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RESEARCH PROJECT ON COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORK THROUGH TRAININGS IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES (RAY-COMP)

Final report (Module 1, 2 and 3)

ESTONIA

17 APRIL 2024

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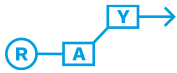
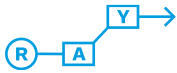


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INTRODUCTION. Context and rationale, core and underpinning research questions

Context of the research to be undertaken

Competence development of key actors in the youth field is essential for contributing to the quality of youth work at all levels in Europe. Particularly crucial actors in this are youth workers and youth leaders involved in the European youth programmes and trainers in the youth field.

An important piece of the puzzle regarding their competence development are training activities. The European Training Strategy (ETS), among others, reflects the importance of these trainings and recently developed competence frameworks for youth workers and trainers. Previous RAY research (in particular [RAY-CAP](#), but also [RAY-LEARN](#)) has shown potential for improvement regarding the fit between training needs both on the individual and the systemic level and training offers. This holds especially true for certain profiles, namely more experienced youth workers and leaders or youth workers and leaders with a strong thematic specialization.

Against this background, [RAY-COMP](#) aims to gain further insights into competence development through trainings in the context of the European Youth Programmes, with a special focus on potentials for improvement. We aim to explore the different perspectives on competence development in the youth sector, namely training providers' rationales for developing training offers; youth workers and leaders' perceptions of their own training needs; trainers' interpretations of these training needs and aspects hampering and fostering their ability to respond to these needs while implementing training offers. As each perspective comes with assets and limitations (youth workers and leaders may not know what they don't know; providers may be focused on responding to priorities and strategies, but link lesser to youth workers own needs assessments; trainers may know which aspects foster or hamper their ability to respond to training needs and comply with providers' training objectives, but may have little influence on some of these aspects), they complement each other and taken together can best show potentials for improvement. This is not only regarding the training offer but also reasons why certain trainings providers consider relevant are not taken up by some youth workers and leaders. In other words, the comparison of perspectives will allow us to formulate concrete recommendations on how to improve competence development through trainings in the context of the European youth programmes. Another relevant perspective on competence development, namely the organisational approach to organisational learning and development, is explored in another RAY project, RAY-LEARN, and will only be touched upon at the margins of this project, e.g. when youth workers and leaders are able to reflect on their teams' training needs from the perspective of their organisation or when they reflect upon organizational aspects hampering or fostering their participation in certain training activities.

RAY-COMP links the different perspectives to the relevant context, mainly the influence of the European Youth Programmes, SNACs, the European Training Strategy, the competence frameworks for youth workers and leaders and trainers, other European strategies, as well as the strategies National Agencies may develop for the design of their training offer. A qualitative research approach allows us to explore which of these or other context elements appear as relevant and in which sense. RAY-COMP is implemented in close consultation with [SALTO](#) Training & Cooperation, allowing us to reflect upon the ETS Competence Models for Youth Workers and Trainers as one quality system for training offers in the field of youth work.

As always, this project will be informed by other RAY research, namely [RAY MON](#) and [RAY SOC](#).

Key objectives of the project

The key objectives of this research project are to explore:

- the intentions and rationales of training providers that shape the construction of training strategies;
- the relation between training strategies and the self-assessed needs of youth workers and youth leaders, especially with regard to competence development;
- aspects at structural and individual level (e.g. funding, bureaucracy, organisational structures, trainer competencies) that foster or hamper the trainers' abilities to implement training strategies and respond to the needs of youth workers and leaders within the training context.

Main research questions

Training providers

- Core Research question for **training providers**:
 - How do training providers construct training offers and what are their intentions, concepts and goals?
- Underpinning research questions for **training providers**:
 - Which systemic needs of the European youth field are perceived by training providers and which role do they play when constructing training offers?
 - Which role play the European Youth Programmes and their priorities when constructing training offers?
 - How are possible changes in the training needs perceived by training providers and how are these addressed?

Trainers

- Core research question for **trainers**:
 - How do trainers prepare and implement training activities for youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes in particular in relation to their perception of youth workers and leaders' needs?
- Underpinning research questions for **trainers**:
 - How are possible changes in the training needs perceived by trainers and how are these addressed?
 - Which aspects foster and hamper the trainers' abilities to prepare and implement training activities in respect to perceived and/or expressed training needs of youth workers and leaders and training providers' instructions? Which of these aspects are more decisive and how could they be tackled?
 - Do the contract-status of trainers (contracted by the national agencies themselves or beneficiaries of the programmes) and the programme strand in which they are holding the trainings (Key action 1 or TCA / NET) influence the challenges, opportunities and support mechanisms they perceive?
 - How does the ETS Competence Model for Trainers relate to obstacles and support mechanisms perceived by trainers?

Youth workers

- Core research question for **youth workers**:
 - What training needs do youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes perceive and how do they relate to the training strategies in the field?
- Underpinning research questions for **youth workers**:
 - What training needs do youth workers and leaders within the European youth programmes assess themselves?

- How are possible changes in the training needs perceived by youth workers and leaders and how are these addressed?
- How do self-assessed training needs change over the course of professional careers of youth workers and leaders?
- What obstacles do youth workers and leaders face regarding their participation in trainings (at individual and organizational level)?
- Which training approaches do youth workers and leaders esteem appropriate for responding to their needs?
- How does the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers relate to training needs expressed by youth workers and leaders?

RESEARCH DESIGN. Description of modules, sampling

The quality of youth work is closely linked to the competences of youth workers and leaders. RAY-COMP aims to gain further insights into competence development through trainings in the context of the European Youth Programmes, with a special focus on potentials for improvement.

The following report presents an overview of three modules wherein case studies were followed through. The focus group interviews took place in February and March 2024.

In module 1 (Agency), national researchers were asked to complete Focus Group interviews with the Estonian National Agency team. This involved two groups:

- 1) Erasmus+ programme focus group interview
- 2) European Solidarity programme focus group interview

In module 2 (Trainers), national researchers were asked to complete Focus Groups with trainers at national level. These Focus groups had the aim to produce insights into a) aspects hampering and fostering the implementation of training instructions provided by National Agencies / SALTO resource centres, b) their perception of and experiences with training needs of youth workers and leaders and its relation to training activities.

The focus groups aimed at covering the perspective of trainers. As they were the ones carrying out the training activities developed by training providers, they function like an intermediate hinge when it comes to transferring the providers' intentions of qualification to the learning experiences of youth workers and leaders on the ground. Which obstacles do they face when implementing training activities and what support mechanisms do they encounter and wish for? How do they use the training instructions provided by NAs and SALTO resource centers and how aware are they of the underlying goals?

In module 3 (Youth Workers and Leaders), national researchers were asked to complete Focus Groups with youth workers and leaders active at national and European level to construct in-depth data about training needs and their relation to training offers in the European youth field.

The interviewees were selected and the interviews were arranged by a representative of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Agency's Youth Programme Centre and the study's contact person.

Overview of case studies

Module 1 included focus group interviews with Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Agency staff involved in the delivery of training and with the Agency's partner. A total of 10 professionals and managers (5 and 5 respectively) in different positions participated in two interviews. The interviews were planned to take into account the fact that one group was based on the Erasmus+ Youth programme and the other on the European Solidarity Corps programme, but the interviews revealed that the participants were involved in different activities and reflected on their experiences more broadly than just one programme.

Interviewees considered training to be very important to harmonise the level of key knowledge and competences in the youth field: not all EU countries have a higher education in youth work, not all youth workers have an education or a profession. The budget for training allows focusing on the most critical, but there could be scope for a more personalised approach, development of training activities and additional training to achieve greater impact. Ongoing experience and observations, as well as feedback from trainers and participants, are considered when delivering training.

<i>Interview dates</i>	19.02.2024, 1.03.2024
<i>Format (virtual, face-to-face, hybrid)</i>	Face-to-face
<i>Duration of interviews</i>	1,5 hours
<i>Full name of the umbrella platform/network/institution</i>	Haridus ja Noorteamet (Harno), Erasmus+ ja Euroopa Solidaarsuskorpuse Agentuuri noorteprogrammide keskus
<i>Year of foundation</i>	01.08.2020
<i>Position(s)/Role(s) of person(s) interviewed</i>	<p>1: Leads the training activities team. 1. Manages the Training Manager's team, including strategic management, analysis of research results, international cooperation projects, design of training programmes and commissioning of training for target groups. Training activities account for around 10 - 17% of her workload.</p> <p>2: He has worked at the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Agencies for 4.5 years, and previously at the Archimedes Foundation. In terms of training, he coordinates the mandatory training cycles (DiscoverEU training cycle and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) training cycle). Training represents around 10-15% of the total workload.</p> <p>3: Worked in the Youth Programmes Centre for 2.5 years and is mainly responsible for the compulsory ESF training cycle. Training represents around 10-15% of the total workload.</p> <p>4: Worked as Development Support Coordinator for E+ and ESD target groups at the Agency for half a year. Her tasks are to coordinate the training field and to support the organisation of training. Training represents 100% of the workload.</p>

	<p>5: Worked as Youth Mobility Coordinator for the Agency for 4 years. Mainly working on youth mobility projects and the Youthpassport. Current tasks include supporting learning in projects and leading inter-agency projects. Training is about half a day a week or 7% - 10% of the work.</p> <p>6: Responsible for the DiscoverEU training cycle. He has been in this position for 2.5 months and training represents about 50% of the total workload.</p> <p>7: Works in the Agency as a coordinator for international cooperation projects. Typically works on accreditations for youth exchanges. She currently manages one international cooperation project supporting the quality of youth work in local authorities. Training activities account for about 15% of the main workload.</p> <p>8: Has been working as the Agency's Youth Development Project Coordinator for 9 years. Mainly working with young people, youth workers and LAs. Has been a trainer herself and developed training courses at international and local level. Currently working on youth mobility and accreditation. Training activities account for 30-40% of the main workload.</p> <p>9: Agency Training Specialist, predominantly dealing with ESK training. She has been in this position for about a year, but before that she was a trainer and collaborator in the ESK field and helped coordinate the mandatory training cycle. Training-related activities (including planning training, finding trainers and booking accommodation) account for 100% of her workload.</p> <p>10: She has a contract with the Agency, she is both trainer and cooperation partner. She has been working as a trainer in the ESK training cycle for about half a year. He supports the beneficiaries with his activities and has been coordinating the LevelUp project for about one year. Training represents about 15% of her workload.</p>
<p>Website of the organisation</p>	<p>www.harno.ee, www.euroopanooored.eu</p>

Module 2 consisted of focus group interviews with trainers working in the youth field in Estonia, who participated in three interview groups. A total of 9 people (3, 2 and 4 respectively) participated in the three interviews. Staff from both the public and non-profit sectors with different levels of training experience and a university researcher were involved.

The background of the participants of the **1st interview** group ranged from public youth work and NEET youth issues to digital youth work, providing a rich overview of the current state and future directions of the field in Estonia. Most of the participants were closely involved in European youth programmes, bringing an international dimension to the focus group interview. From the discussion, different perspectives emerged on the objectives, needs and challenges of training, which are essential for youth workers and trainers to be successful.

The backgrounds of the participants in the **2nd interview** group were diverse, ranging from long-term training experience to specific thematic areas such as digital competences and youth inclusion. Discussions focused on training objectives, needs and digital transition. The main themes were the importance of digital competences, understanding professional ethics and the importance of development interviews in identifying the needs of youth workers. Particular attention was also paid to professional standards for youth workers and how they should reflect the dynamic changes in youth work.

The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants in the **3rd interview** group provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities of youth work in Estonia. Participants who shared their experiences and perspectives on the training needs of youth workers. Special attention was paid to the development of digital competences, the inclusion of young people with special needs and the application of creative methods in youth work. The trainers stressed the need for flexible and inclusive training programmes that respond to the ever-changing needs of youth workers and youth leaders.

<i>Focus Group dates</i>	26.02.2024, 8.03.2024, 13.03.2024
<i>Format (virtual, face-to-face, hybrid)</i>	virtual
<i>Duration of the Focus Group</i>	1,5 hours
<i>Position(s)/Role(s) of the participants:</i>	<p>1: A representative of the Local Government Development Centre. Involved in youth work since 1998 at Estonian and European level. Since 1998, European and national level, since 1998. Currently active in various fields in Võru County and the University of Tartu.</p> <p>2: Works in the youth work department of city Education Department. Has been involved in the development of a quality model for youth work. Has been involved in the development of the youth work model in Tallinn City Council.</p> <p>3: Member of the board and founder of Organisation A. Youth work. Involved in youth work since 2010. Since 2010. Since 2010, he has been active in the youth sector. As a trainer, his areas of expertise include project writing, youth entrepreneurship and youth information.</p> <p>4: Works at city Education Department as a Head Specialist in the Youth Department, mainly with youth programmes. She does not work as a trainer on a daily basis, but her activities are related to it.</p> <p>5: University junior researcher. Has been a trainer for over 30 years. Has been a trainer for over 30 years. Also active as a trainer in international youth programmes. Has worked with both young people and people working with young people. Her areas of expertise include youth participation, diversity understanding and inclusion, non-formal learning and others.</p> <p>6: Trainer and advisor for Organisation B. Active in the youth field for over 10 years. As a trainer, her main focus is on developing young people's general competences, raising their awareness of global issues. Main focus on topics related to non-formal learning, self-development and international youth work.</p> <p>7: Member of the board of Organisation C. She has been working as a trainer of youth workers for the last 7 years, focusing on inclusion and support for young people with special needs. Her areas of expertise include a range of methods and approaches to help youth workers understand and meet the needs of young people with special needs and create an inclusive and supportive</p>

	<p>environment for all young people. 7 years of experience in youth work.</p> <p>8: Co-founder and leader of Organisation D. For the last 5 years, she has been committed to training youth workers, bringing innovation and creativity to their work. Activities aim to develop youth workers' skills in teamwork, creative projects and promoting social inclusion. Creative approaches to youth work, using non-formal learning methods and emphasising youth participation are key areas.</p> <p>9: Youth Centre Manager. Focused on youth development and inclusion at local level. Areas of expertise include youth participation, community involvement and youth counselling.</p>
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Module 3 consisted of focus group interviews with Estonian youth workers and youth leaders, divided into two different groups. A total of 9 participants (5 and 4 respectively) took part in the two interviews. They included youth workers with a wide range of experience, both in terms of time and subject matter, from the public sector, youth centres and youth centres, organisations and associations. The participants had experience of youth work in Estonia and international youth work, volunteering, mobility and projects.

The **1st interview** group consisted mainly of leaders and advisers from organisations with a long history of youth work. They shared the necessary views from a managerial level and identified cross-sectoral training issues. The lack of training with practical and real-life examples was seen as a major need for improvement. The lack of training and the increased need for youth workers for training on inclusion were the main problems.

The **2nd interview** group consisted mainly of leaders and founders of organisations with a long history of involvement in youth work. The participants are all active in the field of youth work, but their tasks differ in thematic and thematic content. For the most part, participants agreed with each other and often complemented each other's views with their own experience and knowledge. In the future, participants would like to see more practical training with real-life examples, especially on project management, social media and digital competences. The main problems identified were the superficiality of the training topics and, in some cases, poor preparation or incompetence of the trainer.

<i>Focus Group dates</i>	27.02.2024, 4.03.2024
<i>Format (virtual, face-to-face, hybrid)</i>	Virtual
<i>Duration of the Focus Group</i>	1,5 hours
<i>Position(s)/Role(s) of the participants:</i>	<p>1: Project manager at a leisure centre for just over a year. She has done a quality label and actively mentors external volunteers. As a project manager, she works on projects under the Erasmus+ and ESF programmes.</p> <p>2: CEO of an umbrella organisation for youth workers for 5 years and active in the youth field for over 20 years. Teaches youth work students at university.</p>

	<p>3: Specialist in the Education, Culture and Youth Department of a local authority. Not involved in practical youth work and not in international youth work.</p> <p>4: Founder and CEO of an organisation focusing on youth exchanges and mobility projects (voluntary work). The organisation also trains youth workers.</p> <p>5: Managing director of youth organisation A for two years, but has been working with young people for 10 years. The main point of contact is participation in different events abroad through Erasmus+.</p> <p>6: Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors and Membership Development Manager in the Youth Association B. Erasmus+ with a focus on youth. Deals with youth organisations in Estonia. Worked for three years in the field of youth work.</p> <p>7: Belongs to an association of youth work organisations and works in a youth centre. Has been working in the youth field for more than eight years. Participated in and led international projects and mobility.</p> <p>8: Founder and director of an organisation for the coordination of international projects and youth exchanges. He is a founder and co-founder of a youth organisation, youth exchange and volunteering organisation. His main focus is on international projects, including Erasmus+ youth projects and volunteering.</p> <p>9: Chair of several youth work organisations, including international youth work. Has worked in the youth field for 40 years.</p>
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ANALYSIS. In depth data analysis of modules

This chapter presents the main results by module and research question.

Module 1 - Training providers

Constructing training offers

The basis for training offers is the training plan, which is based on the agency's training strategy. The training strategy is based on the European Commission's guidelines and the national youth sector development plan that is consistent with them. The development of the training plan and training offers is reflected in the following table.

<p>European Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ E+ and ESC program guidelines for the national agency EU youth policy <p>Estonian youth sector development plan</p>	<p>Agency's Programs training strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory and voluntary elements Youth sector workers and young people <p>Agency's Youth Center training strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth sector workers and young people <p>Suggestions, expectations, and feedback from young people, youth workers, specialists, trainers, agency staff, and other agencies.</p>	<p>Training plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Trainings organized and conducted by the agency. Trainings organized by the agency but conducted by trainers sourced externally. Procured training programs. External trainings – the concept of trainers and team from an international network, where the agency only organizes. 	<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the training and as possible, methods and topics are specified in cooperation with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the trainer participants
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Based on the Agency's interviews, they take into account the guidelines, their underlying priorities and strategies, as well as the experience of the trainers and the needs of the target group when designing the training offer. The training is planned to provide not only an introduction to the topic but also an opportunity for exchange and networking.

The topics and methods of the training will normally be specified in cooperation between the Agency's representative and the trainers. The learning outcomes are generally predefined, but the choice of methods is left to the discretion of the trainer. However, there are also more specific training courses. It was also said that training is organised on the basis of past experience - e.g. ESK has established themes and working approaches as a long-standing programme, while DiscoverEU is still experimenting with its approach.

The biggest problem in the provision of training is seen as finding participants (which is generally the responsibility of the agency as training provider). Experience in the field and the feedback received show that training is necessary, but that the target group does not always consider it important to attend. A related issue is that the working conditions and hours of those working in the youth field vary widely: there is no potentially suitable training time for everyone. There are also those who register but do not come. The fact that the DiscoverEU training courses are not compulsory and that it is not known in advance how many participants will come makes it difficult to organise the training.

Limited financial resources were also seen as a problem. It was felt that mandatory things can be done, but not in the volume and in the way that would be desirable for maximum impact. For example, it is not possible to organise training sessions for voluntary service participants frequently enough so that they take place at the right time for the young person. There is also currently little capacity to provide individual support.

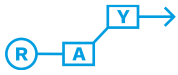
Which systemic needs of the European youth field are perceived by training providers and which role do they play when constructing training offers?

Interviewees saw a significant role for training in developing several systemic needs of the youth field, which seems to be considered when planning training:

- Youth work is developed differently in different countries. Estonia is one of the countries with the most developed youth work and can share its experiences with other countries and youth sector workers.
- Both internationally and nationally, the skills and competencies of youth sector workers vary, partly due to different educational backgrounds.¹ Training helps to unify shortcomings, better understand colleagues and the needs of the youth sector.
- The quality of training, the methods used, and the volume planned for covering the topic are also important. Quality training has a greater impact on the quality of activities and helps to show politicians, various specialists, and society the importance of non-formal education.
- Youth sector workers often work alone, and their work does not receive sufficient recognition. Quality training helps to show that their work is important. In addition, training allows for the exchange of experiences and networking.
- Youth sector workers are busy and find it difficult to find opportunities for self-education. Therefore, the offered training must be of high quality, the learning outcomes must be clear, and the training should consider the specific needs of the participants.
- The target groups' skills in self-analysis and understanding of development needs are sometimes lacking. Therefore, the training target group does not always perceive that they should participate in training.
- In one interview, it was pointed out that more attention should be paid to implementing and sharing with colleagues what was learned in training.

Overall, based on the interviews, it seems that training providers operate consciously and confidently within the given framework, considering the needs of those being trained. This applies both to conducting training themselves and discussing the content and structure of the training with the trainer. Therefore, the biggest role of training providers is to monitor the quality of training and their compliance with the training strategy.

¹ One of the reasons for the difference in skills and competences of workers is that there are no national qualification requirements for entry into the sector in Estonia. However, employers may set such requirements. Due to the scarcity of workers and the low level of wages, it is not feasible or reasonable to set qualification requirements everywhere. See more: [Working conditions of the Estonian youth workforce](#). This reason was not put forward by the interviewees themselves.



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Which role play the European Youth Programmes and their priorities, as well as other relevant documents in the sector when constructing training offers?

According to the interviewees, the training plan is the basis for the delivery of the training, with the training plan being based on the Agency's training strategy, which is based on the E+ and ESF programme guidelines and the guidance given to the National Agency. The training provided does not directly address the development of competences outlined in the Youth Worker's Vocabulary or ETS, but often supports the development of competences outlined in the documents.

According to the interviewees, the European Youth Programmes and their priorities are in line with the European Youth Strategy and the Estonian Youth Development Plan is in line with the relevant EU documents. During the interviews, the importance of paying attention to issues such as improving the quality of youth work, inclusion, project writing skills/initiative, mobility, exchange of experience, recognition of non-formal education and solidarity was highlighted. These aspects are reflected in all these documents. Thus, according to the interviewees, the training provided contributes to the development of both the European and the Estonian youth field.

How are possible changes in the training needs perceived by training providers and how are these addressed? How do training providers gather intel on training needs?

The training program is compiled for each year. Depending on the type of training, there is flexibility in refining the training methods and specific content in collaboration with trainers and participants. Participant needs are surveyed, for example, in the registration form (where they can indicate the most important subtopics).

External trainings have the least flexibility in responding to changing needs, while internally organized trainings by the agency are the most flexible (especially for smaller training groups). Some inflexibility may also be perceived by evaluators when adapting long-standing and previously successful trainings – changing needs may not be noticed in a timely manner. However, this risk could be mitigated by incorporating multi-level feedback mechanisms. Therefore, basing training offerings on the training program does not mean that changes or refinements to training needs cannot be accommodated.

In addition to the content and methods of the trainings, it is more challenging to add entirely new topics to the training program. This is especially true as the training program determines the workload of employees and the training budget, and topics must align with the agency's training strategy. However, interviewees found that the guidelines underlying the training strategy encompass many important topics, thus the most significant field needs are present in the training program. Nevertheless, the training budget is limiting – besides mandatory activities, there are very few resources available for additional trainings.

Perception of changes in training needs is supported by keeping abreast of developments and studies in the field at both EU and national levels, ongoing feedback collection, and evaluating the effectiveness of trainings. According to interviews, feedback mechanisms play a crucial role in the planning of trainings and the training program. The following methods are used for collecting feedback:

- Participants: gathering feedback during the training, for example, by raising hands; surveys (on-site, online after the training, six months after the training)
- Trainers: summaries of the trainings with observations and areas for improvement, discussions

- Agency employees: observations from trainings, feedback from participants and trainers during the training.

In addition to ongoing monitoring of trainings, a feedback summary seminar is held annually in the second half of the year. The seminar highlights the achievements of the trainings and identifies areas for further action. This also serves as the basis for creating the training program for the following year.

Module 2 - Trainers

How do trainers prepare and implement training activities for youth workers and leaders involved in the European youth programmes in particular in relation to the provider's instructions and their perception of youth workers and leaders' needs?

Based on the interviews, the trainers prepare the training of youth workers and youth leaders thoroughly by mapping the needs of the target group and following the guidance of the programme providers. Feedback is also solicited at different stages of the training process. They stress the practical nature of the training and the need to adapt the content to the expectations and needs of the participants. The objectives of the training are often developed in dialogue with the client and reflect changing focuses over time, such as the growing importance of digital competences. Feedback and the needs of the client are a priority for trainers in order to deliver high quality training. As a result, they also attach great importance to the preparation of the training, during which they select methods and approaches that are suited to the specific training objective. They also point out that, thanks to a well-designed youth work system and the small size of Estonia, it is also easy for them to maintain a network where they can communicate directly with youth workers to specify training needs.

Which aspects foster and hamper the trainers' abilities to prepare and implement training activities?

A strong professional network and participants' active involvement in the training design are positive aspects. The possibility to choose more specific training topics and methods within the framework provided by the Agency was also mentioned as a positive aspect. This allows the focus to be refined and the methods to be adapted on an ongoing basis during the training, depending on the participants.

Obstacles include technical challenges related to the competences of the trainees themselves and sometimes differences in expectations between trainers and clients. Expectations refer to the two parties' perception of the training process, which tended to be based on personality differences. However, the interviewees did not identify any significant barriers.

Do the contract-status of trainers and the programme strand in which they are holding the trainings influence the challenges, opportunities and support mechanisms they perceive?

The contractual status of trainers and the types of programmes (KA1 vs. TCA/NET) affect their perceived challenges and support mechanisms. Trainers directly linked to a national agency may receive more support and resources, while independent trainers may face greater resource constraints. Differences between programmes (KA1 vs. TCA/NET) also have an impact on training needs and contexts, according to interviewees.

How does the ETS Competence Model for Trainers relate to obstacles and support mechanisms perceived by trainers?

The ETS competency model is a tool for trainers, which in Estonia is reflected in several other development documents and guidelines. Some individual trainers have a course with the competency model, but its content is generally unknown to the interviewees. While the model is useful, its wider application and understanding is still in a developmental stage. Trainers acknowledge the potential of the model but see a need for greater awareness and practical application.

The focus group interviews revealed a variety of perspectives and approaches to the topic.

On the one hand, scepticism was expressed about the absolute value of professional standards and strategies, stressing that the development of the field does not happen on the basis of compliance with documents, but rather through practical and dynamic action with young people. It was pointed out that, while strategies can provide useful guidelines, they should be flexible and adapt to the actual evolution of the field. It was stressed that blind faith in documents can limit development and innovation in the field.

On the other hand, the professional standard was seen as a valuable tool for self-analysis and professional development. The importance of the professional standards in enhancing the professionalism of youth workers was recognised, noting that the standards set out principles and rules that youth workers should follow. However, it was stressed that young people's needs and evaluations should always come first, even if they are not fully in line with the professional standards. It was highlighted that there are also people working in the field who could benefit significantly from the professional standard, especially those who may not be committed to youth work in the long term.

This dynamic highlights an important point for discussion: how to achieve a balance between structured standards and rules and innovative and dynamic development in the field. The challenge for youth work practitioners and policy makers is to find ways to adapt and update documents to best support youth development and inclusion.

How are possible changes in the training needs perceived at the level of trainers? How are these addressed?

Training needs are constantly changing and trainers need to be ready to adapt quickly. Trainers are noticing an increasing demand for training in digital competences and inclusive practices. Digital competences refer to more specific skills related to specific applications and technologies, but also to a more general understanding of digital youth work. Inclusive practices are seen as those inclusive methods that are widespread in the youth field today and are constantly evolving. They emphasise the need to continuously collect feedback and to involve youth workers in the design of training to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. The ability to make on-going changes to the training in response to the wishes, needs and background of the participants was also considered important.

Other reflections and comments

In conclusion, the analysis suggests that deepening cooperation between trainers and youth workers, overcoming resource constraints, addressing technological challenges and making more effective use of competency frameworks are key factors that support the successful delivery and development of youth work training.

The analysis shows that close cooperation between trainers and youth workers is critical to ensuring the quality and relevance of training. It is also clear that resource constraints and technical challenges require constant attention and solutions. Effective use of the ETS

competency model and similar frameworks in the work of trainers can help to better define and develop the competences of youth workers, but this requires greater awareness and meaningful integration of training into these frameworks. In addition, it is important to understand that the training needs of the youth field are constantly changing, responding to societal trends and technological developments. Therefore, trainers need to be flexible and open to new approaches in the design and delivery of training. The emphasis on digital competences and inclusive practices reflects the broader need to update the skills of youth workers so that they can effectively support young people in an increasingly digitally integrated world. At the same time, an understanding of professional ethics and identity is essential to maintain the quality and credibility of youth work. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that deepening cooperation between trainers and youth workers, overcoming resource constraints, addressing technological challenges and making better use of competency frameworks are key factors for the successful delivery and development of training in youth work. It is also clear that the continuous adaptation of training content and approaches to changing needs is essential to ensure the professional development of youth workers and the quality of services for young people.

Module 3 – Youth workers

What training needs do youth workers and leaders within the European youth programmes assess themselves?

Based on the focus group interviews, youth workers and leaders highlighted a wide range of training needs, from practical skills such as project management and social media to more complex topics such as mental health, inclusion and future technologies (e.g. AI). It was also pointed out that the changing/changing life circumstances of young people and societal developments require youth workers to continuously self-develop and adapt.

How are possible changes in the training needs perceived at the different levels and how are these addressed?

The interviews showed that training needs have changed over time, reflecting societal changes and the needs of young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for mental health training, while aspects of digital transition and international cooperation require constant attention and innovation in training programmes.

What obstacles do youth workers and leaders face regarding their participation in trainings?

Barriers to participation in training include organisational and personal challenges, such as lack of time, financial constraints and geographical distance. The relevance and quality of the training also play a role in influencing the motivation of participants to take part.

Which training approaches do youth workers and leaders esteem appropriate for responding to their needs?

Practical, participant-driven training that provides concrete skills and knowledge is seen as appropriate by youth workers and leaders. Training that encourages networking and exchange of experience is also valued. It is important, however, that training courses allow time for networking and exchanging experiences.

How does the ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers relate to training needs expressed by youth workers and leaders?

The ETS competency model is partly known and its link with the training needs of youth workers is considered important. The interviews show that there is a need for greater awareness of ETS and the professional standard for youth workers in terms of the opportunities it offers for the professional development of youth workers.

Other reflections and comments

The interviews revealed that participants often do not distinguish, or are not very good at distinguishing, which of the trainings they attended were youth-related and organised or commissioned by the Agency. It is therefore not possible to say to what extent the ideas and feedback shared relate to youth programmes or other training.

It emerged from the interviews that, although there is a wide range of training courses available, they may not always meet the specific needs of youth workers. It was pointed out that information about training offers may arrive too late, which negatively impacts participation. In addition, it was mentioned that the quality of the content and delivery of training is critical in influencing the benefits of training and the satisfaction of participants. Interviewees felt that the introduction of a symbolic registration fee could help to counteract last-minute cancellations or no-shows.

The need for better evaluation of the impact of training was also stressed. Participants pointed out that the measurement of the impact of training and the collection of feedback should be organised in a way that reflects the actual benefits and satisfaction of participants, without being too focused on showing feedback in a positive way to secure funding. It also emerged from the interviews that when training youth workers and leaders, it is important to consider not only current needs but also future directions. This means that training programmes should be flexible and adapt to changing demands, including new technologies and societal changes. Finally, the need for greater cooperation between training providers, youth work organisations and donors were highlighted. Such cooperation would help to ensure that training programmes are relevant, accessible and meet the real needs of youth workers. In general, interviewees felt that the youth field in Estonia is well defined and that things run relatively smoothly compared to other countries.

During one of the interviews, generational differences and different perspectives were evident on some questions. Opposing views on online training and digital competences were largely divided by age and seniority. For example, older participants highlighted some shortcomings in the delivery of online training, which younger participants considered to be rather minor issues. In the second interview, however, age and seniority did not influence the ratings.

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals a number of important insights in relation to the preparation of training proposals, the delivery of training and participation in training. The views of the Agency, the trainers and the youth workers overlap on several issues. These include, for example, the emphasis on practical skills, the need for customization in the content of training and the importance of feedback mechanisms for continuous development. In general, the Agency and the trainers are satisfied with the training system (including asking for feedback, trusting each other) and youth workers also found that, in general, the training provided in Estonia is of high quality. However, there were some areas for improvement or aspects that deserve more attention.

The interviews with the Agency's representatives revealed a systematic approach to the preparation of training proposals. The descriptions show that all systemic training needs in the youth field are considered in the design of the training offer, through the coherence of EU and Estonian strategic documents and the objectives of the youth programmes. However, the Agency relies most heavily on the European Commission's guidelines and national youth development plans, thus ensuring consistency with European and national youth sector strategies. As Estonia has a professional standard for youth workers, which considers the expectations set out in the strategic documents and is similar in nature to ETS, the Agency tends to rely on the professional standard for youth workers, which is also better known among trainers and youth workers.

Participants in the study found that the education system for youth workers in Estonia is diverse and well-structured, offering both formal education in the field of youth work and non-formal training opportunities. Supplementary training effectively fills gaps for youth workers without formal education. Compared to other countries, youth work is considered well-developed in Estonia, and our youth sector workers are often seen as promoters of good practices and examples. Thus, within the broader training network, participants from Estonia are seen not only as recipients but also as providers and learners. However, there is awareness that individuals working in youth work in Estonia come from very diverse backgrounds in terms of age, work experience, and geographical location.

The diverse background of sector workers makes specialization in training crucial, based on different subfields of youth work and the prior experience of the workers. Therefore, according to interviews, it is crucial that the European Commission's guidelines for training programs and offered training allow for continued consideration of national specificities. While the agency and trainers emphasized the importance of trainers being able to choose specific topics and methods, and trainers emphasized ongoing adjustments to training based on participants' backgrounds and needs, interviews with training participants revealed some discrepancies between supply and demand. Roughly half of the youth workers felt that the training often remained too superficial, lacked practicality, focused too much on providing basic knowledge, tried to target all youth workers at once, etc., resulting in them not always meeting expectations or having the desired impact. Trainers did not mention having dilemmas about the level of detail to cover or how to provide new knowledge to beginners and advanced participants. Nor were there any indications of guidelines from the agency in this regard.

Based on interviews, it is reasonable to rely on a training plan when offering training. On the one hand, this allows for a more even distribution of the agency's and trainers' workload and training budget. However, sharing the training plan would also help target groups better accommodate training in their schedules and prioritize participation in specific training sessions if needed. Ideally, there could be a national public training plan covering various trainers' training programs: this would help avoid duplication, support the provision of more specialized training, simplify training marketing, assist the agency, trainers, and target groups in scheduling and setting priorities. Interviews also suggest that awareness of the diversity of

training and trainers would increase among target groups, freeing up resources to order more relevant external training for employees. Namely, it emerged that several organizations order training without knowing exactly what free training is available. However, all interviews showed that the training plan should allow for flexibility in adding new important topics, specifying the focus of planned training sessions, adjusting training based on feedback, etc., to better meet the needs of target groups.

In addition to the training topic, representatives of both the agency, trainers, and trainees consider training quality important (emphasized most by youth workers), as well as the methods used, practicality, the volume of the training, and the opportunity for networking and exchanging experiences. While the agency described volume through the reasonableness of travel time to the training venue, youth workers consistently pointed out that too short training sessions do not allow for specific topics to be covered in depth or enough practical examples to be provided.

According to all interviews, the selection and impact of training are also influenced by the trainers' competence, experience in the field, and willingness and ability to present the topic considering the specific needs of the target group. Depending on the type of training, according to agency representatives, trainers have free rein in selecting methods, as confirmed by interviews with trainers. According to interviews with trainers, trainers prepare thoroughly for training for youth workers and leaders, mapping the needs of the target group, following program providers' guidelines, and considering feedback at various stages of the training process. However, interviews with youth workers indicated that they often do not feel a thorough preparation and consideration of their needs—training remains superficial and impractical, even for training sessions tailored for them or their members. About half of the interviewees held this opinion.

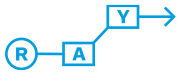
In one interview with trainers, it was also mentioned that there is an increasing expectation for trainers to act as mentors. This was confirmed by interviews with youth workers: there is an expectation for very specific-practical examples and answers to questions and problem areas raised. Interviews with trainers showed that involving practitioners and industry specialists depends largely on the trainer's network and the existing budget and time. In one interview with trainers, it was stated that it is not always possible to involve sector experts due to their busy schedules, and they try to manage on their own. The study also showed that involving practitioners could be valuable but would greatly increase training costs.

Challenges and opportunities vary in each group of participants. Agency representatives mainly focus on following guidelines and resource constraints, while trainers focus on preparation methods and adapting training to participants' needs. Youth workers value the relevance, accessibility, and quality of training programs. Understanding these different perspectives is crucial in developing comprehensive training programs that effectively meet the needs of all participants.

Recommendations and research desideratum

The annually compiled training plan for the youth sector allows for a certain flexibility, less so for international training and more so for domestic training. Once a year, feedback is gathered in the form of a seminar from various stakeholders (participants, trainers, agency staff) regarding the training provided, based on which proposals are made for next year's training plan. Also, where possible, the wishes expressed in the training registration forms are considered. However, for several training sessions, both the agency and trainers feel that the number of participants remains modest, and according to participants' feedback, the training often stays superficial or theoretical. This suggests room for improvement in the content of the training and reaching potential participants.

- Training should be as practical, specific, and comprehensive as possible.
- Feedback is collected in various ways about the training, but participants lack an overview of whether and how their feedback is considered, and trainers did not perceive or mention that the agency solicited feedback from them.
- Networking and exchanging experiences are an important part of the training. Therefore, activities that promote networking and experience sharing should be carefully planned when organizing training, especially to involve more reserved participants.
- Although more comprehensive and longer face-to-face training sessions are generally preferred, very practical digital training sessions lasting a couple of hours, focusing on specific activities or tools (such as how to use Canva or record a podcast), were mentioned as an alternative.
- Agency representatives understand the importance of training, and according to interviews, take all these aspects and feedback into account. According to trainers, the training meets the needs of the target group. However, according to training participants, the training often remains superficial and does not fully meet their needs. Therefore, closer cooperation between providers, trainers, and youth sector workers should be promoted to ensure the relevance, practicality, and responsiveness of training programs to constantly changing needs. Managing the expectations of trainees is also important: when presenting training opportunities, it should be clarified what constraints or opportunities the agency has in planning training sessions.
- Participants value the development of skills necessary for their work, such as using Excel or reaching target groups. Specific topics related to youth work or the E+ and ESC programs were not directly raised. Therefore, to support the development of the youth sector and improve the quality of E+ and ESC projects, smarter ways should be found to combine the general needs of the target groups with those of the youth sector and E+ and ESC programs. Simply marketing training opportunities narrowly may not help the target group understand where and how they could use skills acquired outside of youth programs. • The problem is that those whose competencies need the most development often do not attend training because they do not recognize themselves as the target audience for training, do not consider certain competencies important, or cannot take time off from work for training (e.g., due to lack of substitutes). Therefore, ways should be found to reach those whom agency representatives and trainers believe need training but who do not recognize or acknowledge it themselves or for some reason cannot attend training.
- Further research should be conducted to identify emerging trends and challenges in the youth work sector (especially considering external influences such as technological and social developments) to react to training needs as proactively as possible.
- If possible, a national youth sector training plan covering all training providers could be created. On the one hand, this would help target groups better anticipate which training will be offered soon. On the other hand, it would broaden the perspective on training opportunities, help create an understanding of the need for certain training sessions and increase the potential for cooperation between both trainers and training providers.



- Information about training sessions (including specific learning outcomes and the level of detail in covering the topic) should be disseminated at least a month in advance to give people a better understanding of the suitability of the training and a greater opportunity to accommodate it in their schedule. Creating and maintaining a public training plan would support reaching target groups more efficiently.