NextGen Youthwork
An URBACT APN Network

Quarterly Network Report 6
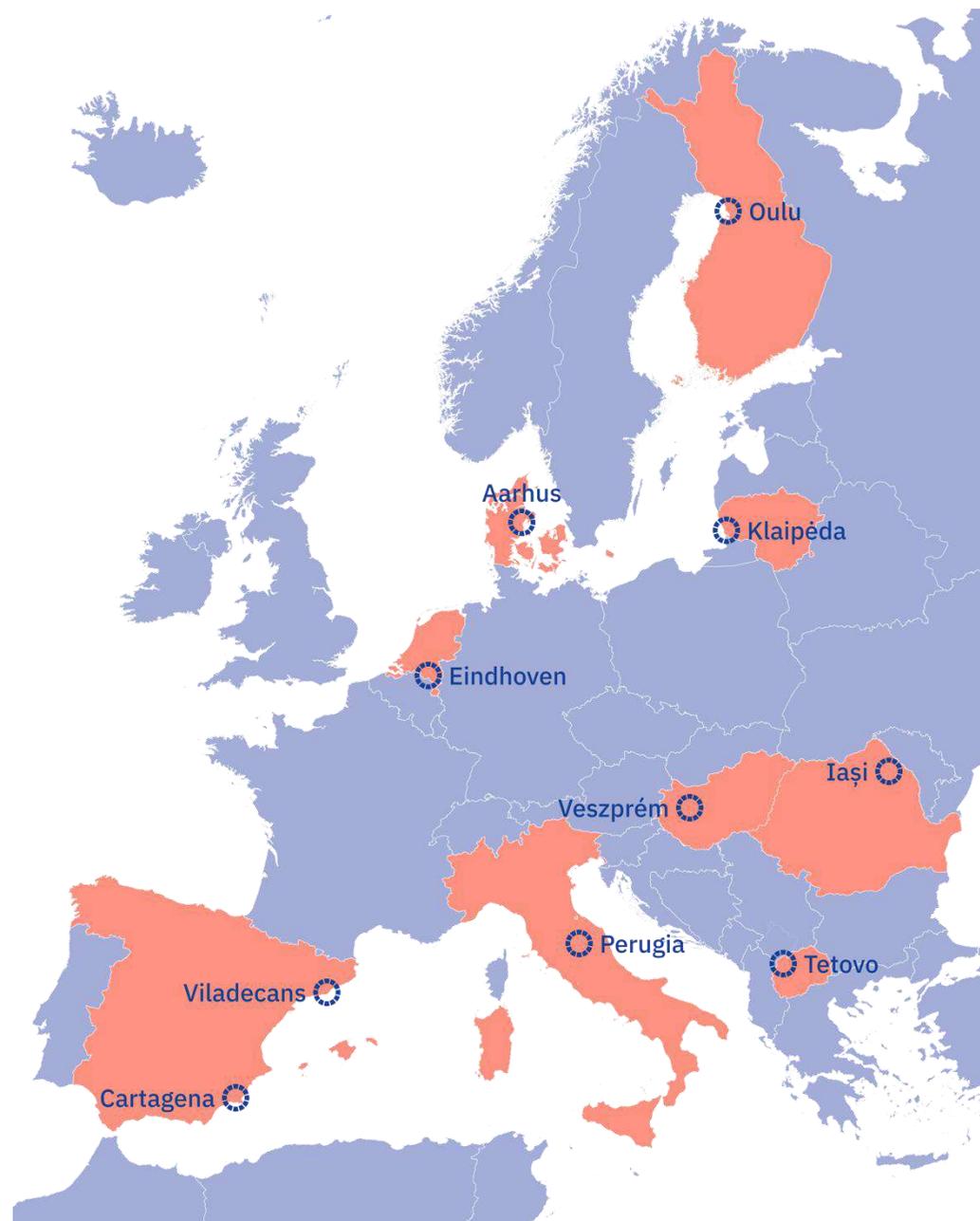
NextGen YouthWork

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).
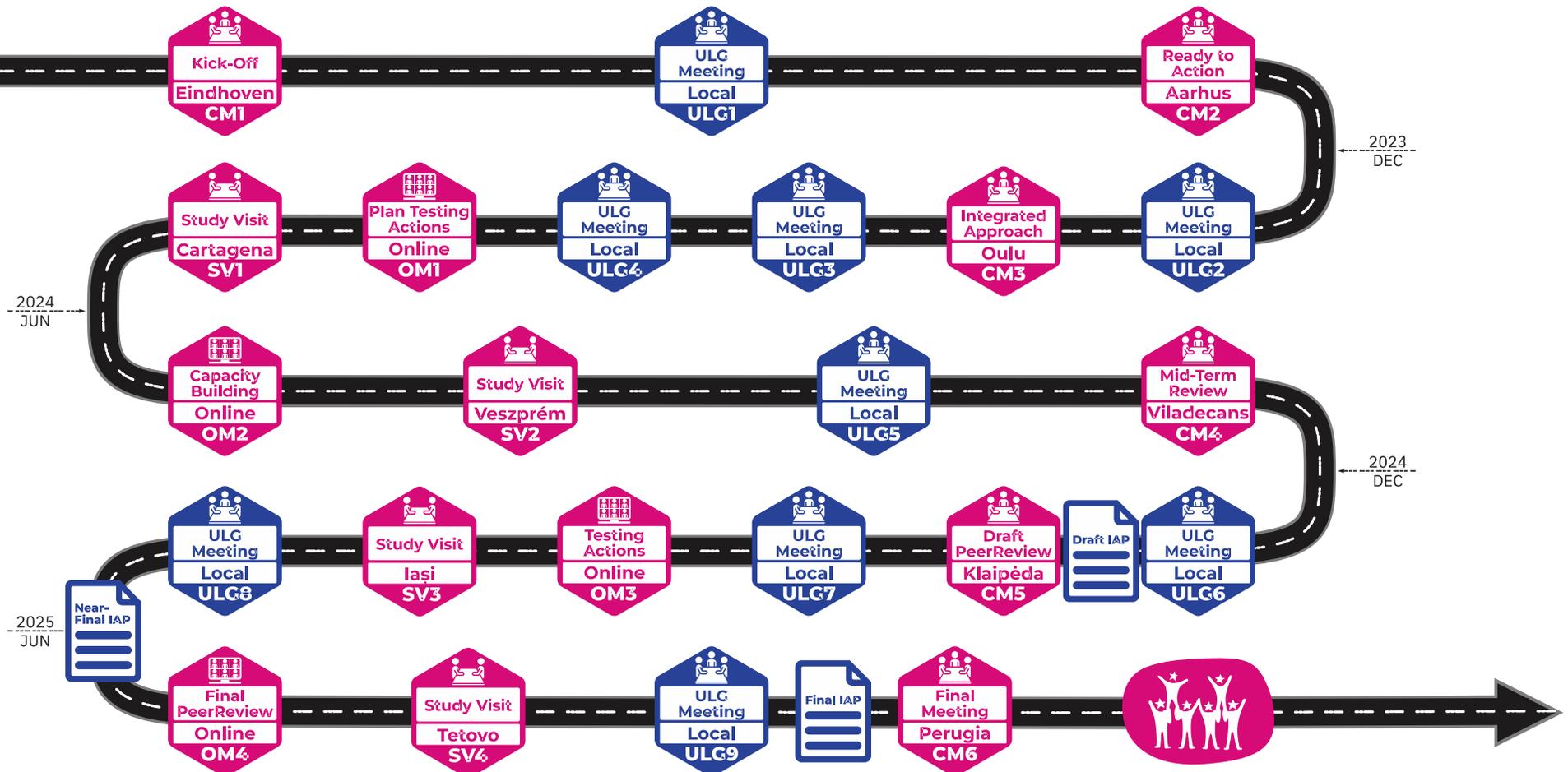
More information on the NextGen YouthWork project is available at the **URBACT mini-site**.

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.

Kick-Off	ULG Meeting	Ready to Action
Eindhoven	Local	Aarhus
CM1	ULG1	CM2

2023 DEC

Study Visit	Plan Testing Actions	ULG Meeting	ULG Meeting	Integrated Approach	ULG Meeting
Cartagena	Online	Local	Local	Oulu	Local
SV1	OM1	ULG4	ULG3	CM3	ULG2

2024 JUN

Capacity Building	Study Visit	ULG Meeting	Mid-Term Review
Online	Veszprém	Local	Viladecans
OM2	SV2	ULG5	CM4

2024 DEC

ULG Meeting	Study Visit	Testing Actions	ULG Meeting	Draft PeerReview	Draft IAP	ULG Meeting
Local	Iasi	Online	Local	Klaipėda		Local
ULG8	SV3	OM3	ULG7	CM5		ULG6

2025 JUN · Near-Final IAP

Final PeerReview	Study Visit	ULG Meeting	Final IAP	Final Meeting
Online	Tetovo	Local		Perugia
OM4	SV4	ULG9		CM6

Study Visit 4
Tetovo, North Macedonia

29-30 Nov 2023

The NextGen YouthWork Study Visit 4 (SV4) in Tetovo, held in September 2024, focused on integrating digital solutions, social inclusion, and heritage preservation into local youth work.

A primary highlight was the EU4Municipalities project, which aims to modernise the city by digitalising municipal services. The visit showcased the Municipal Useful Work Project, a long-standing initiative in partnership with the UNDP that has engaged over 150 people in schools and kindergartens. By 2025, this project successfully transitioned many participants—including youth under 29 and single parents—into permanent employment roles.

Social support was further emphasised through the educational assistents program, which aids children with disabilities while creating job opportunities for newly graduated psychologists.

International collaboration was also showcased through the experiences of a Peace Corps Volunteer, who assists the municipality in implementing EU-funded projects.

Participants also explored the revitalisation of the artisanal street, an IPA-funded project that promotes tourism by reviving traditional crafts. Looking ahead, Tetovo is collaborating with URBACT partners like Onda and Brindisi to learn how to transform underused historic buildings into vibrant community hubs. The visit concluded with a presentation by the Youth Community Centre and a city tour featuring the Colourful Mosque and Arabati Baba Teke, highlighting Tetovo's unique cultural heritage.

Core Meeting 6
Perugia, Italy

Final Meeting, October 2025

The NextGen YouthWork Core Meeting 6 (CM6), held in Perugia on October 28–29, 2025, marked a critical phase in the network's lifecycle, focusing on refining strategic outputs and creating final collaborative media.

A Peer Review Session defined the core of the first day. To deliver this review effectively, partner cities were paired one-to-one. In these sessions, each city presented its near-final Integrated Action Plan (IAP) to receive constructive, peer-to-peer critiques. This delivery method ensured that every city benefited from the collective expertise of the network, addressing specific local challenges before a comprehensive recap was held with the full group to synthesise findings.

The first day also included an immersion in Perugia's local context through a City Tour showcasing the city's Good Practices in youth work.

Day two emphasised execution and technical development. A two-part Workshop on project development, moderated by Alberto Saiz, focused on advancing the network's primary goals. In the afternoon, in the Piazza del Melo District, the focus shifted to digital engagement with a specialised session on creating visual content. In collaboration with young professionals from Perugia, participants created videos for the Final Network Product, a collective synthesis of the project's impact across all partner cities. The meeting finalised with a comprehensive wrap-up of the results achieved during the sessions.

Cities in Focus

Perugia

Perugia, the capital of Italy's Umbria region, is a historic city of 160,000 residents located 170 km from Rome. Young people aged 15–34 make up 20% of the population, a demographic significantly influenced by the city's role as a major academic centre hosting 30,000 students. including a significant number of international and Erasmus students who bring a global perspective to the city.

However, the city faces distinct policy challenges. Without a national legislative framework for youth work, Perugia must rely on local models to overcome communication gaps between municipal operators and youth. Socio-economic pressures, including housing scarcity driven by over-tourism and digital social isolation, have hindered active civic engagement. Many young people feel their voices carry little weight in traditional decision-making, leading to the underutilisation of dedicated public spaces.

Perugia's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) aims to transform the city into a place where young people play a central role in shaping the community. Building on grassroots success such as the Switch On project, the plan prioritises investing in human capital by training youth workers in modern digital tools and AI. Other strategic goals include regenerating urban spaces through artistic initiatives and strengthening participation in public policies. By bridging the digital divide and fostering dialogue, Perugia seeks to empower its youth as active protagonists of the city's future.

Cities in Focus

Tetovo

Tetovo, the fifth-largest city in North Macedonia, is located in the country's north at the foot of the Sharr Mountains. It is home to 85,000 residents, with young people aged 15–24 making up 15% of the population. Youth work in the country is in its infancy, currently moving from former socialist models toward a modern framework guided by NGOs. The national Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies mandates the establishment of youth centres through cooperation between municipalities and youth organisations.

The city faces significant local policy challenges, as the pandemic exacerbated social isolation, health issues, and digital addiction. Youth are spending less time in physical centres, and cyberbullying remains a high-level concern. To address this, the Local Youth Council, representing diverse ethnicities and high schools, coordinates voluntary activities and cultural events to engage young residents in community life.

Tetovo's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) aims to foster a dynamic youth population to prevent youth migration. Key priorities include establishing structured cooperation between the municipality and local NGOs, creating low-threshold digital competency opportunities for the labour market, and improving secondary school curricula. Additionally, the city focuses on enhancing leisure activities to support mental health and on ensuring youth voices are central to all local decision-making.

Good Practices

Tetovo

Tetovo has demonstrated excellence in local development through the Municipal Useful Work Project. Launched in 2015 in partnership with the UNDP and the Employment Centre, the project has evolved into a robust program that has engaged more than 150 participants across primary schools, secondary schools, and the city kindergarten. The initiative specifically targets vulnerable groups, including unemployed youth under 29, single parents, and the long-term unemployed.

The program addressed local unemployment while filling critical gaps in education by involving young professionals as educational assistants, educators, and caregivers. A landmark achievement of the project is its sustainability; by 2025, all participants transitioned into permanent employment contracts within the educational institutions where they served. This model has significantly increased access to care and inclusive services for a vast number of children and students in the city.

Beyond this, Tetovo focuses on revitalising community spaces to support youth development. The restoration of the youth council premises involved a participatory process where the city co-financed the transformation of a dilapidated building into a vibrant hub for NGOs and artists to host meetings, exhibitions, and mental health debates. Together, these practices support Tetovo's goal of preventing youth migration by providing professional opportunities and dedicated spaces for youth engagement.

Good Practices

Perugia

Perugia has developed a robust network of youth services that empower young people to become protagonists of urban life. The Youth Services Centre (Centro Servizi Giovani) serves as a vital multifunctional hub where youth aged 14–30 can meet, socialise, and access informal education. This public service, managed in collaboration with youth associations, provides orientation for the world of work, CV drafting support, and recreational spaces equipped with free Wi-Fi and gaming consoles.

Complementing this is the Youth Information Service (Informagiovani), which coordinates city-wide projects to inform youth about study and cultural opportunities. In the digital age, it has become a dynamic hub for promoting innovative youth associations.

A standout grassroots initiative is the "Switch On" Project, which originated from a group of young musicians who created the popular "L'Umbria che Spacca" music festival. It has since transformed into a multifunctional space for cultural promotion, digital literacy, and artistic workshops, effectively integrating technology with human relationships.

Additionally, the city hosts a Centre for Advanced Graphic Arts, which provides specialised laboratories for computer graphics, video games, and stop-motion animation. For those in need of direct support, the municipality offers free psychological counselling for youth aged 14 to 27 and a network of 24-hour self-managed study rooms.

Common Threads in IAPs

NextGen Actions: Common Ground

Across the IAPs of the NextGen YouthWork network, a central commonality in their planned actions is the creation of hybrid youth spaces. Cities like Eindhoven, Oulu, and Veszprém are developing Online Youth Centres utilising platforms like Discord, while Iaşi plans to launch dedicated municipal youth apps. Simultaneously, municipalities are regenerating physical spaces to serve as safe, inclusive hubs.

Another major shared action is capacity building for the digital age. Almost all cities prioritise training programs to enhance the digital competencies of both youth workers and young people. This includes teaching safe online practices, media literacy, and the use of AI, which is prominently featured in the plans of Perugia, Klaipėda, and Veszprém.

IAPs strongly emphasise youth empowerment and co-creation. Multiple cities are launching "Youth Correspondent" programs where young people generate peer-to-peer digital content. Structured participation mechanisms ensure youth actively shape local policies.

Finally, the planned actions frequently target mental health and social inclusion. Initiatives range from Aarhus's digital SMS counselling and Digital Detox Zones"to Tetovo's mental health support and Klaipėda's inclusive gaming rooms, all aimed at combating social isolation and equipping vulnerable youth for the modern world.

Policy Recommendations

A Blueprint for Hybrid Youth Work

Co-Design, Don't Just Deliver: Youth must be active partners in designing and evaluating digital services, rather than passive recipients. Engaging young people in multidisciplinary teams unlocks creativity, builds trust, and fosters a sense of belonging. Policymakers must provide institutional support and dedicated funding for co-creation and pilot initiatives.

Invest in Youth Workers: Continuous investment in practical training is fundamental to helping youth workers build digital skills and confidently use emerging tools like AI. Cities must recognise the vital dual role youth workers play across online and offline environments. This professional development ensures the long-term sustainability of digital youth work.

Build Integrated Spaces: Effective hybrid youth work requires accessible, welcoming physical and digital spaces where youth feel safe and included. Adopting a one-stop shop model integrates multiple services into a single platform or location, ensuring support is easily accessible by meeting youth where they are.

No Strategy, No Budget, No Magic: Digital services must be embedded in local action plans and backed by stable, predictable funding. Funding for co-creation and pilot projects must be a priority from the outset. Long-term impact requires the formal recognition of hybrid youth work as an essential public service.

No City Can Do Hybrid Youth Work Alone: Success heavily relies on strong cross-sector collaboration. Municipalities should establish formal multiprofessional partnerships with NGOs, schools, and private companies to pool resources and expand outreach.

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