

# NextGen Youthwork An URBACT APN Network

Quarterly Network Report 5 – June 2025

# NextGen YouthWork

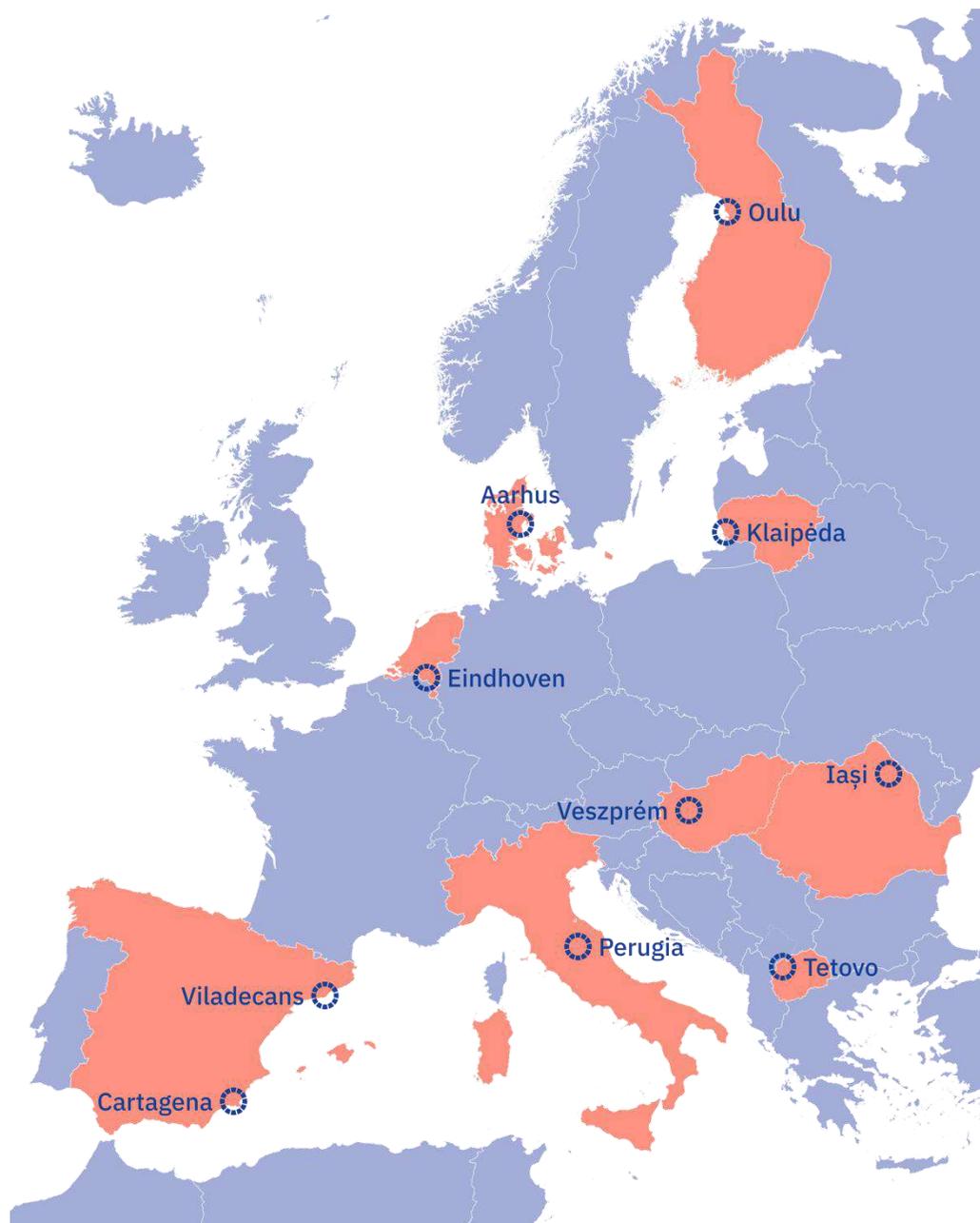
## About the Network

With the rise of digitalisation, European youth spend more time online and less in physical public spaces. Youth work starts where youth are; therefore, youth workers need to acquire the skills to use key (social media and gaming) platforms to be accessible and interact with young people.

**NextGen YouthWork**  
aims to create a long-term vision and strategy  
for a hybrid and sustainable youth work  
that effectively meets the needs of young people.

NextGen YouthWork is a URBACT Action Planning Network consisting of ten European cities: Eindhoven (the Netherlands), Aarhus (Denmark), Cartagena (Spain), Iași (Romania), Klaipėda (Lithuania), Oulu (Finland), Perugia (Italy), Tetovo (Republic of North Macedonia), Veszprém (Hungary) and Viladecans (Spain).

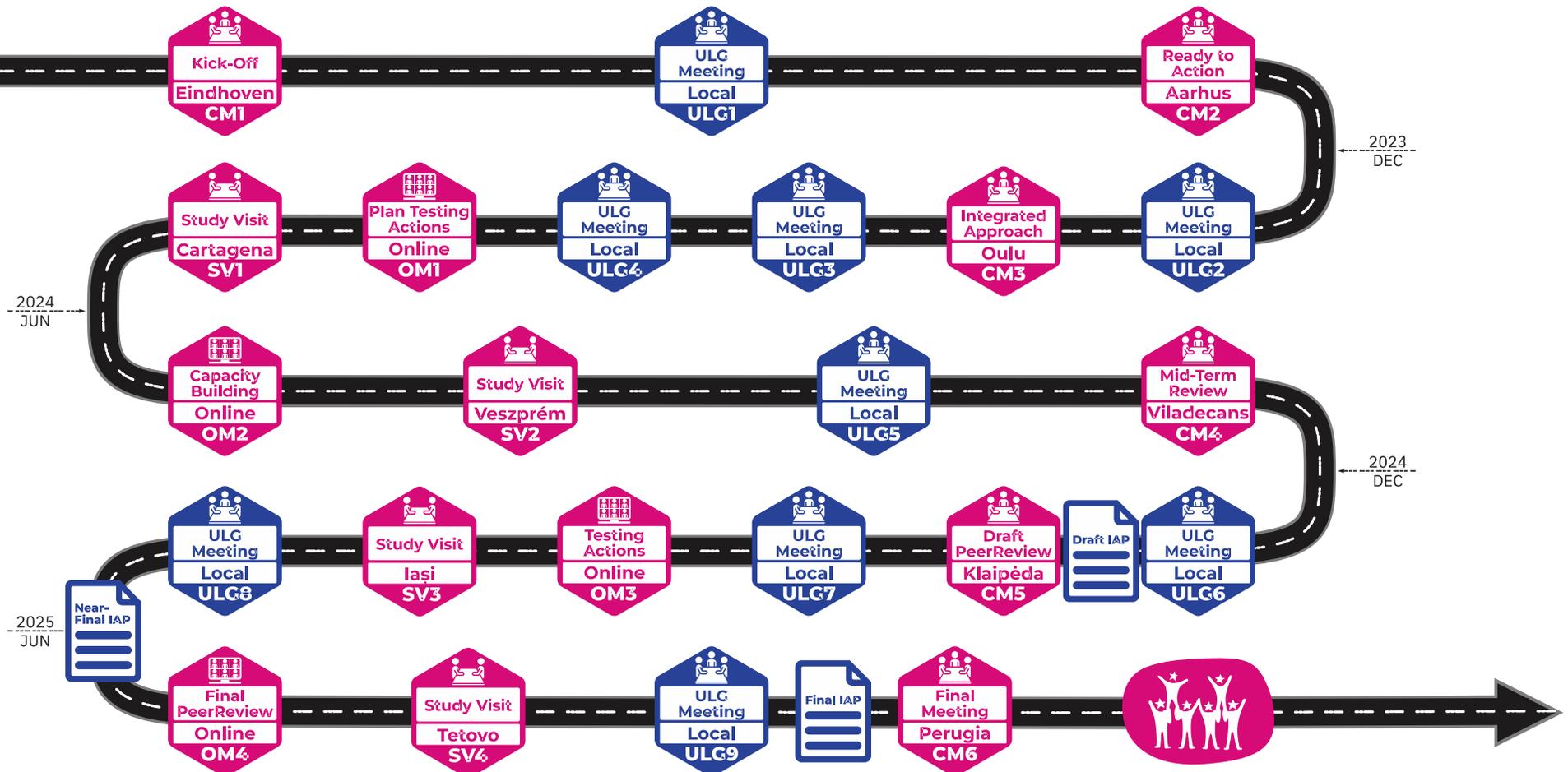
More information on the NextGen YouthWork project is available at the [URBACT mini-site](#).



# NextGen YouthWork

## The Network Roadmap

The Network Roadmap summarises the main steps to exchange knowledge and experience between cities. Throughout this journey, cities learn from each other through international meetings, such as face-to-face Core Meetings (CM), Study Visits (SV), and Online Meetings (OM). In parallel, they work jointly with the local stakeholders in their URBACT Local Groups (ULGs). By linking the international and local scenes, cities will develop their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) by December 2025.



# Core Meeting 5 Klaipėda, Lithuania

25-26 March 2025

Core Meeting 5 (CM5), held in Klaipėda on March 25-26, 2025, focused on refining the Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) through the peer review of Draft IAPs, during which the cities presented their plans and received feedback to strengthen their local youth initiatives.

Klaipėda showcased several innovative good practices. A significant highlight was the Virtual Reality (VR) Education tool, which uses interactive films to build empathy by allowing young people to experience the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities or those experiencing bullying. The meeting also featured Jaunimo linija (Youth Line), a volunteer-led organisation providing 24/7 emotional support via phone and online chat to address critical issues such as anxiety, depression, and self-harm.

On the second day, participants explored the Klaipėda City Public Health Office, which operates the Youth-Friendly Healthcare Services model. Key services discussed included the "Green Corridor," which provides 14-29-year-olds with rapid, confidential, and free access to medical specialists, and the "Man Cares" (I Care) app, designed to engage youth with health news and tracking tools. The agenda concluded with a visit to Aje.Skatepark, the city's first indoor alternative sports park, and a brainstorming session for the network's Final Network Product.

Overall, CM5 highlighted the integration of digital tools, mental health advocacy, and accessible health infrastructure in youth work.



# Study Visit 3

## Iași, Romania

20 May 2025

Study Visit 3 (SV3) in Iași, held on May 20, 2025, focused on the city's robust youth infrastructure and its role as a regional hub for digital innovation. The program began with a visit to the New Multifunction Youth Centre Cicoarei, a European-funded project that provides educational and sports facilities, including an indoor hall and playground, to an underserved area. This was followed by a tour of Zbor Hub, a collaborative initiative between BCR Bank and FabLab that functions as a safe space for personal and professional development through mentoring, coaching, and informal education.

In the afternoon, participants explored the city's creative and technological side with a brief immersion in Romanian Creative Week. A central highlight was the visit to FabLab Iași. This community-driven maker space serves as a "go-to" place for creative ideas. Presentations detailed innovative projects such as Solidarity FabLab, which equips disadvantaged youth with technical skills in 3D printing and CNC milling, and Fab Mobile. This van-based laboratory brings STEM education to vulnerable rural communities.

The day wrapped up at the Technical University of Iași with a visit to the Callisthenics Community, featuring the largest university-based street workout area in the city. These visits showcased Iași as an ambitious city committed to talent retention and to integrating digital tools into modern youth work.



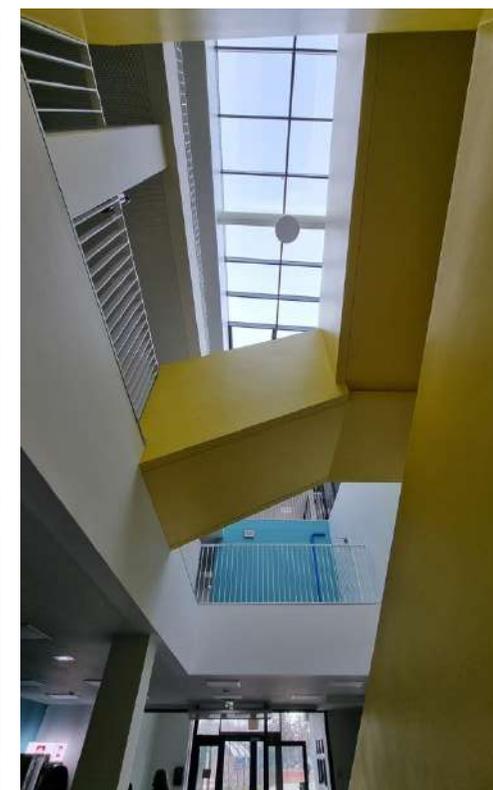
# Cities in Focus

## Klaipėda

Klaipėda, Lithuania's third-largest city on the Baltic Sea coast, has a population of 160,000, with 16% aged 14-29. Over the past 15 years, open youth work has gained prominence, supported by the Youth Policy Framework Law, which encourages innovative engagement methods like street and mobile youth work. As the European Youth Capital 2021, Klaipėda aims to leverage smart approaches and non-formal education to address the evolving needs of young people.

However, the city faces challenges in the digital transition. A 2023 survey found that many local youth organisations need improved technological support and ready-to-use learning resources to incorporate modern tools effectively. A significant issue is the digital skills gap in the NGO sector, with workers often unfamiliar with platforms such as Discord, Canva, and various AI tools. Additionally, many young individuals are disengaged, remaining at home and not participating in local activities, underscoring the need for more engaging digital platforms.

Klaipėda's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) aims to tackle these challenges by creating a robust framework for digital youth work. Key initiatives include developing a digital tools guidebook, piloting online youth worker roles, and expanding Virtual Reality (VR) education to foster empathy and combat bullying, all aligned with the city's Strategic Plan 2021-2030 to enhance the quality of life of youth.



# Cities in Focus

## Iași

Iași, the third-largest city in Romania, is located in the northeastern part of the country. It is home to a population of 395,000, of whom approximately 30% are under 29. While Romania lacks a long-standing tradition of youth work, Iași has built significant momentum through its designation as the Romanian Capital of Youth (2019-2020). Locally, youth services primarily focus on creating opportunities for learning, employment, and entrepreneurship.

Despite these, the city faces core policy challenges, including a shortage of dedicated youth workers and a lack of an appropriate national legal framework. However, the municipality leverages partnerships with high schools, universities, and local businesses to provide services such as career counselling and job fairs. Building on a robust IT sector, Iași is implementing a Digital Transformation Strategy to advance social inclusion through technology.

The focus of Iași's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) is to empower young people to take charge of their futures while increasing their presence in decision-making structures. A paramount objective is to create a youth community around a dedicated municipal centre that offers non-formal digital skills education. By learning from network partners, Iași seeks to strengthen its organisational background, effectively integrating volunteers and NGOs into youth work.





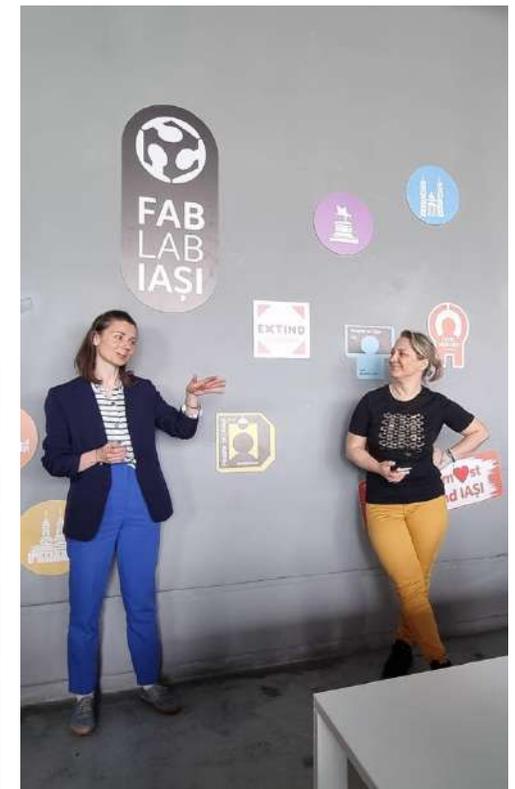
# Good Practices

## Iași

Iași has established a distinctive model of youth engagement, primarily driven and strongly supported by the private sector. A leading example is FabLab Iași, a community-driven maker space and coworking association founded in 2017. It serves as a "go-to" hub for innovation, where young people can access digital production tools such as 3D printers and CNC machines. Private partnerships, such as Solidarity FabLab and Women's Digital Centre, provide technical training to disadvantaged youth and women to improve their professional prospects. Additionally, the Fab Mobile project, a mobile STEM laboratory on a van platform, brings technology and financial education to vulnerable rural communities.

Complementing this is Zbor Hub, a safe space designed to help youth "take flight" through a dedicated learning mindset. This initiative, strongly supported by BCR Bank, focuses on essential life skills, including financial literacy, mental health, entrepreneurship, and digital competencies. Through its dedicated mobile app and physical hubs in Iași and other cities, Zbor offers workshops, challenges, and mentorship facilitated by specialists with extensive private-sector experience.

These practices demonstrate how Iași leverages corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurial ecosystems to create high-quality, sustainable platforms for youth, effectively bridging the gap between formal education and the demands of the modern job market.



# Peer Review at a Glance

## NextGen Draft IAPs

The peer review of the Draft Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) within the NextGen YouthWork network reveals a solid foundation across partner cities, alongside clear areas for refinement.

Most municipalities excelled at clearly defining their local contexts and using relevant data to justify key urban challenges related to digital access and youth participation. Through ULGs, cities successfully engaged NGOs, municipal departments, educational institutions, and young people themselves to actively co-create solutions.

The IAPs demonstrate excellent alignment with existing local, regional, national, and EU policies and feature a logical flow. Strategic objectives are clearly derived from local visions, providing a structured pathway to proposed interventions. The planned actions, often framed as realistic pilot projects, are clearly linked to the overarching goal of improving youth work. Common network priorities include digital inclusion, equipping youth workers with modern competencies, and empowering youth in decision-making.

However, a few minor areas for refinement remain. Some IAPs focus heavily on immediate testing actions and would benefit from explicitly articulating a more specific, forward-looking vision statement. While most proposed actions are clear, many lack specific, measurable indicators to effectively evaluate their success. Finally, the implementation frameworks often require further detail, specifically regarding the inclusion of estimated costs, concrete timelines, and clearly assigned responsibilities.



# Testing Actions

## Innovating Youth Work in Practice

Cities implemented diverse Testing Actions to validate proposals for their IAPs. A major focus was on enhancing digital communication and media literacy. Viladecans reactivated its TikTok channel, co-managed with young people, to test its effectiveness as an engaging tool. Eindhoven organised workshops where youth workers created content for interacting with youth on social media. Cartagena piloted the extensive use of visual content on social media alongside direct engagement via street agents.

Another prominent theme was building digital skills, navigating AI, and combating fake news. Perugia conducted training sessions focused on AI, culminating in events to present youth-developed projects. Iași engaged students through interactive learning sessions on active citizenship, democracy, and tackling online fake news. Oulu hosted a successful interactive broadcast on source criticism and misinformation, and pioneered a National Fortnite League to build community spirit across youth centres. Klaipėda organised capacity-building for youth workers on AI and fake news, and tested the LogBook system to track youth work.

Finally, cities tested innovative hybrid and physical youth spaces. Veszprém launched a community space to provide mental health support and gathered youth input to develop a municipal mobile app. Aarhus implemented Digital Detox Zones in community centres to combat digital fatigue by offering analogue activities. Meanwhile, Tetovo identified the potential of using Virtual Reality (VR) equipment to simulate job interviews, helping young people manage their emotions and build employment confidence.





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