

Final Network Product

NextGen YouthWork



URBACT



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About the Network

NextGen Youth Work is a URBACT Action Planning Network that brings together ten European cities to rethink youth work in a digital age. The participating cities—Eindhoven, Aarhus, Cartagena, Iași, Klaipėda, Oulu, Perugia, Tetovo, Veszprém, and Viladecans—focused on a common issue: young people are increasingly online, but youth workers often lack the necessary skills and resources to connect with them in these spaces. This digital gap can lead to inequalities and inadequate support for youth.

Over two years, the cities developed Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) to become "Digital Youth Cities". Their goal is to empower young people to be active and informed citizens who can navigate digital environments safely. They aim to create inclusive spaces where online and offline resources work together, ensuring equal access to information and opportunities for skill-building.

The cities structured their IAPs around key objectives, such as investing in youth workers' skill development, creating engaging physical and digital spaces, encouraging youth participation in civic life, and fostering collaboration across sectors.

These objectives are reflected in a wide range of testing actions. Aarhus piloted digital counselling and telepresence robots; Tetovo introduced VR job-interview simulations; Perugia co-created hands-on generative AI training with young people; Veszprém tested a new youth community space and municipal youth app; Viladecans relaunched its youth TikTok presence; Klaipėda focused on digital tools and data-driven youth work; Iași tested democracy-focused digital literacy workshops; while Oulu and Cartagena contributed models for guided gaming and youth-led communication.

Together, these cities are establishing a sustainable youth work model that enhances digital skills, amplifies youth voices, and promotes robust partnerships across Europe.



The cities

City of Aarhus



More Citizen - Less System

City of Cartagena



Connection - Youth - Digital World - Youthworkers

City of Eindhoven



EINDHOVEN

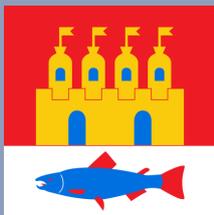
Accessible - Attract - Engage - Retain

City of Iasi



Youth-empowered City

City of Oulu



Inclusion - Participation - Equality - Wellbeing



City of Klaipėda



Klaipėda

Tech-driven

City of Perugia



Comune di Perugia

Music - Art - Innovation Drive

City of Tetovo



Youth-empowered

City of Veszprém



Multiple Organisations and Spaces

City of Viladecans



AJUNTAMENT DE VILADECANS

Hybrid Participation - Youth Voices - Youth Workers



Lessons Learnt



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Lesson learnt

What worked well in engaging young people

Cities achieved the strongest engagement when they reduced barriers, co-created solutions with young people, and combined digital and physical formats.

Co-creation ensured relevance and trust: Perugia's generative-AI activities attracted many young people through hands-on music and video creation, while Veszprém gathered input from 150 young people to design its youth app. Hybrid models supported access for vulnerable groups, such as Aarhus's low-threshold BRUS digital counselling and the Robot Café telepresence jobs for youth facing anxiety or mobility barriers. New or improved physical youth spaces in Veszprém and Viladecans increased belonging, while immersive tools—Tetovo's VR employability training, Klaipėda's VR empathy films, or Oulu's guided Fortnite League—strengthened skills, confidence, and community. Strategic communication through TikTok, WhatsApp, interactive broadcasts, and youth-led content (e.g., Oulu's ...) ensured messages reached youth through platforms they trusted.

Challenges that proved difficult to overcome

The main difficulties are related to staff capacity, digital exclusion, and structural constraints. Many youth workers lacked digital skills or confidence. They were hesitant to adopt hybrid approaches, as reported by Perugia, Tetovo and Eindhoven. Workforce shortages and unstable staffing further limited digital innovation in cities such as Iasi, Veszprém and Viladecans. Digital exclusion remained a major concern: vulnerable youth often lacked digital skills, access, or trust in online services, making engagement difficult for Aarhus, Tetovo and Eindhoven. Some groups—unaffiliated youth, those over 18, or racialised young people—remained hard to reach. Institutional barriers included unclear national frameworks for digital youth work, limited long-term funding, and fragmented coordination. Several cities also struggled with rapidly changing youth communication habits, saturation of participation processes, and a general lack of trust between youth and public institutions, all of which reduced the effectiveness of engagement efforts.

Tips cities would give to others starting hybrid youth work

Cities consistently advise starting with youth voice and co-creation. Aarhus, Perugia, Tetovo and Iasi emphasise that youth must shape concepts, tools and evaluation systems from the outset. Treating young people as co-developers ensures relevance and builds trust. In parallel, staff training is essential: Klaipėda, Eindhoven, Veszprém and Tetovo stress that hybrid youth work cannot function without youth workers having digital competences and an understanding of online youth cultures. Continuous, multi-level training—covering digital tools, online facilitation, well-being and digital dependency—is strongly recommended. Finally, sustainability requires strategic planning, stable funding and a balance between online and offline formats. Cities recommend integrating hybrid youth work into local strategies, creating safe physical spaces, and ensuring iterative adaptation based on feedback. Hybrid youth work works best when digital services complement, not replace, human connection and community-building.



Aarhus

What worked well?

BRUS digital counselling (SMS and letterbox) created low-threshold access for youth with psychological and social challenges. It is anonymous, flexible, and nationwide, and can easily be transferred to other municipalities.

What was a challenge?

Overcoming digital exclusion among vulnerable youth due to a lack of skills and trust in authorities was a key challenge, addressed through targeted pilot projects and co-created solutions with youth.

What tip would you give to another city?

Start by actively co-creating solutions with youth, as their input ensures relevance and engagement, which is essential for effective digital counselling. Also, integrate digital tools with physical spaces to provide a balanced approach that maintains accessibility and encourages ongoing engagement.

NextGen YouthWork: Aarhus



What lesson did you learn about with engaging youth online?



Cartagena

We succeeded by actively listening to young people and stakeholders for two years. A study by the University of Murcia confirmed WhatsApp as the most accessible platform, including for youth with fewer opportunities. This consultation built trust, increased participation, and enabled the design of hybrid, inclusive, sustainable and replicable hybrid youth work actions.

What worked well?

The key challenge was implementing new communication methods within the public administration, encountering resistance and limited adaptability from some older officials and management. Recognising this resistance can help stakeholders feel understood and patient. Overcoming this required obtaining political agreements, increasing awareness of the need to adapt communication to younger people's dynamics, and, most importantly, providing training, support, and demonstrations of the benefits.

What was a challenge?

Ensure the continuity and stability of youth workers and provide them with ongoing training in digital tools and hybrid methodologies. They must maintain regular communication with the young people and continuously update their hybrid, in-person, and online communication methods. Since each country has its own dynamics, a preliminary study of local communication strategies is highly recommended to ensure effectiveness and relevance.

What tip would you give to another city?



Eindhoven

NextGen YouthWork: Eindhoven



What was the main challenge your city addressed through hybrid youth work?



Eindhoven successfully engaged youth through events such as the Eindhoven Game Festival and the Night of the Nerds. By leveraging influencers, prize giveaways, and interactive surveys, the city gathered insights from over 100 young people to address specific needs for their digital platforms. A dedicated youth panel provided valuable qualitative input, shaping the Discord environment, Dynamo Centraal, to be created "by and for" the youth.

A key challenge was connecting diverse stakeholders and moving from knowledge exchange to concrete commitment. The local ULG struggled to identify a shared project for all members, highlighting the difficulty of fostering collaboration in a hybrid framework.

What worked well?

What was a challenge?

What tip would you give to another city?

The essential tip for other cities is: Just do it. Sustainable hybrid youth work requires swift action, experimentation, and learning from mistakes to remain relevant amidst rapidly changing online trends. Eindhoven suggests engaging young professionals with a natural digital affinity to enhance decision-making and align better with the online environment. Lastly, they recommend prioritising a "warm community" that fosters social interaction over strictly scheduled activities.

Iasi

What worked well?

Iași's effective engagement of youth by integrating private initiatives like Zbor and FabLab with universities, schools, and Local Youth Associations demonstrates a successful model worth emulating.

What was a challenge?

Iași faced several specific challenges in digital youth engagement, including a shortage of dedicated staff, limited legislative support, restricted access to digital tools, and limited field experience. However, connecting with various good practices within NextGen YouthWork provided valuable learning opportunities and insights into diverse approaches to youth digital transition.

What tip would you give to another city?

Work directly with youth and empower them to develop and get involved in innovation and co-creation activities. Balance fun online and in-person engagement to ensure sustainable, impactful hybrid youth work.

NextGen YouthWork: Iași



What lesson did you learn about engaging with youth online?



Klaipėda

What worked well?

Klaipėda used state-of-the-art technology to engage youth. Virtual Reality (VR) aided sessions fostered emotional connections and curiosity, transforming abstract social issues into tangible experiences that encouraged reflection and dialogue. Many young participants reported a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusion, leading to greater engagement in community activities.

What was a challenge?

A challenge in Klaipėda was motivating youth workers to adopt new digital tools. To tackle this, the Municipality organised training sessions on practical digital technologies, including VR and video-making programs, which helped youth workers gain confidence and become more open to innovation.

What tip would you give to another city?

A key tip for other cities is to train youth workers in digital technologies and familiarise them with the communication styles of young people. Understanding popular online platforms can help engage youth more effectively and make activities more relevant.

Oulu

Discord emerged as the central engagement platform. Oulu established a dedicated Nuorten Oulu Discord server, creating a safe online space for young people aged 13 and over. Youth workers provided support and interaction during scheduled times, allowing youth to chat, play games, participate in quizzes, and connect socially.

Challenges extended beyond technical issues, such as the provision of devices. They were also related to practices and youth behaviour, highlighting the need for safe services and for employees to develop digital skills. A significant difficulty remains in balancing employee resources effectively between traditional physical spaces and the increasing demands of digital platforms.

Establish a clear structure and clearly defined roles, determining which aspects of youth work will be conducted in person and which will be online. Ensure that young people understand how to participate in both channels. Additionally, utilise multichannel communication methods, such as WhatsApp, Discord, or Teams for quick communication, Instagram and TikTok for creating content and reaching young people, and live broadcasts (e.g., Twitch, YouTube) to foster a sense of community.

What worked well?

What was a challenge?

What tip would you give to another city?

NextGen YouthWork: Oulu



What lesson did you learn about engaging with youth online?



Perugia

The success of our initiative stemmed from a co-creation methodology that engaged youth in designing activities around generative AI. We reached a diverse group of young people through Perugia's Youth Service Centres. Others can replicate this by combining user-centric design with outreach in local youth hubs to promote engagement and skills development in digital tools.

What worked well?

A key challenge was motivating youth workers to adopt new digital methods for hybrid activities, as some were hesitant about generative AI and online engagement. Through targeted training, workshops, and peer support, we built their confidence, enabling them to facilitate digital youth participation effectively.

What was a challenge?

Perugia recommends prioritising training for youth workers in digital tools while involving youth in co-creation from the start. Balance online and offline activities with hybrid sessions, and ensure continuous feedback to foster skills and long-term impact in digital youth work.

What tip would you give to another city?

Tetovo

What worked well?

Tetovo effectively engaged youth by linking the Youth Council with secondary schools, creating opportunities for students to share ideas and participate in decision-making. This initiative included traditionally marginalised groups, such as students from underrepresented areas, ensuring their voices were heard in local policy-making. Other cities can replicate this by merging formal youth organisations with active school engagement.

What was a challenge?

Tetovo encountered challenges in hybrid youth engagement, including motivating staff to use digital tools and reaching marginalised youth. By offering targeted training and fostering collaboration, the city overcame these obstacles, enabling participation both online and in person.

What tip would you give to another city?

Equip youth workers with digital skills and hybrid facilitation methods. Involve youth in co-creation and balance online and in-person engagement to maximise participation and inclusivity. Continuous support and regular feedback are crucial for sustaining effective engagement.

NextGen YouthWork: Tetovo



What was the main challenge your city addressed through hybrid youth work?



Veszprém

What worked well?

We successfully engaged several hundred young people in our Testing Actions by inviting secondary school classes to participate in free programs at the For You Youth Club and the Digital Knowledge Hub. We achieved this through existing relationships with local stakeholders and educators. To replicate this success, cities should leverage their existing contacts and aim to include all age groups of youth.

What was a challenge?

A primary challenge was that youth workers lacked experience in operating digital platforms or managing online community spaces, and there were no local examples or established routines for the hybrid transition. Providing practical learning opportunities, such as a short study trip to Oulu, can help build confidence and enhance digital skills.

What tip would you give to another city?

Digital youth work should act as a gateway for young people to seek support and become involved in their physical community, ensuring that digital and in-person activities are complementary and balanced. Engaging youth in co-creating solutions is essential. However, it is equally important for youth workers to possess adequate digital skills and knowledge and to be open to new digital solutions.

NextGen YouthWork: Veszprém



What was the main challenge your city addressed through hybrid youth work?



Gathering the voices of young people allowed us to focus on their actual communication needs in a hybrid model. A survey we conducted highlighted the importance of creating a dedicated TikTok profile, which became a key action we developed collaboratively with the youth. This participatory process clarified their digital habits, enabling us to adapt our channels and messages to be more dynamic and relevant.

What worked well?

A significant challenge was reaching non-organised youth, particularly older young people aged 18 and above, who were disconnected from traditional support structures like schools or youth centres. To address this engagement issue, we needed to fundamentally redesign our overall communication approach and adopt a variety of hybrid tools.

What was a challenge?

Begin the process by co-creating solutions simultaneously with both young people and youth workers. Hybrid youth work is most effective when digital tools, communication channels, and activities are shaped with them, rather than for them. Also, ensure that planning successfully balances necessary online interaction with meaningful face-to-face engagement and spaces.

What tip would you give to another city?



NextGen YouthWork: Viladecans



What lesson did you learn about engaging with youth online?



City Spotlights



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Aarhus

City profile

Aarhus, Denmark's second-largest city, is a dynamic coastal centre on Jutland's eastern coast, harmoniously blending historical heritage and modern development. Aarhus stands as a hub of education, culture, and innovation, driven by a vibrant student population, showcasing the balance between tradition and progress characteristic of Scandinavian urban life.

Testing Actions

To tackle digital inclusion challenges, Aarhus has implemented three innovative actions:

1. The BRUS Project offers expanded digital counselling via SMS and Letterbox, focusing on youth 18 and older. It ensures accessible, anonymous support to overcome mental barriers regardless of location.
2. The Robot Café employs telepresence robots at the House of Generations, providing marginalised youth with remote work experience in service roles, aiding their integration into the job market.
3. Digital Detox Zones created in Bunkeren offer analogue activities (like board games and workshops), establishing digital safe spaces to alleviate the stress of excessive online presence and enhance social well-being.

Main challenge

Aarhus faces a significant digital divide, leaving vulnerable youth without access to technology, essential digital skills, and appropriate public solutions. This gap leads to risks such as marginalisation, exposure to cyberbullying, misinformation, and harmful content. The municipality aims to ensure equal access and foster critically engaged citizens capable of safely navigating the digital landscape.

Results

The vision is a digital Aarhus where youth are curious and equipped to navigate critically. The BRUS Project aims to ensure that at least 75% of youth in the digital treatment course recognise digitalisation as key to their participation and demonstrate engagement. The Robot Café aims to train 10 young individuals in remote robot operation, creating job opportunities and reducing isolation among vulnerable youth.

“The robot gives me a real job, even with my anxiety. I gain experience and no longer feel isolated.”

~Young person



Cartagena

City profile

Cartagena, Spain's twenty-fourth-largest city, is a Mediterranean port with approximately 49,000 young people aged 14 to 35, spread across a dispersed territory that hinders consistent in-person youth services. Studies show that youth are concerned about jobs, housing, and low political engagement. Youth work relies on existing policies, fostering active participation and offering a comprehensive Youth Space (Informajoven) for employment, housing, health, and other needs. The approach is Connection – Youth – Digital world – Youthworkers.



Testing Actions

The pilot program implemented WhatsApp as the official youth communication channel. This action was tested at the Associations Fair, engaging 41 organisations representing approximately 2,000 young people. More than 300 young people were introduced to the channel on October 18th through a contest, flyers, and an information tent, in an effort to provide immediate, accessible municipal information.

“With the WhatsApp Channel, I stay informed about information of interest to young people, easily and quickly.”

~Young person

Main challenge

The city needed to strengthen youth workers' training in digital tools and hybrid methods, and to provide stakeholders with guidance on integrating new communication channels. Simultaneously, the main challenge was to boost the WhatsApp channel's visibility and trust to make it an effective, accessible, and sustainable tool for agile youth programs.

Results

The WhatsApp channel is establishing itself as an effective information tool, reaching 672 accounts in 30 days (585 followers and 87 non-followers). The channel leverages WhatsApp's widespread use among young people for its immediacy and ease of use, improving access to municipal services and modernising communication.



Eindhoven

City profile

Eindhoven, a vibrant city in the Netherlands, is renowned for its technology and design, and hosts key institutions such as Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e), the Design Academy and Dutch Design Week. Home to 245,000 residents, with around 28% aged 14–29, it faces social challenges, including housing affordability and an ageing population in some districts. The city's involvement in the NextGen YouthWork project supports its initiative to transform youth work sustainably through digitisation.

Testing Actions

Eindhoven launched pilot actions to gather youth input and enhance staff capacity.

Youth Input: At the "Night of the Nerds" event, over 70 young attendees provided feedback through an interactive survey for an online youth centre.

Staff Training: Youth workers produced short instructional videos for platforms like TikTok and Instagram, sharing best practices for digital engagement.

Concept Testing: A youth panel tested concepts from partner cities (Oulu, Aarhus, and Cartagena) and attended the Breda Esports Conference for expert insights.

“It is important that it remains welcoming. A warm community is most important, with less focus on activities and more on social interaction.”

~ Young person



NextGen YouthWork: Eindhoven



What result or impact has your testing action achieved?

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Main challenge

Youth workers in Eindhoven struggle to engage with young people digitally due to limited insights, skills, and resources. Many underutilise available online tools, hindering effective communication in preferred environments. Enhancing digital competencies is vital for youth workers to connect and support young people online.

Results

These actions reached over 100 young people through surveys, enabling the customisation of the Dynamo Centraal Discord environment to suit the needs of youth better. The city developed an e-learning course for youth workers and established a shared vision among all stakeholders.

Iași,

City profile

Iași is a young, vibrant university city with a large youth population, including 60,000 students each year. This strong academic environment stimulates innovation, supported by a rapidly expanding IT sector, active start-up initiatives, and youth-friendly spaces such as FabLab Iași and the Zbor Hub, where young people can learn, socialise, and experiment with new ideas. Iași's rich cultural life further strengthens its youth appeal. Digital solutions and hybrid youth work are therefore essential to reach, support, and empower youth, encouraging innovation and fostering participation in local decision-making.



Main challenge

The city faces ongoing challenges in engaging youth, mainly due to the lack of national legislation, strategic frameworks, or local regulations that support youth work. This issue is worsened by the rapid spread of digital misinformation, which distorts public perceptions, erodes young people's trust in institutions, and threatens broader democratic stability in Romania. Addressing this requires hybrid youth work that enhances digital literacy, civic participation, and structured opportunities for meaningful involvement.

Testing Actions

Iași implemented training and interactive learning sessions focused on EU values, active citizenship, voting, democracy, and community participation. Particular emphasis was placed on helping young people recognise and counter online fake news. The first testing action targeted university students, while the second worked with high school pupils, resulting in a total of around 100 participants.

“The digital world is full of opportunities, but also with traps. Only by learning to use it properly can you empower yourself.”

~Youthworker

Results

The testing actions strengthened participants' understanding of democratic processes, improved their confidence in engaging with community decisions, and equipped them with practical tools to navigate digital misinformation. The experience demonstrated the value of combining in-person facilitation with digital content, supporting the city's broader ambition to develop sustainable hybrid youth work.



Klaipėda

City profile

Klaipėda, Lithuania's third-largest city with around 161,000 residents, including 25,000 youth aged 14–29, continues to invest in digital youth work following its 2021 designation as European Youth Capital. The city's active youth work network, comprising six centres and NGOs that promote creativity and inclusion, highlights ongoing efforts to enhance digital skills among youth workers and to engage young people effectively both online and offline, despite existing challenges.

Testing Actions

Klaipėda implemented targeted actions, including capacity-building training for youth workers on digital tools and piloting LogBook systems, to enhance digital competencies and data-driven youth work. The primary goals were strengthening youth workers' digital competencies and promoting data-based decision-making. The target group of the training was youth workers and organisations working with youth. Through hands-on training on AI, VR, and video tools, youth workers learned to apply digital technologies for communication, outreach, and engagement. The city also piloted LogBook and LogBook Street, two systems designed to support documentation and follow-up in youth work.

“I experienced my personal growth and improvement of my knowledge and skills related to youth work.”

~Young person



Main challenge

The main challenge remains the digital skills gap among youth workers, combined with limited access to suitable tools and insufficient data literacy. Additional barriers, such as a lack of youth-friendly digital methodologies, uncertainty about online trends, language barriers and scarce financing, emphasise the ongoing need for training, innovation, and hybrid approaches.

Results

A total of 45 youth workers participated in the training, which enhanced their skills and increased their confidence in using digital tools. However, the adoption of the LogBook system by youth centres and street teams was not successful. Evaluations of the testing period revealed that the system created more administrative burdens than benefits. Nonetheless, the experience provided valuable insights for the municipality's broader ambition to develop data-driven youth services.

Oulu

City profile

Oulu, located on the Gulf of Bothnia, is the fifth-largest city in Finland and serves as a regional hub for technology, education, and culture. With approximately 220,000 residents, Oulu has a notably youthful population. The city actively promotes inclusion, participation, equality, and the support of young people's growth and well-being. Its comprehensive Youth Services provide extensive resources, most notably through the Byström One-Stop Guidance Centre.

Testing Actions

Oulu conducted four pilot initiatives:

1. Workshops on Improving Digital Youth Work: These workshops aimed to identify necessary local improvements.
2. Interactive Broadcasts for Youth: The city tested interactive digital broadcasts, such as a session on source criticism hosted by the Iha Just Imus duo, which achieved a record 3,500 views on the NuortenOulu YouTube channel.
3. Digital Youth Exchange Project: This initiative connected 18- to 29-year-olds in Oulu with peers in other countries through a pilot exchange program.
4. National Fortnite League for Youth Centres: A national league was launched to leverage the popularity of gaming, culminating in a final face-to-face event.

“Just do it! It's easy to talk, but we need action. Start, learn from mistakes, and continue to develop.”

~ Young person



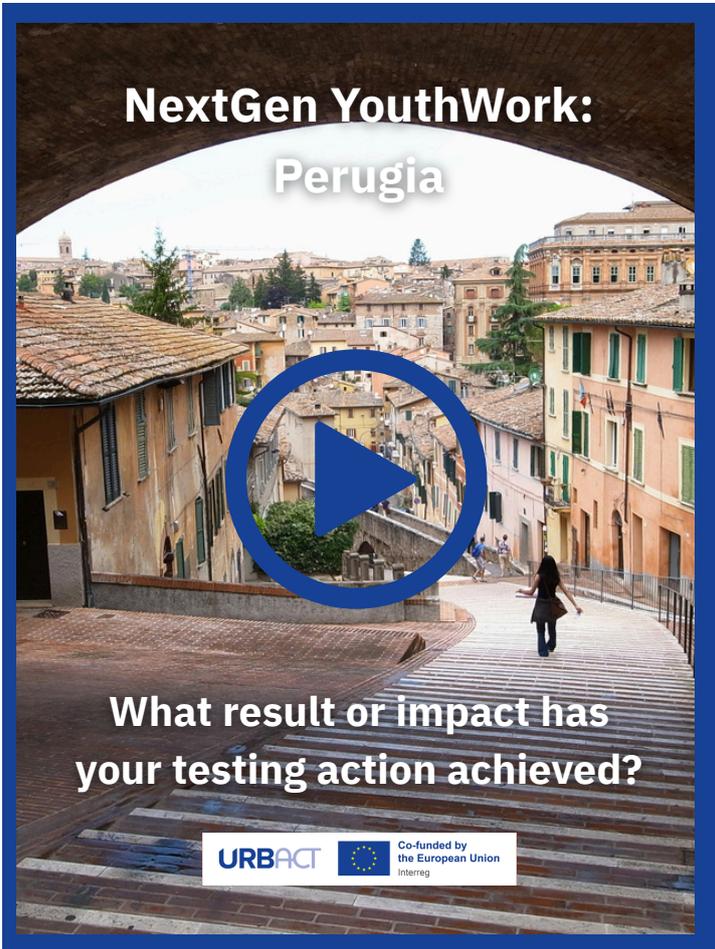
Main challenge

Oulu aims to adapt its youth work to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. The city faces challenges in providing accessible services across its large physical area, which is compounded by increasing socioeconomic inequality. There is also a pressing need for leisure activities to combat loneliness and prevent gang activity among youth.

Results

As a result of these actions, the city began developing its own policy for digital youth work. This policy aims to ensure the quality of digital youth services, including impact measurement, and to incorporate these services as an integral part of location-independent offerings in Oulu.





Perugia

City profile

Perugia, the capital of the Umbria region, is home to around 160,000 residents, including over 33,000 young people aged 15–34. With two major universities, the city attracts a large and diverse student population, including many international students. The mix of digitally savvy students and less connected youth makes hybrid youth work essential to ensure inclusive participation and skill development across all groups. Moreover, despite a youth services ecosystem and innovative initiatives, youth centres remain underused, and communication between institutions and young people is still fragmented, making hybrid youth work crucial for bridging physical and digital environments.

Main challenge

Perugia aimed to address interconnected issues: weak youth engagement in civic and community life, increased social isolation, limited digital literacy, and underuse of youth spaces. Young people often struggle to find inclusive, accessible places to develop skills or participate meaningfully. A generational communication gap and limited digital competencies among youth workers further hinder participation.

Testing Actions

Perugia tested a series of AI-focused training sessions and two showcase events, enhancing the creative and technological skills of young people. The program guided participants from discovering generative AI to producing complete music and video projects. Digital tools were central: AI software enabled composing, mixing, generating visuals, and storytelling. Targeting youth interested in music, videomaking, and digital creativity, the action combined hands-on training, co-creation, and public presentation to boost skills, engagement, and innovation.

Results

Around 50 young people took part in the training pathway, and more than 100 attended the final showcases. The events increased institutional visibility among youth and demonstrated strong demand for creative digital opportunities. Participants gained practical digital skills, confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging to Perugia's youth community.

“Participants gained confidence with AI tools and valued collaboration between youth workers and local associations.”

~Youthworker



Tetovo

City profile

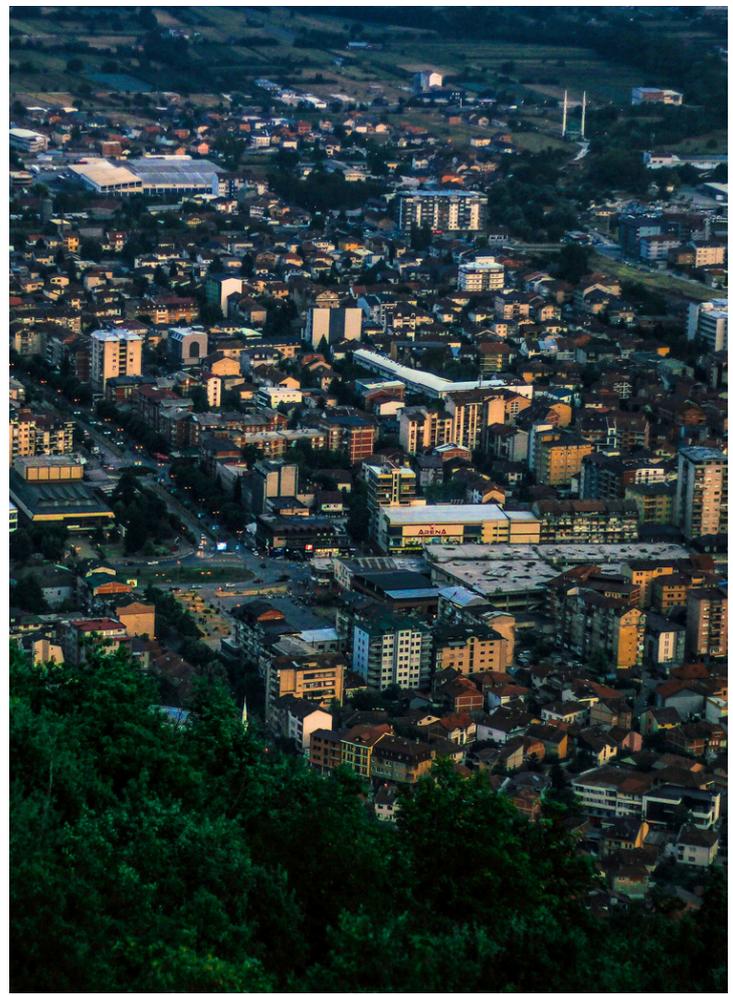
Tetovo is a vibrant and diverse city characterised by a large youth population, high unemployment rates, and limited inclusive services. It is home to multiple high schools and two universities, serving both urban and suburban areas with minority communities. Hybrid youth work is vital for reaching all young people, as it combines digital and in-person activities to empower marginalised groups and foster active participation in local development.

Testing Actions

The city piloted digital tools to enhance youth employability, including Virtual Reality (VR) technology. This pilot targeted young job seekers, allowing them to simulate job interview scenarios in a virtual environment. This immersive training helped participants practice communication skills, emotional control, and build confidence, improving their readiness for real-world employment opportunities.

Results

The ULG in Tetovo engaged 25 diverse stakeholders and over 70 youth participants in workshops and testing actions. VR job interview simulations improved confidence and practical skills for employment. Qualitatively, youth reported increased empowerment, greater awareness of mental well-being, and active participation in local decision-making processes.



Main challenge

Tetovo faces a significant challenge: low youth engagement in civic life, education, and mental health. Many young people lacked access to quality non-formal learning opportunities, digital skills, and spaces for participation in decision-making processes. This led to limited youth empowerment, weak connections between local institutions and young citizens, and a growing risk of social exclusion and migration. Through the NextGen Youth Work initiative, Tetovo aimed to modernise youth services, strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, promote digital inclusion, and create innovative programs that support young people's personal, social, and professional development.

“Using VR for job interviews gave me confidence and skills I never thought I could gain so quickly.”
~Youth



Veszprém

City profile

Veszprém is a medium-sized city in Hungary near Lake Balaton, with 56,000 inhabitants, including roughly 20,000 under age 35. The city faces challenges related to population decrease and ageing, aiming to become a city of strong communities and a high quality of life. The city's youth work currently relies primarily on multiple organisations operating in the physical space, lacks a unified online platform, and faces workforce and digital skills shortages among staff.

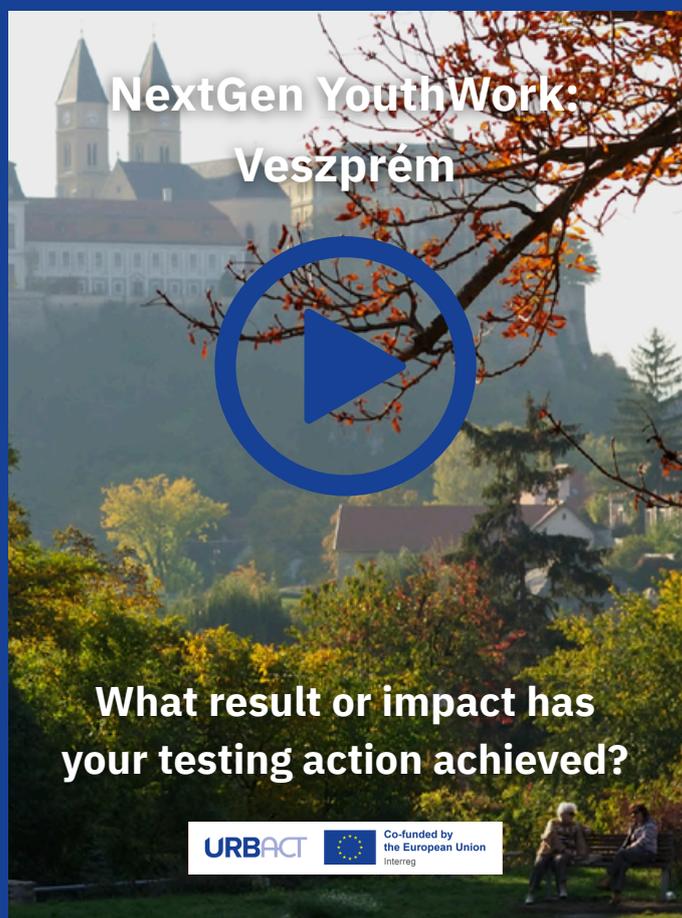
Testing Actions

Veszprém conducted two main test actions:

1. For You Youth Centre (Érted Youth Club): A survey identified the need for a community space for youth aged 12 to 29. This led to the establishment of the youth centre, which offers free services, including digital game events. A young psychologist was also employed to provide mental health support.
2. Testing a City Youth App: Primary and secondary school groups participated in free digital educational modules aimed at teaching them how to create mobile apps. They were also surveyed to gather information on desired features for a future mobile app for city youth.

“It gave me inspiring, new ideas for youth work development, my own work, and the practical use of digital tools.”

~Youthworker



Main challenge

The primary challenge was the lack of a Youth Club offering a variety of programs and services, as well as an online platform to provide information and support for young people. The testing actions were designed to create integrated spaces that deliver comprehensive youth services, both digitally and physically.

Results

One new Youth Community Space has been open and functioning in Veszprém since July 2024, partly inspired and supported by the project. Additionally, an elective course on digital skills and tools is set to launch at the Archepiscopal College next semester, reflecting new cooperation among members of the URBACT Local Group (ULG).



Viladecans

City profile

Viladecans is a fast-growing, medium-sized city near Barcelona, home to 17,800 young people. Young people in the city face several challenges, including the digital divide, unequal participation, mental health issues, and difficulties in accessing housing. The diverse and consistently changing youth landscape in Viladecans makes it essential to adopt hybrid youth work approaches. This aims to ensure inclusion, broaden access to services, and engage with young people through both digital and in-person channels. Youth services rely on facilities such as the Youth Resource Centre (Can Xic) and are actively working to decentralise services to other public spaces while enhancing the digital aspect.



Main challenge

The primary challenge is to effectively reach and engage a diverse youth demographic, particularly older, less organised, and vulnerable groups. This requires hybrid approaches to modernise communication, participation, and access to essential services.

Testing Actions

Viladecans experimented with a hybrid youth communication and engagement model that aimed to reactivate the TikTok channel and co-create online content with young people. This initiative also included enhancing outreach efforts in public spaces, with a primary focus on older youth aged 18 and above.

Results

Viladecans experimented with a hybrid youth communication and engagement model that aimed to reactivate the TikTok channel and co-create online content with young people. This initiative also included enhancing outreach efforts in public spaces, with a primary focus on older youth aged 18 and above.

“NGYW boosted our TikTok game, sparking fresh ideas and inspiring young people to join and engage with the youth centre.”

~ Youthworker



Aarhus

The Robot Café is an innovative practice that uses advanced telepresence robots in the House of Generations café. This initiative allows marginalised youth, who may face social or physical barriers such as anxiety or geographic limitations, to gain remote work experience in service roles, including customer interaction and order-taking.

This model effectively addresses digital exclusion by turning technology from a barrier into a pathway for participation. It provides young people with professional training in advanced telepresence technology and essential digital skills for the future, promoting their labour market integration and helping reduce feelings of isolation.

Cartagena uses WhatsApp as an official communication channel for youth services. This approach is highly adaptable, providing a direct, quick, and personalised service at a low cost. It significantly enhances institutional communication and connects with young people who often avoid traditional channels but appreciate the platform's immediacy and popularity. Implementing this strategy requires aligning the tool with a broader youth strategy, training staff, and establishing clear response protocols.

Cartagena

The Dynamo Youth Work Discord environment is a digital space created by and for young people. It serves as a low-threshold meeting place organised by city district and hobbies, reaching youth who are often less accessible offline. It features an innovative ticketing system for private 1-on-1 conversations and automatic entry messages with clear rules. This model proves that designing a platform based directly on specific youth needs ensures low-threshold online engagement. It demonstrates how digital spaces can effectively complement physical outreach through location and interest-based organisation.

Eindhoven

The Zbor Youth Centre is a successful initiative funded by a private company and NGOs that offers free hybrid activities for youth. It serves as a co-working and connection space for those interested in education, technology, and personal development. Zbor promotes informal education through digital skills and AI workshops, mentorship, and personal growth opportunities. It effectively addresses the lack of dedicated municipal youth services by providing a venue for youth to propose their own learning sessions and games, fostering community and a safe space for experimentation.

Iasi



Klaipėda

Klaipėda's practice integrates digital tools to support youth health through the "I Care" app and the Green Corridor Service, as well as Virtual Reality (VR) in education. The "I Care" app provides youth-friendly health information and allows users to contact specialists and book online consultations. VR education uses movies to foster empathy towards individuals with disabilities and victims of bullying by enabling viewers to influence the story. These tools combine accessible digital services with personalised guidance, exemplifying hybrid, sustainable youth work that can address social exclusion across diverse local contexts.

Oulu's transferable good practice is its Online Youth Work, successfully implemented via the Nuorten Oulu Discord server. This platform provides a safe virtual space for youth aged 13 and older to chat, play games, and socialise. Youth workers are available at scheduled times to offer support and interaction, demonstrating that digital platforms like Discord are essential tools for engaging in hybrid youth work. This concept is location-independent and can be easily expanded to other cities.

Oulu

Perugia

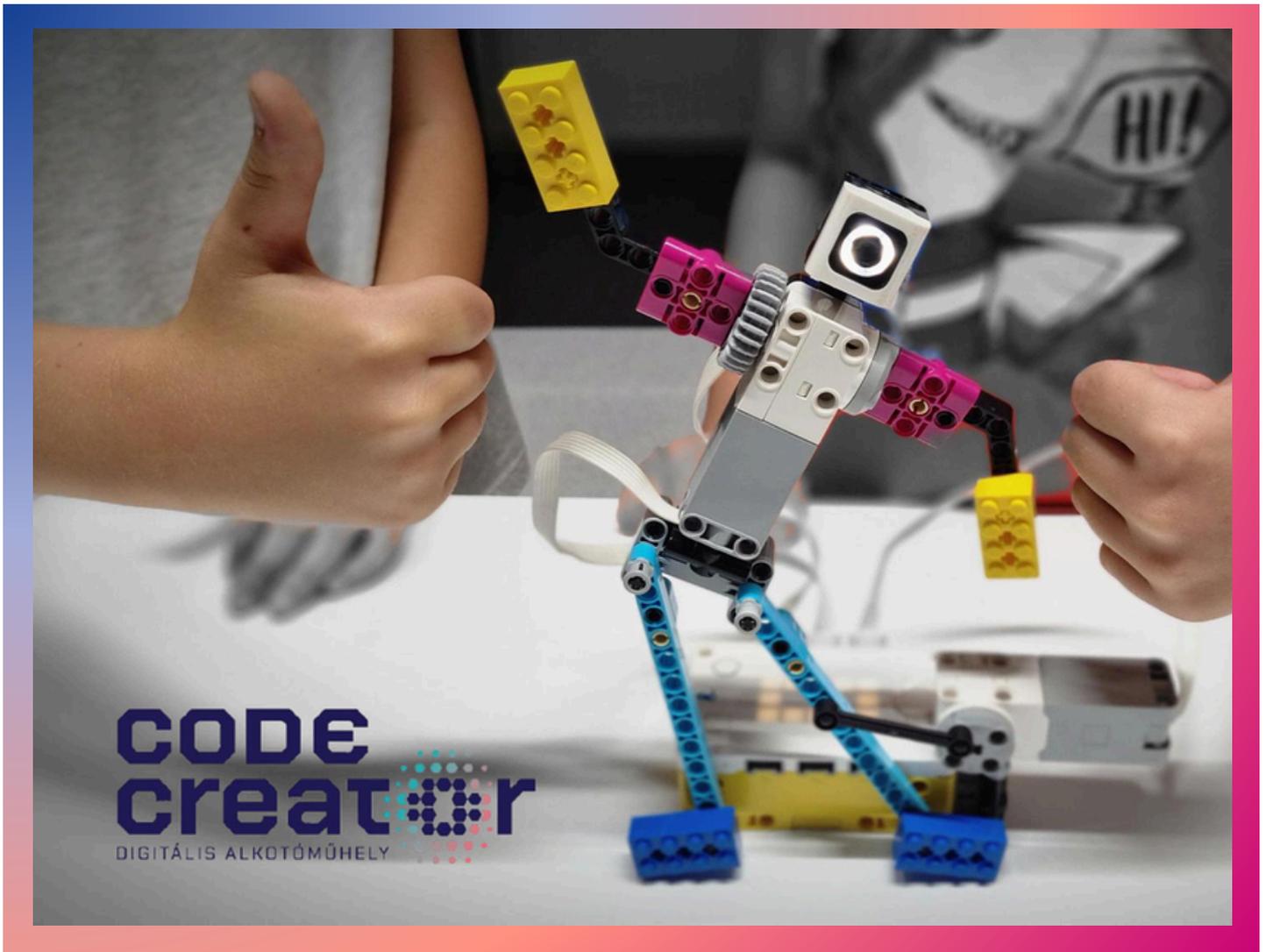
Perugia offers a valuable transferable good practice through its generative AI training course. This innovative program, run by youth associations active in the bustling local music scene, trains both young people and youth workers to create music videos and storytelling projects using AI tools. By combining hands-on training with collaboration, this initiative fosters essential digital skills and creativity while strengthening connections among youth and professionals within the community.

Tetovo has implemented a VR-based job interview training program for youth, successfully combining digital tools with in-person mentorship. This effective method uses low-cost VR simulations that enable young job seekers to practice their communication skills and emotional control, improving their readiness for real-world employment. It fosters skills development, builds confidence, and encourages sustainable engagement among youth.

Tetovo



Veszprém's Digital Knowledge Hub (Code Creator) provides easily transferable vocational training that can be seamlessly applied to various career opportunities. This educational centre focuses on delivering up-to-date, hands-on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) knowledge and on developing essential job-market skills. Visitors participate in short sessions using technologies like 3D printing, robotics, and programming to create their own products, fostering skills development beyond formal schooling.



Viladecans' youth co-created hybrid communication strategy leverages popular digital platforms, especially TikTok (@ViladecansJove), Instagram, and in-person outreach. By involving young people in designing communication channels and creating relatable content, the strategy aligns with their digital habits and engages diverse youth groups effectively. This participatory approach resulted in significant engagement, with a 151% increase in followers and over 90K views on TikTok, showing that content featuring young voices resonates strongly.

Policy Recommendations



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Co-Design, Don't Just Deliver

Perhaps the most universal recommendation comes from Eindhoven and Oulu: if you want to reach young people, don't wait for them to come to you — go to where they are. Young people must be recognised as partners, not as passive service users. That means involving them early, jointly shaping tools and programmes, and making co-creation the default approach. And policymakers need to secure institutional backing and sufficient funds for co-creation and pilot activities.

Aarhus calls it the most essential tip to start by co-creating with youth to ensure relevance and engagement. Viladecans stresses that you should design with youth, not for them. Their hybrid communication strategy, including the TikTok profile, was built by youth workers and young people together. Perugia's testing success also came from engaging young people directly in shaping generative-AI activities. Veszprém started creating an app for youth by training them and then engaging them in designing the app itself.

The message from all cities is consistent: relevance increases when youth are involved, and engagement follows naturally. Aarhus recommends that youth should be co-developers—not just users—of digital solutions, supported by funds allocated for co-creation.

- Veszprém states that a multidisciplinary team is necessary, where young people participate in planning and decision-making.
- Perugia advises that policymakers should step back and create more opportunities for young people and their associations, empowering youth creativity, engagement, and collaboration.
- Iași recommends involving youth in identifying needs alongside private companies and NGOs.
- Eindhoven recommends creating integrated working groups to share insights on online trends and developments and ensure youth work stays relevant.



Train the Team Before You Blame the Technology

Policymakers must prioritise continuous investment in youth workers, committing to a stable, permanent workforce with sufficient and adequately trained staff. This includes allocating funds specifically for digital skills, empowering youth workers to manage online communities, integrate new tools (including AI), and work confidently in hybrid settings.

Cities demonstrate that training works best when it is practical and ongoing. Klaipėda overcame staff reluctance by offering hands-on sessions on VR, AI, and video-making tools. Eindhoven developed a Handbook for Digital Youth Work and introduced a mentoring system where digitally experienced colleagues coach others. And there is already an abundance of online resources and training opportunities. Still, structured guidance and peer support make the real difference.

It is also essential to recognise that youth workers now have both online and offline personas, and combining these builds trust. And cities need to balance staffing and budgets between physical and digital youth work.

Several cities prioritise the need to invest in staff training to ensure youth workers possess the necessary competencies for the digital age:

- Klaipėda recommends that policymakers train youth workers to use digital tools, noting that hybrid youth work cannot exist without the necessary digital competencies.
- Viladecans highlights the need to invest in sustained training and support for youth workers in hybrid methodologies, stressing that digital transformation requires staff equipped to combine online tools with participatory face-to-face youth work.
- Cartagena advocates a commitment to a stable, permanent workforce structure, including adequately trained youth workers and ongoing training and adaptation to digital environments.
- Perugia explicitly recommends that policymakers invest in digital training for youth workers.
- Tetovo advises providing training as part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen sustainable, inclusive, and future-oriented youth engagement.



Build Spaces Young People Actually Want to Use

Hybrid youth work requires infrastructure that connects physical and digital spaces: accessible youth centres acting as one-stop shops and equally coherent digital environments offering services regardless of location.

Oulu is a prime example of this approach. The city runs the Byström One-Stop Guidance Centre, a central hub with comprehensive youth services and extensive resources. Additionally, they have established the Nuorten Oulu Discord server, a digital space designed to offer the same sense of safety and accessibility.

Cartagena follows a similar strategy, offering multiple services in one physical location at Youth Space (Informajoven) and using WhatsApp as its official communication channel, which will soon be supported by a chatbot. But Veszprém, Klaipėda, Iasi, and Viladecans are also taking steps towards combining the one-stop shop concept with the creation of digital spaces.

A well-designed infrastructure helps cities meet youth where they already are, rather than pulling them into fragmented systems.

- Oulu emphasises that youth work should be implemented in a diverse array of environments, with location-independent services (digital platforms) forming an integral part of the approach to engaging young people who may not participate in traditional services.



No City Can Do Hybrid Youth Work Alone

Hybrid youth work thrives when cities connect various stakeholders across sectors, including youth organisations, schools, NGOs, private companies, and other municipalities. This collaboration broadens expertise, increases access to young people, and helps secure resources.

For example, Iași has successfully engaged private initiatives (such as ZBOR and FabLab), universities, schools, and Local Youth Associations. They recommend formalising this collaboration through a dedicated municipal framework. In Cartagena, an annual fair is held for associations and NGOs, creating a natural meeting ground that fosters cooperation.

Digital services also enhance collaboration across city borders. Oulu's Online Youth Centre is available not only to local young people but also to young people from beyond the city. Their youth work mentoring app is being utilised by ten other Finnish municipalities, providing valuable learning opportunities for youth workers and policymakers. Aarhus has established a regional counselling service in partnership with neighbouring municipalities, demonstrating how joint services can scale effectively.

- Iași recommends bringing youth, private companies and NGOs to the same table with local authorities to support identified needs.
- Tetovo advises integrating hybrid youth work into local strategies in cooperation with schools, NGOs, and other institutions.
- Veszprém recommends utilising a multiprofessional team comprised of youth workers, digital experts, skills experts, and communication experts who can work together effectively.



No Strategy, No Budget, No Magic

Cities should integrate hybrid youth work into local strategies and action plans to ensure that digital services are seen as essential rather than temporary add-ons. Long-term commitment requires stable and predictable funding.

Oulu has already begun shaping its own digital youth work policy, making it a core part of its services. Iași initiated a procedure to allocate dedicated annual municipal funds to youth and youth workers. Aarhus highlights that funding for co-creation and pilot projects must also be part of the foundational support for youth work.

Cities consistently stress that funding and the workforce should be balanced between online and offline youth work, without prioritising one over the other.

- Aarhus recommends allocating funds for co-creation and pilot projects.
- Eindhoven suggests investing in innovation for online services, as trends and platforms change rapidly.
- Oulu states that, for the long-term effectiveness of youth work initiatives, sufficient resources must be allocated and a sustained commitment maintained.
- Perugia recommends providing funding and recognition alongside training efforts.
- Tetovo advises policymakers on the importance of ensuring stable funding to strengthen sustainable, inclusive, and future-oriented youth engagement.
- Cartagena views the creation of a stable, permanent workforce structure as an investment in personnel necessary to guarantee sustainable hybrid youth employment.
- Iași recommends creating a dedicated funding framework to support learning and needs identified in collaboration with young people and other stakeholders.



Oulu

NextGen YouthWork: Oulu



What advice or policy tip would you give to another city?



Viladecans

NextGen YouthWork: Viladecans



What is the single most essential piece of advice or policy tip you would give to another city?



Klaipėda

NextGen YouthWork: Klaipėda



What advice or policy tip would you give to another city?



Looking Ahead



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Future Vision

NextGen YouthWork cities continue collaborating to create sustainable, digitally integrated youth services, focusing on expanding successful pilot projects and formalising hybrid communication systems. Their visions are organised around three key themes:

Developing and Sustaining Hybrid Youth Spaces and Centres

Establishing institutional physical and digital environments is a priority. Eindhoven launched Dynamo Centraal - the new online environment - in December 2025 and will actively manage, moderate, and further develop the platform. Iași plans to create a digital/hybrid youth centre (IASI 4 YOUTH) and a mobile hybrid youth centre. Klaipėda is advancing its Digital Youth Centre concept. At the same time, Veszprém will continue operating the For You Youth Centre and establish a Discord channel for youth support. Perugia aims to amplify youth voices through collaboration with youth workers and associations. Aarhus plans to introduce Digital Detox Zones and explore AI integration for youth initiatives. Tetovo is focusing on integrating hybrid youth work into its strategies to ensure continued engagement in both the digital and physical realms.

Institutionalising Digital Communication and Outreach

Several cities are formalising their digital outreach methods. Cartagena is developing WhatsApp as an official communication channel, featuring a chatbot for scheduling and activities. Viladecans is committed to enhancing its hybrid communication model and expanding youth participation through the Youth Forum. Oulu is further developing youth work on digital platforms and promoting international collaboration via online gaming tournaments.

Integrating Technology and Enhancing Digital Competencies

The cities are adopting new technologies and improving digital skills. Aarhus aims to integrate AI into its digital solutions. At the same time, Klaipėda has applied for a project leveraging E-Gaming as a youth engagement tool. Oulu continues to prioritise expanding digital youth work and international cooperation. Finally, Eindhoven developed an online youth work e-learning, which will be used to train new youth workers joining Dynamo.

NextGen YouthWork: Cartagena



What project or idea
will your city continue
with after the
network?



NextGen YouthWork: Perugia



What project or idea
will your city continue
with after the
network?



Joint Projects

Digital Horizons: Piloting Digital Tools: AI, VR, GAMING

The proposed Creative Europe project, titled "Digital Horizons," aims to bridge the gap between the digital lives of young people and the ability of youth and cultural institutions to engage them meaningfully. Across Europe, many organisations lack the training and frameworks needed to responsibly use emerging digital tools such as AI, Virtual Reality (VR), and gaming. This project seeks to establish a transnational framework for experimentation and peer learning, supporting the digital transition and promoting inclusion. Cities will serve as experimental laboratories where youth workers, artists, educators, and technologists can collaboratively pilot innovative tools. The specific objectives include fostering experimentation with these technologies, building digital and creative competencies among both professionals and youth, promoting cross-sectoral and transnational cooperation, and ensuring inclusive access to digital culture, especially for marginalised youth. Key outcomes will include documented pilot models, training curricula, and policy recommendations. Examples of local pilot ideas contributing to this concept include Aarhus testing AI tools for social work, Cartagena planning to implement an AI-enhanced virtual assistant, and Tetovo proposing VR equipment for job interview simulations.

Youth Work on the Wheel: Hybrid and Mobile Youth Centres for Inclusive Engagement

This Erasmus+ KA3 project aims to translate local innovations from the NextGen network into a scalable European model of "Hybrid Youth Centres." It addresses the challenges of declining participation in traditional youth centres and uneven digital inclusion by integrating mobile, physical, and digital spaces. The core objectives include creating and validating a standardised European Youth Needs Assessment Tool to gather comparable data across cities for evidence-based service design, as well as building the capacity of youth workers and municipal staff in hybrid and inclusive methodologies. The project emphasises adapting successful practices, such as Eindhoven's Mobile Youth Centre Bus, for piloting in contexts with limited youth infrastructure. The hybrid solutions to be tested include co-created digital platforms, such as Discord-based online centres, and the deployment of mobile youth units, specifically focused on reaching underrepresented groups, such as young women and youth with disabilities. This initiative is designed to strengthen transnational cooperation and produce a transferable "Hybrid Youth Work Inclusion Toolkit" along with European-level policy recommendations.

NextGen YouthWork: Oulu



What project or idea
will your city continue
with after the
network?



Joint Projects

Digi-Citizens: Youth Ambassadors for a Human-Centred Digital Transition

The "DIGI-CITIZENS – Youth Ambassadors for a Human-Centred Digital Transition" project aims to bridge the growing divide between digitally-savvy youth and public institutions. While young people are adept at using technology, they often face challenges related to misinformation, privacy concerns, and passive consumption of digital content. The project establishes a transnational network of Digital Youth Ambassadors—local volunteers who serve as essential links between their peers and local governments. These ambassadors receive training to promote the ethical and responsible use of technology, encourage democratic participation, and assist municipalities in creating socially responsible digital policies that reflect the values of youth. The goal is to cultivate critical digital literacy skills among young individuals, addressing topics such as combating fake news, understanding the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and promoting mental well-being in online environments. The comprehensive work plan comprises 10 thematic work packages that focus on key aspects of digital citizenship, including developing e-participation tools and enhancing digital skills for future job opportunities. The final objective of the project is to establish a sustainable European framework for these ambassadors, including a training program and certification system to ensure long-term policy impact.



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