed project group that would meet regularly on all topics. We chose this approach because there were many changes in group membership early on. Therefore, we decided to convene the group as needed, with the appropriate composition for each situation.

The local YMCA, decision-makers, youth workers, and our ICT office have been involved throughout the process. Especially in the early stages, ULG meetings were held regularly.

ULG meeting dates and themes in 2024:

- 19 January: ULG Pilot Planning
- 14 May: ULG Pilot Themes
- 30 August: ULG National Gaming Tournament
- 30 October: ULG Status Check (Pilots and Schedule)
- 18 December: ULG Digital Youth Exchange Program

As the project progressed, ULG's working method evolved from regular meetings to daily collaboration among members during different phases of the process. Communication included phone calls or Teams calls as needed, which were not documented in detail.

Funding and Finance

As a public administration organization, the City of Oulu plans its finances at a very early stage. During 2025, the city has conducted a service network review covering the entire city organization. Decisions made after the review will affect future funding and resourcing for development work.

In connection with the service network review, we proposed the idea of developing location-independent services within youth services, including their funding and resourcing as part of the city's budget. Digital youth work will be one part of these services, and the aim is to ensure its development is included in the youth services budget as part of municipal funding.

If necessary, we will use external funding sources for larger development projects, while smaller pilots will be implemented using internal funding. Partnerships are also one way of budgeting. An example of this is the cooperation between **the National Association for Municipal Youth Work's digital network**.

The situation regarding the future city service network is still open, which currently affects our financial planning. Once the service network is confirmed, we can prepare detailed cost and funding estimates for development work.

Youth Services Vision

The vision of Oulu Youth Services was created a few years ago and captures the core purpose of youth work: every young person in Oulu is seen as a valuable individual and an active participant with the opportunity to grow, influence, and thrive in their community. The vision is not just an aspirational goal — it guides all youth work in everyday encounters, projects, and services.

“Young people in Oulu – the well-being changemakers of the future. Let's face the future together through action.”

In Oulu, youth work is done *with* young people, not just *for* them. Young people participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities, which strengthens their participation and agency. This creates a foundation for sustainable growth and community.

The focus of activities is on young people's individual needs, equality, and sustainable development. Youth work must stay relevant—it should respond sensitively to changes in young people's living environments and boldly utilize the opportunities of digitalization. Digital services and new practices bring youth work closer to young people's everyday lives and enable accessibility in different settings.

The final part of the vision, “*Let's face the future together through action*,” emphasizes community and partnership, illustrating that youth work does not happen in isolation but is built through multidisciplinary collaboration with schools, families, organizations, and other

actors. Together, we are building Oulu as a place where young people can grow safely, discover their strengths, and build their future with confidence.

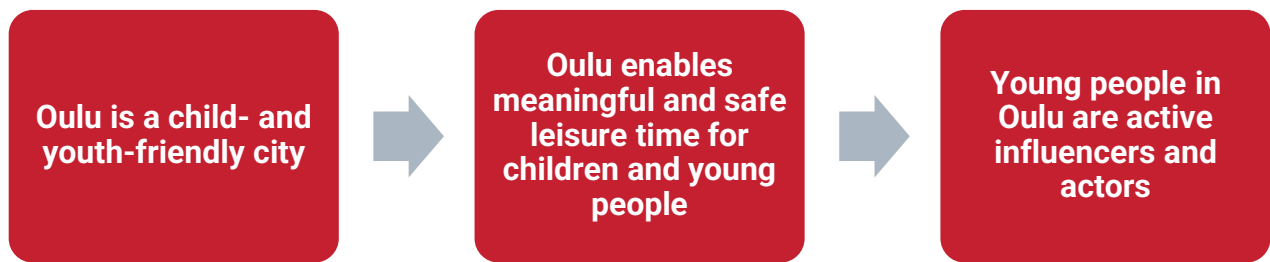


CHART: Oulu is a child and youth friendly city

IAP Section 2: Overall Logic and Integrated Approach

Youth work must boldly utilize and experiment with the opportunities offered by digitalization to ensure that services are accessible, up-to-date, diverse, and supportive of young people's everyday lives. Digital youth work is one component of the future development of Oulu Youth Services. It is reflected in the renewal of practices and working methods, as well as in offering a more versatile range of services digitally across different operating environments.

The Oulu Youth Services actively engages in nationwide cooperation to develop digital youth work. One central area of development is the creation of a digital platform that will serve as a virtual meeting place or hub where young people can connect with each other and access other activities or services organized in digital environments.

Currently, youth services already provide a wide range of digital youth work activities, taking into account different target groups. Digital youth work focuses on, among other things, gaming spaces and game education, social media and content production, STEAM workshops (3D and programming), as well as individual guidance through digital channels (chat and video connections to support young people).

These activities have kept digital youth work relevant and responsive to young people's needs, but they are no longer sufficient to reach all youth. New measures and operating models are needed to engage especially those young people who do not find their way to youth services on their own.

Through the URBACT project, we are developing the next step in digital youth work – the Digital Youth Work 2.0 model, which aims to strengthen young people's well-being, increase participation, and prevent inequality and social exclusion among youth.

Digital Youth Work 2.0

In Oulu, young people are accustomed to digital environments and the use of technology, making it especially important to develop youth work that meets their needs and fits their everyday lives. Digitalization offers new opportunities to reach young people, support their well-being, and strengthen participation—even when physical presence is not possible.

Key reasons for development:

- **Preventing social exclusion:** Online interaction can reduce loneliness and provide communities where young people feel a sense of belonging.
- **Reaching young people:** Digital channels enable contact with those who are difficult to reach through traditional means.
- **Equal services:** Provide services in young people's own environments, including those whose natural operating environment is digital.

- **Strengthening competence:** It is essential to offer youth workers training and resources so they can operate safely and effectively in digital environments.
- **Expanding field of activity:** Digital youth work is already an integral part of youth work, and its importance continues to grow.
- **Safety and privacy:** Protecting young people in digital environments is a key aspect of responsible youth work.

Objectives, targets, and actions

Digital Youth Work 2.0 Model

The strategic objective of Oulu Youth Services, through the URBACT project, is to **develop digital youth work by identifying and adopting good practices** from project partners and finding new ways to utilize digital tools in youth work. To achieve the best results, Youth Services will design and test at least three innovative digital youth work models that combine creativity, social learning, and emotional well-being. This includes strengthening staff competence, increasing youth participation, and promoting safe and meaningful interaction in digital environments.

By December 2028, Youth Services will have implemented a fully integrated Digital Youth Work 2.0 model by identifying and adopting at least five good practices and digital tools. Youth workers (90%) will be trained to use these effectively, and at least 1,000 participants will have engaged in safe, inclusive, and collaboratively developed digital environments that promote well-being, participation, and digital skills.

Operational Objectives

Objective 1: Identify, select, and implement the most suitable digital tools for youth work.

By December 2026, at least five digital tools or platforms that promote interaction, learning, and communication in youth work will be identified, tested, evaluated, and implemented, ensuring usability and accessibility for both youth workers and young people. The aim is to develop digital services that are timely, responsive to young people's needs, and flexible enough to address emerging trends quickly.

Result indicator related to the objective:

- Digital tools and platforms, testing actions

Actions:

- Mapping and experimentation: Testing and evaluating digital tools (e.g., Discord, VR environments, learning applications).
- Consider a wide range of activities and related organizational methods.
- Engage staff and young people in this process, for example through testing activities.

- Utilize research and survey results on digital environments used by young people and/or popular among them, as well as what they do on digital platforms (e.g., gaming, streaming, connecting with friends).

Output indicators related to the actions:

- Number of tools tested and adopted
- Number of testing actions implemented
- Satisfaction ratings from young people and staff

Documented usability assessments

- Evaluation and reporting of trials as a basis for the next testing phase
- In the future, aim to carry out at least two new trials annually to ensure services remain up-to-date, responsive, and adaptable to changing needs.

Objective 2: Learn to use digital tools effectively and purposefully

By December 2027, at least 80% of Oulu's youth workers will have acquired basic skills in using basic tools and digital services and will demonstrate improved ability to plan, implement, and evaluate digital youth work activities. In addition, youth workers specialized in digital youth work will have deepened their expertise in this area.

Result indicator related to the objective:

- Youth workers and the strengthening of their digital skills

Actions:

- Competence development, training, and evaluation: Organize regular workshops and peer-learning sessions on social media, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality.
- Provide regular training for the entire staff on youth digital cultures, their various forms, and digital content — at least twice a year.
- Include up-to-date digital youth work briefings in Regional Youth Work team meetings every other month.
- Skills assessment survey once a year, either as a separate digital skills assessment or as part of a broader youth work competence mapping.
- Update the expertise of the digital youth work team (e.g., through thematic seminars and network meetings 2–4 times per year).
- Networking and partnerships.

Output indicators related to the actions:

- Number of trained staff
- Percentage improvement in digital competence level
- Number of digital activities implemented after training
- Organizations and networks with which partnerships and resource sharing can be built.

Objective 3: Develop new ways of thinking and working to support digital youth work

By 2027, at least three innovative digital youth work models — combining creativity, social learning, and emotional well-being — will have been co-designed and tested, with measurable feedback collected from participants.

Result indicators related to the objective:

- New forms of digital youth work
- Participation of young people in new forms of activity

Actions:

- Innovation and development: Create and test new forms of digital youth work (e.g., online mentoring, interactive broadcasts, virtual exchanges).
- Organize and lead the national cooperation network for digital youth work as a driver for development.

Output indicators related to the action:

- Number of models tested
- Number of young people participating
- Documented lessons learned and scalability potential
- Network meetings
- National joint testing actions/ pilots
- Increased identification and outreach of at-risk groups

Objective 4: Promote youth participation and interaction in digital environments

By the end of 2028, at least 1,000 participants in safe, moderated digital spaces (e.g., Discord, streaming events, online campaigns), and clear safety and privacy guidelines will have been developed and adopted by all youth workers.

Result indicators related to the objective:

- Young people and their participation
- Accessible, safe, low-threshold digital platforms

Actions:

- Safety and privacy: Develop ethical and privacy protocols for online youth work.
- Provide young people with safe, moderated digital spaces and platforms.

Output indicators related to the objective:

- Number of actively participating young people
- Number of implemented safety guidelines and trainings
- Reduction in reported digital safety issues
- Strengthened accessibility of alternative communities and opportunities for youth

Building a Unified Approach to Digital Youth Work

The development of digital youth work in Oulu must be based on strengthening a unified and strategic approach that understands young people's everyday lives and digital habits. The goal is to establish a shared understanding of digital youth work, develop services based on young people's real needs, and provide low-threshold, accessible, and equal solutions for all youth.

Key elements to be achieved include:

- **New ways of working** and a bold culture of experimentation, where digitalization is seen as an integral part of youth work methods — not merely as technology.
- **Strengthening staff competence**, including not only technical skills but also media education and supporting young people's media literacy and critical thinking.
- **Increasing opportunities** for participation and influence in digital environments where young people act as active contributors.

Digital youth work builds bridges between young people and services, reaches those who cannot be engaged through traditional means, and creates safe, inclusive, and meaningful digital communities.

Implementation Framework

Strategic and Operational Objectives

Strategic and Operational Objectives	Result Indicator	Target	Source	Responsible party	Frequency
1. Digital Youth Work 2.0 Model	Operational objectives achieved. Best model implemented.	By December 2028	At least three innovative digital youth work models have been designed and tested and adopted at least five good practices and digital tools.	Digital Youth Work Team	Continuous monitoring and evaluation.
1.1. Identify, select, and implement the most suitable digital tools. Develop necessary digital platforms.	Digital tools and platforms. Number of testing actions.	By December 2026 5 different platforms/tools tested, evaluated, and using, 5 testing actions. Increased availability of inclusive digital platforms, easier access to services and communities.	Documented usability assessments. Youth and staff satisfaction surveys. Number of tools tested and adopted. Evaluation and reporting of trials for next phase	Digital Youth Work Team	Continuous monitoring and evaluation; at least 2 new trials annually
1.2. Learn to use digital tools effectively and purposefully. Strengthening expertise	Youth workers and the strengthening of their digital skills	By December 2027 90% workers trained and 80% acquired basic skills achieved	Training feedback surveys. Annual evaluation survey. Competence mapping	Digital Youth Work Team	Two major thematic trainings per year; Digital youth work updates in Regional Youth Work team meetings every other month
1.3. Develop new ways of thinking and working to support digital youth work.	New forms of digital youth work Participation of young people in new forms of activity	By 2027: New digital youth work models created and tested; Increased identification and engagement of at-risk groups; Strengthened	Participant feedback; Identification and implementation of data collection methods	Digital Youth Work Team	4–6 network meetings per year; 1–2 national pilots per year

		accessibility of alternative communities and opportunities			
1.4. Promote youth participation and interaction in digital environments.	Young people and their participation Accessible, safe, low-threshold digital platforms.	By the end of 2028: Clear safety guidelines developed and adopted by all youth workers; Ethical and privacy protocols for online work developed; Strengthened sense of belonging among youth; Increased availability of peer support and online communities; Growth in alternative communities and opportunities	Participant feedback; Alternative communities and opportunities	Digital Youth Work Team	—
1.5. Networking and partnerships	Identified and mapped cooperation networks for developing and implementing digital youth work	Close cooperation with 5 organizations (local, regional, national)	Achieved co-development and collaboration	Digital Youth Work Team	4–6 network meetings per year

Actions

Action	Output Indicator	Baseline	Target	Source	Responsible Party
Launch national digital youth work network	Number of network meetings held	Kick-off meeting autumn 2025	Active network operational by end of 2026	—	Digital Youth Work Team
Pilot use of AI in youth participation work	Participation in pilot	0	International cooperation pilot in 2026	Pilot report	Digital Youth Work Team
Map and test digital tools	Number of tools tested and adopted Number of testing actions implemented	—	By end of 2026 5 different tools in use	Satisfaction ratings from young people and staff	Digital Youth Work Team
Establish national digital gaming tournament activities	Number of tournaments held	One testing action tournament held	Regular annual tournaments starting 2026	Satisfaction ratings from young people	Digital Youth Work Team
Establish online peer groups: gaming communities, chat services, etc.	Number of groups and communities	—	—	—	Digital Youth Work Team
Allocate resources	FTE	0	4	—	Supporting services for youth work
Designing and testing digital models for youth information, guidance, counselling work and outreach work	Number of trials	0	By spring 2027: tested and selected suitable models	Participant feedback	Services for young adults

Schedule

	2025						2026						2027						2028					
Digital Youth Work 2.0 Model (completed)																								
Digital tools and platforms																								
Identify and select tools																								
Develop necessary platforms																								
Evaluate and implement tools																								
Competence development																								
Map staff digital skills																								
Organize platform training																								
Develop new ways of thinking and operating																								
Test new digital work models																								
Identify data collection methods for detecting negative phenomena																								
Youth participation and interaction in digital environments																								
Establish online peer groups with youth on various platforms: gaming communities, chat services, etc.																								
Pilot digital models for youth information, guidance, counseling, and outreach work																								
Networking and partnerships																								
Contact essential partners and networks for digital youth work																								

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