All on board

# DOS AND DON'TS

## CURRENT CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## *Updated version after the testing phase*

**ALL ON BOARD:**
**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN YOUTH WORK**
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# INTRODUCTION

Engaging young participants and maintaining their involvement throughout the lifecycle of youth activities is a crucial aspect of effective youth work. This research aims to delve into the strategies employed by organizations involved in youth work to achieve and sustain high levels of engagement among their young participants. By exploring their approaches, challenges, and strategies for addressing those challenges, this study seeks to identify successful strategies that contribute to meaningful youth engagement.

This research aims to provide an accurate depiction of the various challenges related to youth engagement encountered by different organizations in the field of youth work, and of the strategies employed to overcome these difficulties. The subject is further divided into three areas of research.

The first objective of this research is to identify the various approaches used by organizations to involve young people in the lifecycle of their activities. Understanding the methods employed to attract and retain youth participants is essential in designing effective programs and initiatives that cater to their needs and interests.

The second objective is to explore the issues faced by organizations when it comes to inconsistent youth participation. Recognizing the challenges that hinder sustained engagement can provide valuable insights into the underlying factors contributing to the fluctuating levels of participation among young individuals.

Lastly, this research aims to identify the strategies employed by organizations to address these challenges and examine their effectiveness. By analyzing the approaches used by successful organizations, valuable lessons can be learned about how to overcome barriers to youth engagement, ensuring that young participants remain actively involved in youth work initiatives.

The result of this research provides the basis for the next phase of the project. During the next step, the insights gained from the research will be examined, built upon, and turned into a cohesive set of strategies that will provide organizations active in youth work with an effective range of measures to ensure a consistent and sufficient level of youth engagement.

The sample for this research consisted of 26 organizations involved in youth work from 11 different European countries, plus the partner organizations of this project themselves. The participant organizations were selected with the aim of obtaining a varied sample in terms of size, age, main field of activity, urban/rural organizations, and country of activity. The wide range of organizations included in the study enriches the research results with insights from very different contexts and experiences.

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative research approach has been employed in this study. The primary method used has been in-depth interviews with individuals working for organizations involved in youth work. This approach provided rich and detailed insights into the strategies, challenges, and solutions employed by these organizations to engage and retain youth participants.

The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions, allowing the respondents to provide detailed and nuanced responses. This approach encouraged participants to share their experiences, insights, and personal viewpoints related to youth engagement. The open-ended nature of the questions enabled the exploration of various themes and a comprehensive analysis of the data.

The metadata of the interviews is available to the general public on the website of the project. The transcriptions of the interviews are the primary data source for this research. They have been analyzed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights from the interview data. This approach involves coding and categorizing the data to identify key findings and draw meaningful conclusions.

By employing qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, this research aims to gain a deep understanding of the approaches used by organizations involved in youth work to engage and retain young participants. It will also shed light on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to address those challenges. Through this rigorous methodology, the study aims to contribute valuable insights and knowledge to the field of youth work and inform the development of effective engagement strategies for youth organizations.

# DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY ORGANIZATIONS

Youth work serves as a crucial catalyst for empowering young individuals and promoting positive transformation in society. However, organizations dedicated to this mission often grapple with multifaceted challenges that influence their capacity to maintain optimal levels of youth engagement. These issues encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from resource constraints to navigating an ever-evolving landscape. This section, thoroughly examines the primary obstacles confronted by youth organizations, gaining insights into the barriers that impede their ability to effectively engage and support young participants throughout their developmental journey. By understanding these challenges, we can proactively seek innovative solutions and implement strategic approaches to address them, ultimately ensuring the enduring impact, inclusivity, and sustainability of youth work initiatives.

## INADEQUATE SELECTION PROCESSES

The implication of young people in youth-centered activities is the result of a process where both parts assess the idoneity of the other for helping them achieve their goals. This process ranges from informal conversations and a lack of an explicit agreement to a fully developed and explicit selection process encompassing an application process, one or more interviews, the signature of a formal agreement, etcetera.

When this process is done on the basis of insufficient or incorrect information, it may generate wrong expectations about the nature, results, and conditions of the collaboration. Youngsters who find out that the activities they are taking part in do not correspond to their expectations often feel frustrated, and inclined to discontinue their participation in them.

This problem seems to be present among big and small organizations alike, although the research shows that it is less prevalent the bigger an organization is. Smaller organizations reported having access to a smaller pool of candidates to choose from, and therefore had to "settle" for less-than-idoneous collaborators.

# RIGID PARTICIPATION MODES

Youth participation in youth-centered activities offers the participants a great learning opportunity in multiple fields, such as interpersonal and managerial skills, cultural awareness, language proficiency, field-specific knowledge, etc. This self-development process benefits heavily from cross-sectoriality and access to different roles and domains.

Throughout the research, several of the interviewed organizations mentioned the lack of flexibility in the ways of involving young people as a reason for discontinuing their participation. These rigid modes often fail to accommodate the diverse needs, interests, and availability of the youth, hindering their active involvement.

This limited flexibility from the organizations' side comes from the offer of only a narrow set of participation options, such as regular meetings or structured programs. While these modes may suit some young individuals, they might not align with the preferences or schedules of others. This lack of flexibility can deter potential participants who may have valuable contributions to offer but are unable to commit to rigid participation requirements.

Lacking the flexibility to adapt to the youth' interest and needs also may lead to neglecting individual passions and talents. The predetermined participation modes may not be well suited to allow the youngsters to explore and develop their interests and skills, ultimately diminishing their motivation to engage actively. Furthermore, it can lead to boredom and loss of interest in the organizations' activities.

Finally, rigid participation modes may be specially detrimental to the inclusion of marginalized groups who face additional barriers to involvement. For instance, those with disabilities, socio-economic challenges, or other specific needs may find it challenging to fit into the predetermined structures, leading to a lack of representation and diversity within the activities.

To address this problem, organizations must prioritize adaptability and inclusivity in their youth engagement strategies. By offering diverse and flexible participation options, they can attract a broader range of young individuals and ensure that their unique skills and interests are valued. Adopting a person-centered approach that considers the individual needs and preferences of the youth will foster a sense of ownership and commitment, resulting in more sustainable and meaningful participation.

# LOSS OF RELEVANCE

For an organization, sharing interests, approaches, and goals with the youth they work with is not a given, and it's a process that has to be carefully monitored and taken care of. What worked in the past may not work anymore, or not work with different people. During the research, some organization mentioned past experiences of losing relevance and touch with the youth they worked with.

One of the primary reasons for losing relevance is failing to evaluate and adapt the organization's approach to youth engagement. If organizations stick to traditional methods and fail to adapt to the changing needs and preferences of the youth, they may become disconnected from their target group. The rapid evolution of technology and communication further exacerbates this issue, as the youth gravitate towards innovative and tech-savvy platforms for engagement.

Organizations that fail to have diverse and representative leadership may struggle to resonate with a broad spectrum of young individuals. If the decision-making processes within an organization do not reflect the demographics and concerns of the youth they serve, they risk alienating potential participants and perpetuating a disconnect.

This problem is specially grave for organizations that do not actively and meaningfully involve young individuals in the planning and decision-making aspects of their programs, as they may overlook their interests and priorities. Engaging the youth in co-creating initiatives can ensure that the offerings remain relevant, appealing, and responsive to their needs. In this sense, organizations that fail to have a diverse and representative leadership are at a greater risk, as they may struggle to resonate with a broad spectrum of young individuals. If the decision-making processes within an organization do not reflect the demographics and concerns of the youth they serve, they risk alienating potential participants and perpetuating a disconnect.

# TIME OF GREAT CHANGES IN LIFE

Youth is a hectic period of life in which people's lives can significantly change in a relatively short time. During this phase, young people face various transitions and demands, which can lead to fluctuations in their commitment and engagement. Some of the main reasons cited during the research were:

- Academic responsibilities. As young people pursue their education, academic responsibilities become a significant aspect of their lives. The pressure to excel in studies, meet deadlines, and manage coursework can be overwhelming. Balancing academic commitments with extracurricular activities, including youth work initiatives, can become challenging, leading to varying levels of motivation and participation.
- Career and employment. For older youth, entering the workforce or exploring career opportunities may consume a considerable amount of time and energy. The demands of building a career, attending job interviews, and working part-time jobs can leave little room for consistent engagement in youth activities, affecting their motivation to stay involved.
- Personal development and exploration. Youth is often a time of personal growth and exploration for young individuals. They may be exploring new hobbies, relationships, and interests. During this time, their attention may shift away from certain youth work activities, affecting their motivation to participate consistently.
- Social and family commitments. Young people are often engaged in various social and family commitments. These include spending time with friends, attending family events, and participating in community activities. These commitments can sometimes clash with the schedule of youth work initiatives, leading to decreased motivation to participate regularly and aversion to engage in long-term commitments.

To address this challenge, organizations must recognize and understand the pressures and demands young individuals face during the hectic period. Offering flexible scheduling options for youth activities can accommodate the dynamic nature of young people's lives. This may include providing alternative meeting times or online participation options to cater to their changing commitments.

## INADEQUATE INCORPORATION OF DIGITAL METHODS OF PARTICIPATION

The organization's adaptation to virtual modes of participation can be a double-edged sword, posing challenges if not appropriately balanced. As technology advances, virtual engagement options have become increasingly prevalent in youth work initiatives. While embracing virtual participation can offer numerous benefits, both neglecting and overemphasizing this mode can lead to problems impacting youth engagement.

Neglecting virtual engagement in today's world leads to limited reach, restricting the organization's reach to a broader audience. Young individuals who may face geographical, logistical, or time constraints might find it challenging to engage in on-site activities. As a result, the organization may miss out on the valuable contributions of these potential participants. I can also lead to the exclusion of more tech-inclined youth who prefer virtual encounters. The reluctance to explore online modes of participation may also put additional pressure on the organization's resources, as they tend to be significantly cheaper than on-site alternatives.

On the other hand, an overemphasis on virtual engagement may result in digital fatigue. Constantly being online for various activities can lead to burnout and decreased motivation to engage in additional virtual programs or initiatives, as well as miss out on the irreplaceable benefits of face-to-face personal interactions. For some young individuals, building meaningful connections and a sense of community might be more challenging in a virtual setting, affecting their overall engagement.

## LIMITED RESOURCES

The organization's limited material means can significantly impact youth engagement in various ways. When an organization lacks sufficient financial resources and material support, it faces challenges in offering attractive and comprehensive youth work initiatives.

With constrained financial means, the organization may struggle to design and implement engaging and diverse programs. Activities, workshops, and events that require materials, equipment, or venues may be compromised, leading to less appealing offerings for young participants. The organization's limited material means may be especially grievous for young individuals from low-income backgrounds. Higher costs associated with participation, such as fees or travel expenses, can deter economically disadvantaged youth from engaging in the organization's activities.

They can also limit the resources invested in maintaining and developing connections with the youth, such as open doors events, team-buildings, or simply allocating time and effort to an info center and to stay in touch with the youngsters.

A lack of financial resources may limit the scope of activities and interventions the organization can offer. This could lead to a lack of diversity in programs, hindering the organization's ability to cater to the varied interests and needs of young participants. It can, in turn, lead to stagnation and burnout, as the organization may face difficulties in introducing new and innovative initiatives, potentially leading to program stagnation and diminished motivation among youth participants. Without the means to explore fresh ideas, the organization may struggle to remain relevant and inspiring.

# STRATEGIES THAT WORK

A lack of financial resources may limit the scope of activities and interventions the organization can offer. This could lead to a lack of diversity in programs, hindering the organization's ability to cater to the varied interests and needs of young participants. It can, in turn, lead to stagnation and burnout, as the organization may face difficulties in introducing new and innovative initiatives, potentially leading to program stagnation and diminished motivation among youth participants. Without the means to explore fresh ideas, the organization may struggle to remain relevant and inspiring.

## GIVE ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Granting decision-making power to the youth can have a transformative impact on their engagement in youth work initiatives. By involving young individuals in the decision-making process, organizations create an environment of empowerment and ownership, fostering increased motivation and sustained commitment.

When young people are given the opportunity to make decisions that directly impact the programs and activities they participate in, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. This ownership instills a deeper connection and commitment to the organization and its mission, as they feel valued and recognized for their contributions.

It also ensures that programs and activities are more relevant and aligned with their interests and needs. As young individuals actively shape the initiatives, they can tailor them to reflect their diverse backgrounds, preferences, and aspirations. This personalization creates a sense of belonging and fosters a stronger emotional connection to the organization.

Empowered with decision-making authority, young participants become more motivated and proactive in their engagement. They are more likely to take the initiative, propose new ideas, and contribute actively to the success of the initiatives. This heightened level of engagement fuels a positive cycle of motivation, as their contributions are acknowledged and encouraged.

# GIVE ROOM TO COMMIT MISTAKES

Providing young individuals with the space to commit mistakes is a vital aspect of fostering deeper and more sustained engagement in youth work initiatives. Encouraging a culture that embraces mistakes as opportunities for growth builds confidence, encourages creativity, and nurtures resilience. By viewing mistakes as valuable learning experiences, young participants become more motivated, accountable, and invested in the organization's initiatives. Ultimately, an organization that supports youngsters through their journey of learning and development creates an environment where youth engagement thrives, leading to positive outcomes for both the individuals and the organization as a whole.

It is especially useful for building confidence. They learn that taking risks and trying new approaches is an essential part of personal growth and development. As they witness their capacity to learn from mistakes and improve, their self-assurance increases, encouraging further engagement in youth work initiatives.

Embracing mistakes also nurtures a culture of exploration and creativity. Young individuals feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and experimenting with different solutions. This culture of creativity sparks innovation and encourages young participants to actively contribute their unique perspectives, ultimately enriching the organization's initiatives.

Finally, understanding mistakes as a part of the learning process cultivates a supportive and non-judgmental community within the organization. Young participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and seeking help from peers and mentors. This sense of camaraderie fosters a supportive network that encourages consistent engagement and long-lasting connections.

## CULTIVATE A SENSE OF BELONGING

Cultivating a sense of belonging among young participants is crucial for enhancing their engagement and commitment to the organization's initiatives. To achieve this, organizations focus on creating a group identity and being transparent about their activities. By establishing a shared mission and set of values, young individuals feel a sense of purpose and alignment with the

organization's goals. Utilizing symbols and traditions unique to the organization reinforces a distinct group identity, fostering solidarity and connection among participants.

Transparency plays a vital role in building trust and understanding. Open communication about decisions, challenges, and successes makes young individuals feel valued and respected as part of the community. Involving them in decision-making and organizational planning demonstrates that their opinions are valued, increasing their sense of ownership and commitment.

Engaging in shared experiences, such as collaborative projects and team-building activities, further strengthens the sense of belonging among young participants. Working together towards common goals promotes a feeling of unity and camaraderie. Organizing retreats allows them to bond outside of regular programs, creating a deeper connection and a more supportive environment.

Mentorship and support play a vital role in nurturing a sense of belonging. Establishing mentorship programs within the organization provides guidance and encouragement from experienced members. Personalized support that addresses the unique needs and challenges of young individuals creates a more inclusive and supportive environment.

In conclusion, creating a sense of belonging through group identity and transparency in the organization's inner workings is essential for enhancing youth engagement. When young individuals feel a strong connection to the organization, they become more motivated, committed, and invested in its initiatives, leading to positive outcomes for both the individuals and the organization as a whole.

## PROVIDE LONG-TERM BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATION

Providing long-term benefits is a powerful strategy for maintaining high levels of youth engagement in organizations involved in youth work. When young individuals perceive that their involvement offers meaningful and lasting advantages, they are more likely to stay committed and invested in the organization's initiatives. Two key approaches that contribute to long-term engagement are connecting these benefits with their personal aspirations and setting learning goals with the youth.

Firstly, aligning the organization's programs with the personal interests and passions of young individuals demonstrates that their unique aspirations and talents are valued. When they see the organization as a platform for pursuing their personal goals and interests, they feel a stronger connection and relevance to the initiatives. This alignment motivates them to stay engaged, as their involvement becomes a means of personal development.

Secondly, empowering young individuals to set their own learning goals empowers them to take ownership of their growth. By being actively involved in the goal-setting process, they become more committed to achieving these objectives, fostering sustained engagement. Tailoring the learning experience to individual participants ensures a customized approach, making the organization's programs more appealing and impactful.

Furthermore, promoting a culture of lifelong learning within the organization reinforces the sense of continuous growth among young individuals. Emphasizing skill development and offering opportunities for both personal and professional growth demonstrates the organization's commitment to their holistic development. As young individuals recognize the organization as a place of learning and growth, they are more motivated to remain engaged in the long term.

In addition to personal growth, the organization can foster lasting relationships and networks among young participants. By facilitating connections and friendships, the organization becomes a community where individuals find belonging and support. Engaging former participants as mentors or involving them in alumni programs further strengthens the organization's connection with current youth. Positive interactions with people who have benefited from their involvement encourage young individuals to remain engaged and invested.

In conclusion, connecting with personal aspirations and setting learning goals with the youth are fundamental in sustaining high levels of youth engagement. Providing long-term benefits, fostering continuous growth, and building supportive networks create an environment where young individuals are motivated, committed, and dedicated to the organization's initiatives. As they recognize the lasting advantages of their involvement, they become more invested in their journey of personal and professional development, leading to positive outcomes for both the individuals and the organization as a whole.

# STAY RELEVANT

Staying relevant for the youth is essential for organizations involved in youth work to maintain high levels of engagement and impact. By understanding the target group and their interests, being flexible and open to feedback, diversifying activities, and adopting a youth-centered approach, organizations can effectively meet the evolving needs of young individuals.

To remain relevant, organizations must invest time in understanding the diverse interests, preferences, and aspirations of the youth they serve. Conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews can provide valuable insights into the topics, issues, and activities that resonate most with young participants. By staying attuned to their interests, organizations can tailor their programs and initiatives accordingly.

Embracing flexibility is crucial in adapting to the changing dynamics of youth engagement. Organizations should be open to receiving feedback from young individuals, allowing them to express their opinions, suggestions, and concerns. Listening and responding to their feedback demonstrate that their voices are valued, fostering a sense of trust and partnership.

Offering a diverse range of activities and programs helps cater to the varied interests and preferences of young participants. By incorporating a mix of educational, recreational, cultural, and social activities, organizations can engage a broader audience and appeal to a wider range of youth.

Placing the youth at the center of decision-making and program design is paramount to staying relevant. Involving young individuals in the co-creation of initiatives ensures that their perspectives and needs are considered. A youth-centered approach fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, making participants feel that the organization genuinely represents their interests.

Regularly evaluating the impact and outcomes of programs allows organizations to assess their effectiveness and relevance. Gathering data and insights from participants and stakeholders helps identify areas for improvement and informs future planning.

In conclusion, staying relevant for the youth is essential for organizations in the realm of youth work to maintain meaningful engagement and positive

outcomes. By understanding the target group, being flexible and open to feedback, diversifying activities, and adopting a youth-centered approach, organizations can effectively address the evolving needs and interests of young individuals. Continuously evaluating and adapting programs ensures that the organization remains relevant and impactful in the lives of the youth it serves.

# MINDING THE ENVIRONMENT

Creating a thriving and impactful environment for youth work involves multiple interconnected aspects that require deeper exploration.

1. Establishing Connections with Other Actors: Collaboration with various actors, such as other youth organizations, schools, government agencies, and businesses, can significantly enhance the scope and effectiveness of youth work initiatives. By partnering with these organizations, youth-focused entities can pool their resources, expertise, and networks to create more comprehensive and well-rounded programs for young individuals. For example, partnerships with schools can facilitate after-school programs or academic support, while collaborations with businesses can offer mentorship opportunities or job training.

2. Engaging Stakeholders and Understanding Their Needs: Engaging stakeholders, including parents, teachers, community leaders, and young individuals themselves, is crucial for gaining valuable insights into the specific needs and aspirations of the target group. Through open dialogues, surveys, and focus groups, youth organizations can understand the challenges young individuals face and identify areas where additional support is required. Understanding stakeholders' perspectives enables organizations to design programs that are responsive and relevant to the community's needs.

3. Engaging Stakeholders in Decision-Making: Involving stakeholders in the decision-making process not only fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment within the community but also ensures that initiatives align with the community's values and priorities. By soliciting input and feedback from stakeholders, organizations can co-create programs that have a higher chance of success and acceptance. This participatory approach strengthens community buy-in and commitment, resulting in increased engagement and sustainability of youth work efforts.

4. Building Supportive Networks: Creating a supportive network of stakeholders dedicated to youth development amplifies the impact of youth work initiatives. Establishing relationships based on trust and collaboration fosters mutual support and shared resources. For instance, businesses may provide funding, expertise, or job opportunities, while community leaders can advocate for youth-related policies. A strong network also facilitates knowledge sharing and best practices, benefiting all parties involved and fostering a sense of collective responsibility towards youth development.

5. Advocating for Youth Issues: Engaging stakeholders in discussions about youth issues and advocating for policies that support youth development elevates the importance of youth work in the broader community. By raising awareness about the challenges faced by young individuals and the positive impact of youth work, organizations can mobilize support and resources for their initiatives. Advocacy efforts may involve awareness campaigns, media engagement, and collaboration with policymakers to prioritize youth-related initiatives.

6. Promoting Sustainable Approaches: Minding the environment in which youth work happens also involves adopting sustainable practices. Organizations can incorporate environmental awareness into their programs, encouraging young individuals to become environmentally conscious and responsible citizens. By integrating sustainable principles into activities, organizations demonstrate a commitment to long-term impact, instilling in young individuals a sense of environmental stewardship and a desire to make a positive difference in the world.

In conclusion, creating a thriving environment for youth work requires comprehensive and strategic efforts that encompass establishing collaborations, understanding stakeholder needs, engaging stakeholders in decision-making, building supportive networks, advocating for youth issues, and promoting sustainability. By embracing these interconnected approaches, organizations can ensure a holistic and impactful youth work ecosystem that empowers young individuals and fosters positive change in their lives and communities.

## RECOGNIZE GOOD WORK

Recognizing and appreciating the good work of young participants is a powerful tool for maintaining high levels of youth engagement. When young

individuals feel valued and acknowledged for their efforts and contributions, it reinforces their sense of belonging and motivates them to stay actively involved in youth work initiatives.

Examples of recognition that were mentioned during the research include celebrating successes, expanding the responsibilities of those people, organizing awards ceremonies, etcetera.

## CREATE SPECIFIC ORGANISMS FOR YOUTH

For larger organizations, and for those not solely active in youth work, creating specific boards or organisms for youth within the organization can be a transformative approach to enhancing youth engagement and empowerment. These dedicated bodies offer young individuals a platform to have a direct influence on the organization's decision-making processes and initiatives.

Having a dedicated board or organism for youth ensures that their voices and perspectives are at the forefront of decision-making. Young individuals can actively contribute ideas, propose initiatives, and influence the direction of the organization, leading to more relevant and impactful programs. They take pride in being valued members of the organization and feel motivated to contribute their best efforts to its success.

Youth boards ensure that the diverse needs and interests of young individuals are represented and advocated for within the organization. This fosters a more inclusive and equitable environment where all voices are heard and considered, and create a close-knit community of young individuals who share common goals and aspirations. This sense of camaraderie enhances engagement, as participants support and inspire each other throughout their involvement in youth work initiatives.

# A TALE OF TWO ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout the research, it has been noticed that both the challenges faced and the strategies employed are significantly different for small and large organizations. Small organizations are usually at low risk of losing touch with the youth, or of failing to incorporate them into their activities. They face, however, issues derived from their lower resources and increased difficulties for diversifying their activities, providing long term opportunities for young people, and creating a strong group spirit.

At the same time, the mitigation strategies at their disposal are also vastly different, as they are usually conditioned by the resources and scope of the organizations. Small organizations typically have a harder time engaging a large number of stakeholders or having enough resources to spare to properly fostering relations with the youth. They are also usually less able to explore new fields of action or activity types that may require additional resources, and to offer significant growth opportunities within the organization.

# CONCLUSION

This research has analyzed the various challenges and responses to different aspects of effective youth engagement. By examining the strategies employed, the challenges faced, and the successful approaches adopted by these organizations, it offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to meaningful and sustainable youth participation.

One of the primary findings of this research is the significance of aligning the interests and objectives of youth with those of the organization. An interest mismatch can lead to tension and disengagement, underscoring the importance of a thorough selection process that ensures mutual suitability and expectation alignment. Moreover, the research highlights the critical role of fostering a sense of belonging among young participants. By creating a group identity, being transparent about the organization's inner workings, and empowering youth through decision-making and room for making mistakes, organizations can strengthen their participants' commitment and motivation to actively engage in youth work initiatives.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of staying relevant in a rapidly changing environment. Organizations must understand the target group, be flexible, open to feedback, and diversify their activities to cater to the evolving needs and interests of young individuals truly. The research also sheds light on the challenges posed by limited material means for youth organizations. Striking a balance between resource constraints and providing meaningful support is crucial to ensuring accessibility and effective engagement of young participants.

In addition, creating collaborative networks with other actors and engaging stakeholders emerges as a powerful approach to enrich the youth work ecosystem. Advocating for youth issues and adopting sustainable practices further solidify the organization's impact and commitment to positive change. By recognizing and celebrating the good work of young individuals, organizations can reinforce their sense of value and belonging, contributing to higher levels of sustained engagement.

In summary, the findings from this research offer valuable guidance and knowledge to practitioners and organizations involved in youth work. Understanding the complexities and interplay of various factors influencing youth engagement can lead to more effective and impactful programs and initiatives.

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN LONG-TERM ACTIVITIES: AN OVERVIEW

This methodology is the result of the consortium work within the cooperation project All on board. The content is the creation of the partners, and it does not reflect the opinion of the European Union.

## CHAPTER 1: REALITY CHECK: WHO IS GEN Z?

This chapter explores the characteristics, demographics, and attitudes of Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennials, focusing on their engagement in contemporary societal issues. Gen Z, born between 1996 and 2010, and Millennials, preceding Gen Z, represent two distinct generational cohorts whose identities have been shaped by unique circumstances, such as the digital age, climate anxiety, changing financial landscapes, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter delves into their diverse backgrounds, cultural influences, and attitudes toward key global challenges. By examining these aspects, we aim to provide insights into the engagement of young people in today's world.

### WHO IS GEN Z?

Gen Z encompasses individuals born between 1996 and 2010, and their collective identity has been significantly influenced by several key factors, including the digital era, climate concerns, shifting economic landscapes, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the generational timeline, Gen Z currently stands as the second-youngest cohort, with millennials preceding them and Generation Alpha following. As with any generation, the behaviors and attitudes of Gen Z have been shaped by the unique circumstances in which they have grown up. Today's young people have reached adulthood against the backdrop of

looming climate challenges, pandemic- related lockdowns, and economic uncertainties.

Notably, the earliest members of Gen Z were born during a period when the internet was just beginning to achieve widespread adoption. Consequently, they are often referred to as "digital natives," representing the first generation to experience the internet as an integral part of their daily lives. It's important to recognize the wide age range within this generation, encompassing those who have established careers and mortgages, as well as those who are still in their preteen years.

## WHO COMPRISES GEN Z?

In Europe, the proportion of young people within the population is decreasing when compared to the global context. In the European Union (EU-27), the combined percentage of individuals aged 29 and under in the total population witnessed a decline over the years, decreasing from 38.1% in 1999 (excluding Croatia) to 34.2% in 2009, and further dropping to 31.8% by 2019. In contrast, this age group's share of the global population was considerably higher, standing at 49% as of July 2019.

Significant disparities exist among EU member countries regarding the share of children and young people in their populations. Ireland emerges as the most youthful Member State, with individuals under the age of 29 constituting nearly 40% of the total population at the beginning of 2019. Conversely, Italy had the lowest percentage, with only 28.3% of its population consisting of children and young people. On a regional level within the EU, even more pronounced differences can be observed, particularly in regions in eastern Germany, northern Italy, and Spain, where the presence of children and young people is notably lower.

Although the total population of the EU-27 is projected to continue growing until 2026, reaching a peak of 449.3 million, the proportion of children and young people within this population is anticipated to decrease from 31.8% in 2019 to 28.6% in 2052. Beyond 2052, there is a marginal projected increase in the share of children and young people, but it is expected to remain below the 2019 level until 2080.

# SOME FEATURES OF THE GEN Z-ERS

## Education and mindset

Gen Z individuals are characterized as highly educated and pragmatic, possessing unique qualities that distinguish them from previous generations. Numerous surveys, primarily conducted in English-speaking regions and often for commercial purposes, have yielded a consensus on their defining traits.

In contrast to Millennials, who are often described as self-centered, entitled, idealistic, creative, and dependent, Gen Z stands out for their self-awareness, persistence, realism, innovation, and self-reliance. They are proportionally recognized as the best-educated cohort and are known for their liberal mindset and openness to emerging societal trends. Many argue that their core identity revolves around a quest for truth, encompassing the understanding, connection, and expression of diverse individual truths.

Originally known as the "iGeneration" due to their upbringing alongside iPhones and iPads, Gen Z is the first to be labeled as digital natives. This digital upbringing significantly influences their behavior. They rely heavily on social media to stay informed about current events, place a strong emphasis on personal health and environmental well-being, and exhibit a heightened susceptibility to digital advertising and financial services compared to older generations. Furthermore, they display a preference for interactive platforms such as webchats and smart booking systems over traditional vehicle ownership for travel purposes.

## Cultural diversity and socio-economic status

Within the European Union (EU), Gen Z is marked by remarkable cultural diversity in terms of their origins. For instance, Luxembourg stands out as an exemplar, boasting the highest share of foreign-born children among the 0-14 age group within the EU in 2019. One-fifth of this age group in Luxembourg was born outside the national territory, with 13.9% hailing from other EU Member States and 6.6% from non-EU countries. This pattern exhibits significant disparities between eastern and western EU nations.

In contrast, Ireland recorded a 12.0% share of foreign-born children (with no further breakdown available), whereas Sweden reported 1.6% of children born in another Member State and a notable 7.8% born outside the EU, the highest in the EU, resulting in a total of 9.4% of children being foreign-born. Meanwhile, countries like Croatia and Czechia registered lower percentages, with 0.7% and 1.1% of foreign-born children, respectively.

Regarding young adults aged 15-29, Luxembourg topped the list in 2019 with the highest share of foreign-born individuals at 41.9%, followed by Cyprus, Malta, Austria, and Sweden, each reporting more than one-fifth of young people as foreign-born. The highest percentages of non-EU born young individuals were observed in Sweden, Spain, and Luxembourg. Conversely, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Latvia recorded the lowest shares of foreign-born young people, ranging from 1.4% to 2.5% of the total age group.

In terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, Gen Z faces greater challenges related to intergenerational earnings mobility, often described as "sticky floors and ceilings." Over the decades, OECD countries have witnessed a trend of diminishing mobility between income levels at the bottom and the top of the social hierarchy. Examining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reveals that the youngest generation is the most vulnerable, particularly when it comes to poverty and unemployment. It is important to note that poverty is a multifaceted issue encompassing more than just income, affecting not only children from low-income families. Based on household income calculations, nearly 25% of children in the EU are at risk of poverty. However, when considering various dimensions of poverty, including housing and social activities, approximately 30% of children are affected in high-income countries. This trend has intensified since the 2008 economic recession, as younger individuals are now nearly 10 percentage points more likely to experience poverty compared to those aged over 64.

## Regional Variation in Expectations and Attitudes

Surveys conducted both before the onset of the pandemic and during its early stages provide valuable insights into the expectations and attitudes of Gen Z. These insights suggest several policy considerations, including the pursuit of objectives beyond mere profit, such as stakeholder capitalism instead of shareholder capitalism.

Other key areas of focus include addressing climate change and implementing environmental sustainability initiatives, enhancing opportunities for employee community engagement, establishing structures to reduce income inequality and enhance wealth distribution, albeit not exclusively through fiscal redistribution, and placing a stronger emphasis on mental well-being.

However, it is worth noting that these surveys are often conducted on a global scale, thus potentially overlooking nuanced differences between various continents, and even within continents. Nonetheless, distinctions in the views and attitudes of Gen Z emerge between the United States and Europe, as well as within Europe itself. For instance, a notable majority of Gen Z Europeans, in contrast to their American counterparts, express concern for environmental issues, although it may not always be their top priority. Moreover, a significant portion of this European cohort believes that the private sector is more effective at job creation compared to the public sector.

Furthermore, European Gen Z individuals exhibit a more positive perspective on globalization when compared to other generational cohorts. Attitudinal disparities between eastern and western Europe, as well as between old and new EU Member States, appear to soften within the younger generation. Nevertheless, many younger individuals in Eastern Europe still hold conservative views on specific matters, such as opposing same-sex marriage and placing greater emphasis on ethnicity and religion when defining citizenship. Additionally, the significant migration of highly educated citizens from Eastern to Western European countries contributes to the political leaning of Eastern European nations towards the right.

## THE PANDEMIC'S EFFECT ON GEN Z

### Exacerbated Vulnerabilities for Many

It is widely argued that the pandemic crisis could potentially leave a comparable impact on the most recent generation, Gen Z, as the 2008 recession did on their predecessors, the Millennials. The COVID-19 crisis has severely disrupted their educational pursuits

and cast a shadow of uncertainty over their future employment opportunities. Consequently, this pervasive uncertainty has taken a substantial toll on their mental health. Moreover, the safety of Gen Z, encompassing concerns related to issues like child  sexual abuse through online platforms, cybersecurity, and dependency, is also under  threat.

## Impact on Education Due to Pandemic Disruptions

The disruption of educational institutions has had far-reaching effects, with an estimated 99% of the world's 2.36 billion children experiencing some form of restrictions  on their movements. Globally, school closures have affected 1.6 billion children,  including approximately 76.1 million in the European Union (EU), encompassing early  childhood services and primary education through lower secondary school. Furthermore,  higher education institutions have not been spared, with over 25 million students in the  EU-27 affected, spanning from upper secondary to short-cycle tertiary, bachelor's, and  master's degree programs. Consequently, secondary school examinations were canceled,  necessitating new methods for student selection.

In a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), nearly 98% of  respondents reported complete or partial closures of technical and vocational schools  and training centers, causing significant disruption but also presenting opportunities for  innovation. These disruptions in education have placed considerable burdens on not  only students but also families with children. School closures ranged from 7 to 19 weeks  across 46 OECD and partner countries. Various strategies were introduced to maintain  learning continuity, but quantifying the extent of learning loss remains challenging,  especially considering the intricate nature of skill development and the role of families  in nurturing skill formation.

Early surveys indicate that a majority of students struggled to meet the curriculum's expectations during the initial phase of the pandemic. This poses particular challenges for students from vulnerable backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, children with special needs (including disabilities), and low-performing students in need of additional learning support. Research underscores a strong correlation between educational attainment and employment rates, with higher educational attainment linked to increased employment opportunities. Consequently, the long-term economic implications are substantial.

During the initial crisis phase, students up to age 18 may have lost up to one-third of a  school year of learning, potentially reducing their lifetime incomes by approximately 3%  and negatively impacting a country's GDP by an average of 1.5% over the remainder of  the century. In this context, early childhood education and care services (ECEC), which  serve as critical stepping stones in skills formation, and other family-supporting services  have played crucial roles. ECEC services in the EU responded to the crisis in various ways,  with some introducing innovative methods to assist families with children. UNICEF  estimated that 43 out of 58 million five-year-olds in 122 countries experienced  disruptions in their preschool education, underscoring the vital role of public ECEC  services in both children's well-being and development and their parents' well-being  and labor market participation.

## Impact on Youth in the Labour Market

When assessing the labor market situation of young people, they appear to be among  the hardest hit by the pandemic and the subsequent measures taken in response. These  challenges encompass employment and income setbacks, as well as increased  difficulties in securing employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO)  reported that at the outset of the crisis, 178 million young workers worldwide,  representing more than four out of every ten young employees globally, were engaged in sectors severely affected by the pandemic.

Furthermore, nearly 77% (or 328 million) of young workers worldwide were engaged in  informal employment, compared to around 60% of adult workers aged 25 and above.  The rate of informality among young workers varies, with figures ranging from 32.9% in  Europe and Central Asia to a staggering 93.4% in Africa. Informal and non-standard  employment arrangements often translate into limited social protection, and these systems are typically better equipped to safeguard older workers and the elderly.

Even before the pandemic, over 267 million young individuals were categorized as not  in employment, education, or training (NEET), which included approximately 68 million  unemployed young people. As a consequence of the crisis, one out of every six young  workers (17%), who were previously employed, ceased working entirely, with younger  workers between the ages of 18 and 24 experiencing the greatest impact. Employed young people saw their working hours decrease by nearly a quarter,

equivalent to an average reduction of two hours per day, and 42% reported a decrease in their income.

It is essential to note that young people in lower-income countries faced the most substantial reductions in working hours and income contraction. In April 2020, the European Union (EU) registered 2.776 million unemployed individuals under the age of 25, with 2.239 million in the euro area. During the same month, the youth unemployment rate stood at 15.4% in the EU and 15.8% in the euro area, reflecting an increase from 14.6% and 15.1%, respectively, in the previous month. This increase, which includes NEETs, was four times greater than that experienced by the rest of the workforce. This trend continued into the second quarter of 2020.

An autumn 2020 survey conducted in the United Kingdom focusing on emerging disparities in education and employment revealed that 18.3% of individuals aged 16 to 25 were unemployed, compared to 11.9% among those aged 26 to 65. The younger generation also experienced significantly higher earnings losses, with a 58% reduction compared to 43% for older generations. Research also underscores the long-term consequences for young workers entering the labor market during recessions, affecting earnings and job prospects for 10 to 15 years, along with broader outcomes including overall health and the enduring impact of extended periods of unemployment.

As the COVID-19 pandemic gradually subsides, we took a retrospective look at pre-pandemic surveys to assess how the past three years have influenced the perspectives and experiences of Gen Zs and millennials, particularly regarding their workplace dynamics. Notably, we've observed thanks to Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey 2023 connected with 14,483 Gen Zs and 8,373 millennials across 44 countries, several noteworthy shifts:

*Enhanced Work/Life Balance*: Gen Zs and millennials now express a higher level of satisfaction with their work/life balance. They perceive increased flexibility in their work arrangements, believing that their employers have made strides in fostering greater diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Furthermore, they are slightly more inclined to believe that businesses are taking active measures to combat climate change. These shifts can be attributed, in part, to broader societal changes during this period.
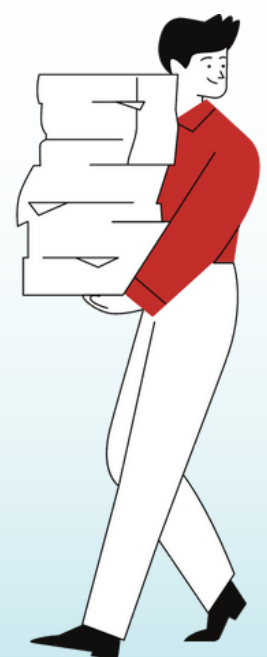
*The Great Resignation Effect*: The pandemic prompted many individuals to reevaluate the role of work in their lives and pursue a better work-life balance. This trend contributed to the "Great Resignation", temporarily shifting the balance of power in favor of employees. This empowered them to demand long- desired changes, including higher pay and greater accountability from employers in areas such as DEI and climate action. The surge in remote and hybrid work options has also increased workplace flexibility across various industries.

*Unresolved Challenges*: Despite these positive developments, the past few years have also left significant negative legacies. Challenges include a cost-of-living crisis driven by the largest inflation surge in four decades, the largest land war in Europe since the 1940s, escalating mental health issues and burnout, and an increase in physical health problems due to a lack of preventative care, among other factors. These issues weigh heavily on the minds of Gen Z and millennial respondents.

*Employer Progress, High Expectations*: the majority remain unsatisfied with businesses' overall societal impact, with less than half believing that businesses are having a positive effect on society. Gen Zs are slightly more optimistic in this regard. Gen Zs and millennials maintain high expectations for their employers and businesses in addressingsocial and environmental issues, recognizing the significant role business leaders can play in this context.

*Reevaluating the Role of Work*: A considerable proportion of Gen Zs and millennials are reevaluating the centrality of work in their lives. While work remains central to the identity of a substantial portion of respondents, achieving a good work/life balance is a paramount goal. Part-time work is increasingly appealing, with improving career advancement opportunities for part-timers ranking as the top solution for achieving better work/life balance. However, many feel that reducing their work hours is unrealistic due to financial constraints and concerns about workload and career progression. Condensed four-day workweeks are also gaining popularity.

*Preference for Remote and Hybrid Work*: Gen Zs and millennials place great value on remote and hybrid work arrangements, recognizing their benefits. A significant majority currently in remote or hybrid roles would consider seeking new employment if required to return to full-time on-site work.

*Workplace Harassment Concerns:* Workplace harassment is a significant concern, particularly for Gen Zs. A substantial portion of Gen Zs and millennials report experiencing harassment or microaggressions at work within the past year. Common forms of harassment include inappropriate emails and physical advances, while exclusion and gender-based undermining are typical microaggressions. While many report these issues to their employers, a significant proportion do not believe the problems were effectively addressed. Women, non-binary individuals, and LGBT+ respondents are less likely to report harassment and express lower confidence in their organization's response.

These findings provide valuable insights into the evolving attitudes and experiences of Gen Zs and millennials, highlighting areas of progress and ongoing challenges.

## Declining Mental Health and Socioeconomic Struggles

Regarding the mental health of individuals aged under 22 to 24, this age group reports experiencing heightened feelings of loneliness and the lowest levels of mental well-being. Furthermore, a rising prevalence of anxiety and depression has been observed among them. Young individuals whose education or employment was disrupted or halted due to the pandemic are nearly twice as likely to have experienced anxiety or depression compared to those whose educational or professional pursuits remained unaffected.

Additionally, the pandemic and associated crises have impacted the rights of young people, particularly concerning their access to basic necessities such as housing. An assessment focusing on individuals under the age of 18 evaluates children's well-being in affluent countries based on three key criteria: mental well-being, physical well-being, and life skills. This assessment reveals that even economically prosperous nations may not adequately safeguard children's well-being, a situation that has exacerbated during the pandemic.

Furthermore, numerous households are facing the risk of falling into poverty due to reduced incomes resulting from the pandemic, coupled with limited financial resources to weather financial shocks. In OECD countries, more than one-third of the population lacks sufficient financial assets to sustain their family above the poverty line for at least three months in the event of an abrupt income loss. Vulnerability to this risk is notably high among households headed by individuals under the age of 34, those without higher education, and couples with children.

These observations underscore the interconnectedness of mental well-being, educational attainment, and labor market integration, which significantly influence overall societal well-being, including civic engagement, trust, and productivity growth, thereby impacting the broader economy.

From Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey 2023 emerges:

*The burden of a high cost of living weighs heavily on the minds of Gen Zs and millennials*: Once again, the top societal concern for both generations is the high cost of living, followed by unemployment and climate change.

Approximately half of Gen Zs and millennials reveal that they are living paycheck to paycheck. They express concerns that a potential economic recession might prompt employers to backtrack on climate initiatives and hinder their ability to negotiate pay raises, maintain flexibility, or seek new job opportunities. Financial anxieties are prevalent among both generations, although Gen Zs are more optimistic about their personal financial situations improving in the coming year (44% of Gen Zs compared to 35% of millennials).

In response to financial pressures, Gen Zs and millennials are turning to side jobs, postponing major life decisions like home purchases or starting families, and adopting money-saving (and environmentally friendly) behaviors, such as buying second-hand clothing or reducing car usage.

*Stress and anxiety levels remain elevated, with burnout becoming increasingly common*:
Nearly half of Gen Zs (46%) and four in 10 millennials (39%) report feeling stressed or anxious at work consistently or most of the time. The primary stressors include concerns about long-term financial futures, day-to-day finances, and the well-being of their families. Workplace-related factors, such as heavy workloads, poor work/life balance, and unhealthy team dynamics, also contribute to stress. Moreover, burnout levels are on the rise due to work-related pressures.

Over half of respondents acknowledge that their employers are placing greater emphasis on mental health, and these efforts are making a positive impact. However, mental health resources remain underutilized, likely due to societal and workplace stigma. Gen Zs and millennials hold mixed views on social media's impact on their mental health. While nearly half believe it has a positive influence, over four in 10 feel that it leads to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, and pressure to maintain an online presence.

*Climate change is a significant concern, but financial constraints affect their ability to prioritize sustainability*: Concerns about climate change heavily influence their decision- making, from family planning and home improvements to lifestyle choices like diet and fashion and even career decisions.

Gen Zs and millennials are actively engaged in climate action, with 70% actively striving to reduce their environmental impact. However, financial concerns pose a challenge, as more than half believe it will become harder or impossible to afford sustainable products and services if the economic situation remains unchanged or worsens.

They continue to demand increased climate action from their employers and perceive a decline in sustainability strategies in recent years. They also emphasize the crucial role of employers in providing the necessary skills training to prepare the workforce for a transition to a low-carbon economy.

*Persistent high levels of stress and anxiety persist, with a more significant impact on underrepresented groups*: This year shows little change in the concerning rates of stress and anxiety experienced, mirroring previous years. Approximately 46% of Gen Zs and 39% of millennials report feeling stressed or anxious consistently or most of the time. Furthermore, we observe a continuation of the trend where women report higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to men in both generations. The disparity is particularly notable among Gen Zs, with the gender gap expanding from an 11-point difference to a 17-point difference over the past three years. In contrast, the gender gap in millennial stress levels has remained relatively stable since 2020. Among LGBT+ Gen Zs, 56% report feeling stressed or anxious consistently or most of the time, while 49% of LGBT+ millennials share this experience. Additionally, 52% of Gen Zs and 51% of millennials from ethnic minority groups, as well as 62% of Gen Zs and 63% of millennials with disabilities, report these persistent feelings of stress and anxiety. These figures are notably higher than the overall respondent base (46% for Gen Z and 39% for millennials).

## Digital Inequalities Amid the Pandemic

The surge in digital tool utilization during the pandemic has the potential to worsen existing inequalities, and these disparities may leave lasting imprints on the youngest generation.

Additionally, the digital divide could widen further, with its complexity spanning three primary dimensions: initial access to digital tools, skill levels, and, in some countries where nearly everyone has access, disparities in offline outcomes. These offline outcomes pertain to variations in the benefits derived from internet use among users with comparable usage patterns, often attributable to differing socio-economic backgrounds. This suggests that internet usage may accentuate pre-existing inequalities, a concerning prospect in the midst of the ongoing digital transformation.

Furthermore, although, on average, nine out of ten students in OECD countries have access to digital devices and internet connectivity at home, there remains a notable gap in access between students in advantaged schools and their counterparts in disadvantaged schools. Students in privileged schools are 15% more likely to have access to computers for educational purposes compared to their peers in less advantaged institutions. Additionally, many households must share digital devices among parents and siblings, which impedes numerous students from effectively participating in remote learning during school closures.

## Positive Developments Amidst Challenges

While the youngest generation faces severe vulnerabilities stemming from factors such as age, skill levels, geographic location, and socio-economic background, they also exhibit resilience and innovation in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic and its aftermath. Gen Z individuals have demonstrated proactive engagement in various areas. They have not only actively participated in social activism but have also emerged as young entrepreneurs, proposing innovative solutions to address financial, employment, and health and safety-related issues.

Surveys targeting both Millennials and Gen Z members, revealed heightened levels of empathy and gratitude arising from the prevailing circumstances. Furthermore, the under-18 age group has continued their climate activism through online channels, demonstrating their commitment to important causes.

# EXISTING EU POLICIES IMPACTING THE YOUNGER GENERATION

EU policies encompass various aspects that directly affect children and young people, representing more than half of all Commissioner portfolios, with a focus on both EU and global contexts. These policies primarily revolve around two key objectives: safeguarding and empowering children and young individuals. However, these initiatives are often fragmented and lack coordination across portfolios.

The existing EU funding programs play a significant role in supporting Member States in developing responsive policies and programs for Gen Z. Key programs include the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, Erasmus+, the Youth Employment Initiative, the Employment and Social Innovation program, and the European Fund for Strategic Investment. Establishing synergies among these programs is crucial for effectively addressing the challenges faced by this generation.

Several Commissioners also focus on child protection, particularly for children in vulnerable situations, such as migrants, Roma children, children with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, and those affected by crises. These efforts include combating child labor, addressing child sexual abuse, and ensuring access to education for children in crisis situations.

The European Parliament has played a pivotal role in advocating for the welfare of children and young people in EU policies. It has championed initiatives such as the European child guarantee and the youth guarantee instrument, aimed at combating child poverty and youth unemployment. These proposals have contributed significantly to shaping EU policies for the younger generation.

# CONCLUSIONS

When formulating policies and programs aimed at addressing the needs of Gen Z at the EU level, it's crucial to consider the following four key points:

## *Balancing Protection and Empowerment*

Recent years have revealed that the youngest generation can be both vulnerable, such as in terms of poverty and intergenerational mobility, and actively engaged in public policy, as seen in climate marches and pro-democracy movements. The challenge here is to create policies that simultaneously protect and empower young people, recognizing them as active agents in their lives rather than passive observers. The 2019-2027 EU youth strategy, developed with the active involvement of young people, sets goals related to various aspects of their lives and challenges, emphasizing inclusivity, employment, and sustainability. Embracing pro-child and pro-youth policies is essential for establishing a balanced welfare state, aligning with the social investment perspective that advocates for a life-cycle approach to investment and empowerment.

## *Ge neration-Fit Policies*

Policies should prioritize the concerns of the youngest generation, reflecting their needs and aspirations rather than imposing older generations' viewpoints on them. A significant gap exists between teenagers' dream jobs and the current labor market reality, highlighting the importance of ongoing dialogue and understanding between generations. Encouraging youth participation in policy-making is vital, and lowering the voting age to 16 could facilitate this process.

## *Comprehensive Approach Across Age Groups*

Policymaking should comprehensively address all young people and children under 22, considering the developmental phase during which individuals grow and transition into adulthood. It's crucial to acknowledge differences between Eastern and Western EU Member States. Anticipation and foresight should be integral to EU policy-making, with a

comprehensive children's rights strategy potentially covering the von der Leyen Commission's six priorities. Next Generation EU and the multiannual financial framework offer opportunities for comprehensive policies. Innovative early years provision could disrupt the existing education system and better respond to evolving expectations and challenges. Monitoring and accountability tools are essential components of comprehensive policies, with the concept of a child's union central to EU policies.

## *Multidimensional Monitoring and Data*

The EU can lead the way in monitoring the socio-economic progress of the entire generation through multidimensional, high-quality data. The UNSDGs can serve as a monitoring framework, aligning with the Court of Auditors' call for a more explicit approach to child poverty. Such a mechanism can inform evidence-based, tailored policy solutions for the diverse challenges faced by this generation.

Despite the pandemic's decline and a growing tendency toward more balanced work-life arrangements, successive and accumulating challenges persistently erode the mental well-being of Gen Zs and millennials. The burden of the high cost of living is a significant concern. Besides financial security remaining the predominant source of stress among Gen Zs and millennials, apprehensions about the economy's future could continue to impact their mental health, particularly affecting their aspirations for a healthier work/life balance. While financial pressures and broader societal stressors like inequality and climate change are beyond employers' direct control, Gen Zs and millennials firmly believe that businesses carry a responsibility to address these issues and drive positive societal change. Organizations neglecting these responsibilities risk losing talent, as Gen Zs and millennials base their career choices on their values.

Many stressors affecting Gen Zs and millennials are work-related factors that employers can directly influence, such as workload, poor work-life balance, and unhealthy work environments or team dynamics. Additionally, inappropriate workplace behaviors occur at an unacceptable level, undoubtedly contributing to unhealthy work environments. These findings indicate that business leaders' actions to promote well-being, although acknowledged by many respondents, have yet to fully counteract concerning trends, from rampant burnout to comparatively high levels of stress and anxiety among younger and under-represented groups, as well as persistent discomfort in disclosing mental health issues due to the workplace's pervasive stigma. In response, employers should focus particularly on:

*Fostering cultures where mental health is openly discussed, and individuals are encouraged to seek appropriate support.*
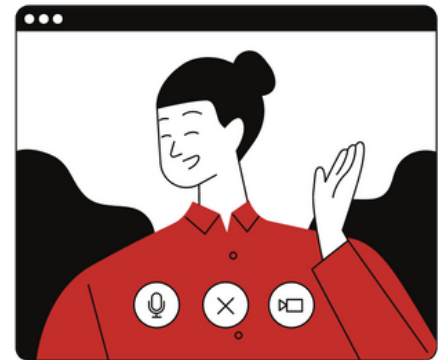
This year's data highlights the ongoing need for employers to establish and maintain cultures that not only prevent mental health challenges but also enable everyone to identify, address, and openly discuss stress, anxiety, and burnout. This entails providing tailored tools and policies to support mental health and encouraging individuals to disclose their challenges and utilize dedicated resources for assistance. However, achieving a substantial increase in resource utilization and issue disclosure requires a permanent shift in behaviors and attitudes. Inclusive leadership at all organizational levels is essential to nurture trust and empathy, reducing fears of judgment or discrimination. Employers should invest in developing leadership capabilities and set expectations for managers not only to facilitate but also to initiate open conversations about mental health, identify signs, offer proactive support, and vocally advocate for colleagues' well-being.

*Empowering individuals to attain their work/life balance aspirations.*

Considering the persistently high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout experienced by Gen Zs and millennials, it is evident that more must be done to meet their expectations regarding work/life balance. With remote or hybrid work arrangements becoming increasingly common, employers should shift their focus from "where" people work to "when" they work. Exploring opportunities to provide models such as condensed work weeks,

flexible working hours, and part-time roles is crucial, with clear assurances that careers of those choosing these models will not be penalized. Leaders should also prioritize understanding and addressing generational pressures faced by Gen Zs and millennials, such as caregiving responsibilities. This may involve introducing specific policies and ensuring that flexible working options are accessible to everyone while destigmatizing the need to adapt work schedules for caregiving. Employers can implement guidelines to combat "always on" habits, encouraging individuals to disconnect outside agreed working hours and setting expectations for managers to lead by example.

*Addressing and reducing alarmingly high levels of burnout.*

Although burnout is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes and dimensions, employers can and should take action to mitigate its prevalence. As understanding of burnout and its manifestations in the workplace grows, more resources become available to address it at both individual and organizational levels. While most actions to improve mental health can help reduce the risk of burnout, specific steps can be taken, such as incorporating the criteria defined by the World Health Organization into training and awareness campaigns. This approach would help HR and Talent teams, line managers, and employees recognize burnout and encourage individuals to seek appropriate help at earlier stages.

*Eliminat ing non-inclusive behaviors.*

The surveys highlight that Gen Zs and millennials continue to experience workplace harassment and microaggressions that negatively affect their mental well-being. This underscores the need for business leaders to create work environments that promote reporting of issues and consistent addressing of inappropriate conduct. Transparency regarding what constitutes non-inclusive behavior, coupled with trust in the available mechanisms for escalation and resolution, is paramount. Special attention must be given to under-represented groups who experience more frequent workplace harassment but are less likely to report it. Simultaneously, clear messaging, starting from senior leadership and cascading down, must emphasize the importance of respectful everyday behaviors in establishing and maintaining fully inclusive environments where everyone can thrive.

The above recommendations can serve as valuable guidance for youth organizations and NGOs engaged in youth-led activities and projects. By fostering open discussions on mental health, these organizations can create supportive environments where young participants are encouraged to seek assistance when needed. Similarly, the emphasis on work-life balance can benefit youth-led initiatives by ensuring that young leaders and contributors have flexibility and support to maintain a healthy equilibrium between their commitments. Furthermore, addressing burnout and non-inclusive behaviors within such organizations can enhance the well-being and inclusivity of young participants, fostering a more positive and productive youth-led project experience.

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# CHAPTER 2: METHODS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## What We Know

The society is changing. This is a constant, with or without major events which accelerate the change. Likewise, is the youth sector which should be, generally, in constant adaptation in order to contain the youth needs and to provide exhaustive solutions for their integration and growth. The previous 3-5 years reinforce the need for adaptation among the youth sector, especially in European societies due to the strong impact from digitalization, Covid crises and war near the borders. These are not the only reasons why the change was accelerated, but they brought a big difference as to how the youth organizations can still be involved in community work and how youth desire to be involved.

As we can perceive from the previous chapters, Gen Z is different in many aspects not only among themselves, but in comparison with the previous generations. This means not only that the differences among generations are widened by the fact that they were born and raised with the internet, but also, they perceive the slow changes from previous generations as a key point for becoming the change and they understand life constraining. The strong interests shown by the Gen Z are perceived in the following areas: the sense of belonging, to matter what they are doing, to have the feeling that their opinion is taken into consideration and to fight for the important things. Another outlined aspect is the power of their own activity and to be involved in the decision- making process which is a new type of ownership and responsibility which was not such a solid quality of previous generations during their early 20's.

*Granting decision-making power to the youth can have a transformative impact on their engagement in youth work initiatives.* When young people are given the opportunity to make decisions that directly impact the programs and activities they participate in, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. This personalization creates a sense of belonging and fosters a stronger emotional connection to the organization.

*Young individuals feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and experimenting with different solutions.* This culture of creativity sparks innovation and encourages young participants to actively contribute their unique perspectives.

*Young participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and seeking help from peers and mentors.*

*Transparency plays a vital role in building trust and understanding. Open communication about decisions, challenges, and successes makes young individuals feel valued and respected as part of the community.*

*Mentorship and support play a vital role in nurturing a sense of belonging. Establishing mentorship programs within the organization provides guidance and encouragement from experienced members. Personalized support that addresses the unique ne eds and challenges of young individuals creates a more inclusive and supportive environment.*

In addition to personal growth, the organization can foster lasting relationships and networks among young participants. *By facilitating connections and friendships, the organization becomes a community where individuals find belonging and support. Engaging former participants as mentors or involving them in alumni programs further strengthens the organization's connect ion with current youth.*

To remain relevant, *organizations must invest time in understanding the diverse interests, preferences, and aspirations of the youth they serve.*

A youth-centered approach fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, making participants feel that the organization genuinely represents their interests.

Engaging Stakeholders and Understanding Their Needs: Engaging stakeholders, including parents, teachers, community leaders, and young individuals themselves, is crucial for gaining valuable insights into the specific needs and aspirations of the target group. *Through open dialogues, surveys, and focus groups, youth organizations can understand the challenges young individuals face and identify areas where additional support is required. Understanding stakeholders' perspectives enables organizations to desig n programs that are responsive and relevant to the community's needs.*

By raising awareness about the challenges faced by young individuals and the positive impact of youth work, organizations can mobilize support and resources for their initiatives. Advocacy efforts may involve awareness campaigns, media engagement, and collaboration with policymakers to prioritize youth-related initiatives.

*In conclusion,* creat ing a thriving environment for youth work requires comprehensive and strategic efforts that encompass establishing collaborations, understanding stakeholder needs, engaging stakeholders in decision-making, building supportive networks, advocating for youth issues, and promoting sustainability.

Recognizing and appreciating the good work of young participants is a powerful tool for maintaining high levels of youth engagement. *When young individuals feel valued and acknowledged for their efforts and contributions, it reinforces their sense of belonging and motivates them to stay actively involved in youth work initiatives.*

Having a dedicated board or organism for youth ensures that their voices and perspectives are at the forefront of decision making. Young individuals can actively contribute ideas, propose initiatives, and influence the direction of the organization, leading to more relevant and impactful programs. They take pride in being valued members of the organization and feel motivated to contribute their best efforts to its success.

One of the primary findings of this research is the significance of aligning the interests and objectives of youth with those of the organization.

# Mind map

This method is creating an overview regarding multiple countenance of each project of the organization, the persons involved in the team and the target groups and their own behaviors and responsibilities of each activity. Being more than a summary of all the pillars involved for each project or activity, It can be implemented during the first days of the volunteers, so they can collect multiple pieces of the puzzle in which they just entered, explore their type and contributions, and have a deeper understanding of the comprehensive perspective of organizational support in the community. Once built this first mind map, it can always receive new completions.

This is a team activity. It can be implemented both online and offline.

**General purpose:**
The new joiners explore a deeper overview of the activity of the organization and to understand where and how they can contribute.
Please allow enough time for the teams to go through each category if you want a global result (at least 10 minutes per category would be the minimum).

**Learning objectives:**
- Create a brief and cohesive visual learning support for further steps
- Design the new contributions in a manner that fit the organizational personality.

**Reasons of developing such tool:**
The descriptive part of an organization is generally available, and the new volunteers know about it, but it represents just the surface of all the actions in which the organization is involved. So therefore, in order to have a complete alignment of the understanding of the benefits of volunteering for that specific organization, the new joiners should be introduced to the methods, type of target group and general way of teamwork in that specific team. This is the reason why, deconstruction from the beginning of all the pillars of the organization will bring several layers of insights, so the young people would strengthen their spirit of belonging.

**Steps:**
- Form the teams with mix members: old and new ones.
- Present the main activities/ pillars of the organization.

- Putting the organization in the middle, in a cloud/ circle, start to create other clouds/circles in different directions in which you can put the following categories: teamwork, roles, projects, target groups, campaigns, communication, funds. Find the categories which are the most representative for your organization.
- From each category, all the teams should add all in the information that they know in different clouds/ circles in order to have the largest perspective of the organization and its work.
- This mind map can be created one per organization, so each team would contribute to a specific category, or each team will create answers for all the categories. For the second option, it is important to combine all the mind maps created previously and obtain one for the organization.
- This mind map can remain as a strategic document that can be accessible during the next activity. Moreover, the volunteers can add information once they have different levels of understanding of the organization or add new activities.

**Needed materials**
Either big paper and pens, either online apps like Miro, Jamboard etc.

**Feedback and evaluation**
The first feedback activity will be immediately after it was implemented to see from the participants if such activity created a wider coordination and affiliation with the organizational directions.
The evaluation can be made after a few months, in which the new joiners had already the time to accommodate with the projects, like a 30-minute process, in order to see if the new joiners find other points relevant for the organization.
This activity can be implemented as well at the beginning of an organization, or a change of strategy, so the volunteers would bring their own contributions for the roles, target groups, communication, projects etc.

## Align the values

Nowadays, the young people feel the need to follow their interests and beliefs and to associate with an organization which shows the same respect for what they consider important and relevant.
Likewise, they will pay attention to what an organization is saying and showing and will check if they do care for the same aspects.

**General purpose:**
This activity is aiming to create among the volunteers the spirit of belonging based on outlining the values which are the core of the organization and their own values. Finding similarities between the 2 main categories of values will make the young people reinforce their sense of belonging and better define the cause for which they volunteer.

**Learning objectives:**
- Perceive the values of each volunteer
- Align the values of the organization with those of the volunteers.

**Reason of developing such a tool**
Young people nowadays are looking to involve their time and energy more into the causes that they believe than the previous generations. Moreover, their need for a sense of belonging is reinforced by the relevance of the activity in which they are involved.

**Steps:**
1. Think about one person who is a role-model for you in the organization.
2. Think about 3 situations in which you appreciated this person. What have they done? According to these responses, try to evidence the values that this person involved in those small actions.
3. At this point, draw a circle that should be split in 8 equal triangles ☮
4. Starting from these 2-3 values that you could designate, complete the triangles with minimum 3 other values which are important for you, or fulfill all the "pies".
5. Think about the activity in which you are more involved in the organization and rate each value from 1 to 10. This rate should prevail how that activity is framed within your values. For example, if you think about flexibility and you have a project in which you must provide daily outcomes at a specific hour, the flexibility may reach a law rate for you, but if you have autonomy as a value and that task is not depending on anybody else, then the autonomy might reach a higher rate.
6. You can repeat the pie with the general objective of the organization.
7. Think about the average that you obtain from all the values and understand how comfortable it is for you to be involved in that activity. If you have a very low value which contradicts with your thoughts about how things should be done, maybe a good solution might be to have a discussion with the support members of the organization and propose solutions so both sides will be satisfied with the final result.

**Needed materials:**
If this activity is made offline, then, the participants need paper and pens.
If it's made online, you can use any tool which will allow you to draw and write.

**Evaluation and feedback**
Check with the participants how they feel based on the conclusions that you reached together in order to reveal the importance of having similar values. Check as well if there are values from the same family which could be matched, even if they are not the same - the organization has one and the participant has another one (like appreciation and validation).
Even if this method does not require a long-term evaluation, it will increase the sense of belonging and seemingly.

# President for a day

From the series "oldies, but goodies", Gen Z may find the old method "What would you do if you were president for a day?" more than challenging, but also a good way of having a larger vision over the cause for which they joined as volunteers and to develop a well-argued plan for their presidency.

**General purpose:**
Using this tool, the organization will have both an idea-generator and a form of recognition for those which are highly involved as volunteers. The main purpose is to involve all the volunteers (new and old ones) to design their creative ideas and write down the plan on how to implement it.

Pay attention to those ideas which were not used yet, but they were proposed because if there will be a situation in which the ideas of one person wouldn't be chosen or many cycles, would bring the opposite of the desired outcome.

**Learning objectives:**
1. To engage all the volunteers in becoming idea-creators and to implement their own idea.
2. To learn how to redirect an action plan for an activity

**Reason of developing such a tool**
This tool is a helper to better integrate the volunteers and to make them feel that their opinion matters and that their voice can be heard. This will bring a lot of enthusiasm among the volunteers who desire to become influential.

**Steps:**
1. Challenge the participants to develop a concrete action plan starting from the presumption of what they would do if they were president for one day.
2. The plan should be presented in front of all the volunteers, so they should vote for those which raised their interests and likelihood to be involved in such actions. The one with the most votes would win and should have the space and the support from organizational members to start those initiatives and to get them to a final point.
3. You can organize such voting experience as often as you find them relevant (monthly, at each 3 months, at each 6 months etc.).
4. The ideas which didn't win could enter in the phase of analysis to see which of them can be further implemented.
5. Another way of having this activity is to periodically have a cycle time to implement their new ideas, but the volunteers would be extracted (as a tombola) and they must prepare their idea for the following period. The selection should be done randomly (like picking up the name from the bowl) and those that were already selected and implemented their own ideas to wait until everyone would do the same. This type of implementation is working when there are not so many volunteers.

**Needed materials:**
At this point, there is no needed material.

**Evaluation and feedback**
At the end of their implementation, check with the volunteers how they felt as being the main lead for putting in the scene their own idea.

Secondly, this method requires a longer time evaluation period, which will include few cycles of implemented ideas, so the volunteers would have more insights about how it is going.

Another idea in this direction can be to have a monthly idea which will be raised by the new joiners and implemented with them in the main role, sith the support from the other members. If there are many more volunteers, maybe it can be a separation of departments and they can be implemented there.

## Suggestions

Some parts of the youth sector suggested that after
COVID crises, the volunteer took serious steps behind and for this reason, within the organization towards the new generation of volunteers was defined the need of going back to the first step in volunteering, such as benefits, rules, design expectations from both sides. For exploring the expectations and preparing the set of rules there will be further in this guideline another method for such introspection.

With a short recap from the first days as a volunteer, the first memory is about the challenges that the team was receiving heavier challenges for their role, but with the supervisor of a mentor to try those activities for a very short period and to get used with different levels of involvement from the beginning.

As a beyond the box type of suggestion would be to find an organizational method which will pay more attention to the needs, values and power of the new generations, in order to create a context in which they can be accomplished alongside the main objectives and types of the activities which are already part of the history of the organization. This is not a type of exercise which is once in a lifetime implemented and that is all with this story. As Gen Z has high tendencies on being adaptive and changing the perspective faster, such methods may be reiterated periodically, as part of follow-up actions or short-term planning. This genre of short-term planning does not disregard the long- term vision of the organization which should be the main pillar when consolidating the short-term approach of including the volunteers.

## Collaboration agreements

The use of learning and collaboration agreements is common practice in activities linked to formal education, such as internships and traineeships. They are useful for identifying the roles and responsibilities of the parties, clarify expectations, and set goals. They provide the formal framework in which the relationship will develop. However, they tend to be mostly one-sided, and centered on the assessing of the learning process of the new joiner, with a focus on incorporating this evaluation into their broader academic grades.

The solution proposed here takes this base idea and expands it to cover all sides of the collaboration in a format suitable for more informal or limited cooperations. The research conducted in earlier phases of the project showed that the use of this kind of agreement is not commonplace in informal and limited collaborations, as it is mostly perceived as too formal and incompatible with the spirit of the relationship.

### The structure

The agreement can be divided in three parts: the individual's, the organization's, and the framework.

The individual's part comprises the learning goals. In contrast to learning agreements common in formal education, the goals contained here are not limited to a those related to a specific field, but instead encompass the whole experience. Examples of it can be acquiring concrete abilities and experiences, network, learning a language, or carrying out certain activities. By expanding the range of goals that can be included in the agreement, its usefulness is extended to situations previously unsuitable for it, and extends the protection and consideration of stated goals to the whole host of benefits the youngster aims to achieve.

The organization's part is a list of the tasks and roles the organization expects the joining person to fulfill. This part ensures that the organization has a position for the new joiner, and that it will continue to have it for the foreseeable future.

Finally, the framework comprises the conditions in which the collaboration will take part. It includes elements such as the provision of materials, the locations, the skills, the timelines, the learning and development methods, and the evaluation process. Altogether, they check the viability of the relationship and set the basis for the whole process.

**Benefits**

The benefits of setting up a collaboration agreement are multiple and extend throughout the entirety of the collaboration's lifetime. For once, it forces all parties to carefully examine their interests, needs and capabilities. This serves to corroborate the match between their goals and their capabilities and prevents setting unrealistic expectations.

Additionally, it clarifies the roles and responsibilities of both parties. Unclear expectations are a common feature of youth work, facilitated by the informal setting in which collaborations develop, and the research conducted during this project have revealed them to be a source of frustration and disenchantment leading to disengagement. A greater clarity about what to expect in terms of processes and results can greatly benefit the stability and success of the youth engagement.

Finally, the agreement serves as a roadmap for the collaboration, allowing all parties to examine their progress at any given time. This in turn allows them to revalidate, adjust or dissolve the collaboration as desired.

**How to use it**

In order for the benefits of the collaboration agreement to take full effect, it must be prepared before the initiation of the partnership. It must be done by the new joiner, on one side, and a representative of the organization on the other. It is imperative that the representative has enough knowledge and experience within the organization to provide accurate information about its capabilities and needs.

As for its implementation, it can be treated as an immobile commitment, or as an evolving document that can be adapted to changes in the relationship. The real value of the agreement lays not in its binding dispositions, but in the conversations and reflections it requires from the individuals and organizations. Having to answer these questions means that the parties will enter their collaboration fully prepared and aware of their mutual expectations and responsibilities.

## Avoiding long periods of waiting

As the research showed, youth activities are rarely evenly distributed in time. Instead, they consist of bursts of frantic activities around key moments of their lifecycle (fundraising, preparation, mobilities, reporting…) with periods of little to no activity between them. This pattern is even more acute in activities that require public funding or collaboration since they are subject to set deadlines outside the organizations' control.

The organizations that took part in the research consistently pointed at these idle periods as critically dangerous for the commitment and engagement of the youngsters. The lack of work to be done can lead to a lower interest in the activity, and eventually, to disengagement and departure.

This method focuses on avoiding the creation of long periods of waiting between phases of the activity. By doing it, it aims to provide a constant influx of challenges and experiences that keep the youngsters interested and involved in the activities.

## Take it easy

While concentrating the activities into short periods of work can be better suited for efficiency, control, and transparency, it may lead to the creation of long times of idleness between them. Distributing them throughout a longer period can help keeping people connected to the activity.

In practice, it can take a number of forms. For some parts, it can include lengthening the deadline for tasks. For instance, instead of preparing the programme for a training course in a few consecutive focused days, consider tackling one activity per day over a period of some weeks. This will also allow for lower burnout and a fresher approach for each of the activities, which can have a very positive impact on their quality.

In other instances, it can be useful to leave some time between the completion of a phase and its review. Instead of jumping straight away into the review and evaluation, it can be beneficial to wait a bit before doing it. By doing so, not only we extend the workload over a longer time, but we can also benefit from a greater distance from the work done that can help identify weaknesses and bring new ideas for improvement.

It can also mean including new steps into the activity, like additional planning or review, or to increase the amount of people working on it.

## Work on the activity's environment

Youth activities, especially those spanning a longer period, rarely happen in isolation. A good way to create more work around them and to increase their impact, sustainability and quality is to pay attention to the environment it is developed on.

By reaching out to other organizations or people working in the same field, we can establish valuable contacts and synergies that will increase the reach and impact of the activity and open up new opportunities for the organization. Taking the time to discover these actors and establishing new contacts, can significantly expand the possibilities of the organization and multiply the impact of its activities.

In a similar fashion, learning about related present, past or future activities in the same area, provides a valuable learning opportunity to learn from others' experiences. It can identify unmet needs and interests from the target group, and avoid duplications and repetitions.

It can also be highly beneficial to allocate time to think about the next steps in the area of work the activity is related to. As the activity unfolds, more is learned about possible follow-up activities and developments. Regularly incorporating the lessons learned into the follow-up plan, exploring new ideas and opportunities discovered along the way, is a great way of keeping people connected to the project while also bringing in a very tangible benefit to its overall quality.

## Create an activity ecosystem

Participants are rarely interested in a single activity. It is far more common that they are interested in the overall topic, or even in joining the organization itself. This can be played to the organization's advantage by involving them into different activities, benefitting from their contributions in different fields.

By actively expanding the participation of the youngsters to other activities, they can enjoy a more constant stream of tasks and challenges that keep their motivation up and benefit from a wider range of experiences, while also expanding the operational capabilities of the organizations.

## Builders together

**General purpose:** In this activity, all participants should cooperate and use each other's characteristics and abilities in order to follow all the instructions and construct / design the final building. No one is excluded or left apart. Key word: team building.

**Learning objectives:**
1. Respect each other
2. Work on and ameliorate communication skills
3. Cooperate

**Reason for developing such a method**
This method was developed in order to point out that each human is so important and valuable, both because of his/her abilities and other characteristics that he/she has. Even though someone is considered the "perfect" or the "average" person, when they are alone, nothing special can happen, whereas when people work in teams and make good use of each other's skills, great things happen, and the community is empowered.

**Description of the method, step by step**
We organize groups of 5 people.
1st is the Client/Boss, who is sitting on a chair and describing the shape of the construction to the rest.
2nd is the Architect, who is sitting on the other side of the room, having no contact with the Client and designing what the rest of the team is telling him/her.
3rd is one of the builders who in this case is the Blind person. He/she is going to the Client to take info about the building and transfer this to the Architect, in any possible way.

4th is one of the builders who in this case is the Deaf person. He/she is going to the Client to take info about the building and transfer this to the Architect, in any possible way.

5th is one of the builders who, in this case, is the general assistant of all the others but can only get in the game for a few seconds when it's allowed. He/she is generally observant.

After the tasks are distributed and the space is ready, each team start the journey to create the same building/shape as the one that the Client/Boss has on his/her hands, in 40 min.

At the end they all gathered in a circle, and they see the final results.

**Required materials**
Papers (with drawn shapes), colorful markers, blindfolds, chairs.

**Evaluation and feedback**
It was described as a successful activity because even after a lot of time each team manage to find a way to communicate and a strategy to implement seas to be as much as efficient, they could. It was very funny, interesting, and challenging.

**Feedback**:
To add more roles and more tasks and obstacles during the activity.

## Making groups ...

**General purpose:** Participants should think out of the box and create their own groups or put themselves where they think they can fit. Moreover, they should take initiative (where they want to go) and guide other (when/if it's needed) at the same time. Key word: Inclusion

**Learning objectives:**
1 .Break stereotypes
2 .Think out of the box
3. Communication with others

**Reason for developing such a method**
This method aims to make people think a bit deeper, especially after the activity about why they chose to form teams in that specific way. It's a simple one, but on the other side, it's a very strong way to think about how some beliefs are shaped and still exist in our minds, to better understand why people either exclude some others or why they feel excluded.

## Description of the method, step by step

All participants are sitting in a circle with closed eyes, and there is chilling music in the background. One person goes in the middle and sticks a post on their foreheads (so nobody can see what is written on it), which has a colorful shape on it. When they all have one, they open their eyes, and from now on nobody can speak, and they create groups with each other in the next 10 minutes (it depends on the number and the dynamic of the group). The groups of the shape could be e.g. 4 post-it with a triangle (different colors or edges), 4 post-it with a circle (different colors and sizes as well), 4 post-it of a square (different colors and sizes as well) etc. AND there are some (in this case) 3 unique shapes like a star, a heart, a sun, which some people of the circle have. So, the main idea is to see how they will decide to create their groups, for example, by the same color, the same shape, or randomly? All these without speaking and can the ease that they have on their forehead.

## Required materials

Post-it papers, colorful pens Evaluation and feedback It was a very meaningful activity in the end. It was food for thought for many of the participants about how they believe that they think and how they are really thinking about different things.

## Feedback:

Some people felt weird when other people tried to take them on. They wanted more different shapes and colors in order to be trickier.

## Cheiron Game

**General purpose:**
The general purpose of the activity is to be an educational and mentorship-oriented game inspired by Greek mythology, specifically focusing on the character Cheiron, the wise and just centaur known for his youth-nurturing nature and mentoring of future heroes. The game incorporates elements from the Gioco dell'Oca, an ancient board game popular in countries such as Italy and Spain and aims to guide youngsters through a journey that reflects Cheiron's role as a mentor in Greek mythology.

It provides a framework for youngsters to explore various aspects of project development. Here are some key elements that youngsters may consider:

**Motivation:**
The game may prompt youngsters to reflect on their motivation for undertaking a project. Understanding why they are pursuing a particular goal can be crucial for maintaining focus and commitment.

**Obstacles and Difficulties:**
As youngsters progress through the game structure, they may encounter challenges and obstacles analogous to those faced during project development. This can help them anticipate potential difficulties and develop strategies to overcome them.

**Seeking Help:**
The game may simulate scenarios where youngsters need assistance or guidance. This encourages them to recognize when to seek help, fostering a collaborative and problem- solving mindset.

**Networking and Contacts:**
Youngsters may be prompted to identify individuals or resources they can turn to for support during different stages of the project. This emphasizes the importance of building a network and seeking advice from knowledgeable sources.

**Decision-Making:**
The structure of the game, inspired by Gioco dell'Oca, likely involves decision points that impact the players' progress. This mirrors the decision-making process in project development, helping youngsters understand the consequences of their choices.

**Learning from Mentors:**
Given Cheiron's role as a mentor in Greek mythology, the game may emphasize the value of mentorship and learning from experienced individuals. This encourages youngsters to seek guidance from those with relevant expertise.

Overall, the game appears to be a creative and engaging way to introduce project development concepts and skills to youngsters, integrating both entertainment and educational elements into the experience.

**Learning objectives:**
These learning objectives aim to cover a range of skills and concepts, combining both practical project development skills and broader personal development aspects. The game provides a holistic approach to learning.

1. Project Development Skills:
Identify and understand the key steps involved in developing a project.
Demonstrate an understanding of project planning and organization.

2. Motivation and Goal Setting:
Reflect on personal motivations for undertaking a project.
Set clear and achievable goals for a project.
Recognize the importance of motivation in sustaining effort over time.

3. Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:
Encounter and navigate obstacles and challenges within the game.
Develop problem-solving skills to overcome setbacks.
Understand the consequences of different decision points.

4. Communication and Collaboration:
Recognize the moments in the game where seeking help or collaboration is necessary.
Identify potential sources of support and expertise.
Practice effective communication skills within the context of the game.

5. Networking and Relationship Building:
Understand the importance of building a network for project development.
Explore opportunities to connect with mentors and peers.
Demonstrate an understanding of the value of relationships in achieving goals.

6. Analytical Thinking:
Analyze and evaluate different paths and choices within the game.
Develop the ability to assess potential risks and benefits.
Apply critical thinking skills to optimize decision-making.

7. Encourage creative thinking in solving challenges presented in the game.
Explore innovative approaches to project development.
Foster a mindset that embraces creativity as a valuable skill.

8. Self-Reflection:
Engage in reflective practices to assess personal strengths and areas for improvement.
Recognize the importance of continuous learning and adaptation.

**Reason for developing such a method (needs analysis)**
The method was developed to address the need for fostering active, responsible, and conscious engagement in project development among young individuals. Recognizing the importance of hands-on learning and personal reflection, the Cheiron Game aims to empower participants to actively construct meaning, take responsibility for their projects, and engage consciously in decision-making processes.

**Description of the method, step by step**
The activity takes the form not so much of playing the game, but of constructing your own personalized board, investing it with specific meanings for each young person, group, and project.

step 1. familiarize yourself with the game by reading through the material available in order to understand the symbolic analogies of the different boxes and gain a thorough understanding of the themes to be addressed with the group of young people, or the youngster, you are working with.
step 2. Imagine that the game board represents your specific project and discuss each of the squares with the young people and try to fill them with meaning by discussing their specific experience and their engagement and role in the project you want to analyze.
step 3. Summarize and present the results of the previous step. Invite the young people to take this responsibility. It will be useful to keep track so that you can compare the results at different stages of project's implementation, so that you can use the game both in the initial phase but also as a monitoring tool.
step 4. Participants can play their very own Cheiron game whenever they want, so as to keep fresh the shared reflections.

**Required materials**
• https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G2p6fz0tXU8fj6YJk3DOwor2zoUbn8hG/view?usp=drive_link
• pen and paper
• flipchart (optional)

**Evaluation and feedback**
Assess the impact of the activity on participants' understanding of project development, problem-solving, and collaboration. Evaluate clarity, coherence, and relevance of the presented meanings. Encourage effective communication and collaboration among participants. Address misconceptions, encourage deeper exploration of project-related themes, and ensure that the symbolic analogies align with the learning objectives.

Assess the long-term impact of the activity on participants' project development skills and mindset. Follow up with participants after a significant period to gather insights on how the learning from the activity influenced their approach to projects. Understand the sustained impact, identify success stories, and address any challenges faced in applying the learning. By incorporating these evaluation and feedback mechanisms, you can ensure that the Cheiron Game remains effective, relevant, and impactful in achieving its educational objectives over time.

## From Virtual Reality to Action

**Method Description:**
the method involves using virtual reality (VR) technology to create immersive experiences that simulate real-world scenarios relevant to the NGO's focus areas and community challenges (e.g., environmental issues, social justice, humanitarian crises). Participants wear VR headsets and are placed in lifelike simulations where they can interact with the environment and make choices.
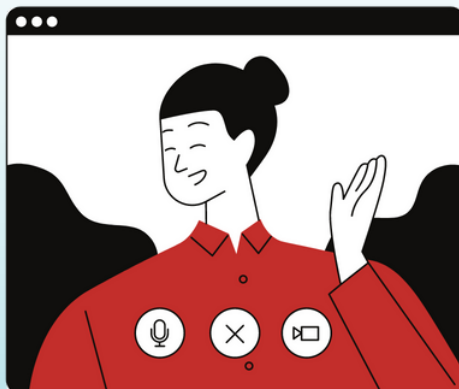
**Aims and Objectives:**

The primary aim is to foster empathy and understanding of complex global issues among the youth and sparkle youth activism using innovative digital technology. Objectives include increasing awareness of societal and environmental challenges, enhancing problem-solving skills, and promoting global citizenship and engagement.

• To foster deep empathy and understanding of global and local issues.
• To empower participants to transform their empathy into actionable projects.
• To develop leadership, project management, and teamwork skills among young people.
• To create a direct link between experiential learning and community action

**Reason for Development/need analysis**
**Engaging the Digital Generation:**

Modern youth are digital natives, comfortable with and stimulated by technology. Traditional methods of engagement often fall. short in capturing their attention and interest. VREAP leverages cutting-edge. VR technology, aligning with their digital inclinations and providing an immersive, captivating educational experience.

**Bridging the Empathy Gap:**

There is a growing recognition of the 'empathy gap' in society, where individuals struggle to understand experiences and challenges, they haven't personally encountered. VR's ability to simulate real-world scenarios can effectively bridge this gap, fostering deep empathy and understanding among young people for global and local issues.

**Need for Active Learning Approaches:**

Passive learning methods are less effective in fostering long-term engagement and retention. Its active learning approach, which combines experiential VR experiences with subsequent action planning and project implementation, ensures a more engaging and impactful learning experience.

**Encouraging Youth Leadership and Initiative:** There's a pressing need to empower young people to take leadership roles and initiate change. Trough it we can not only educates but also encourages participants to develop and implement their ideas, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards societal issues.

**Effectiveness of using VR in maintaining the youth engagement in NGOs and in society:**

**1. Enhanced Learning through Immersion:** VR provides an immersive learning experience that is more impactful than traditional methods. By virtually experiencing different scenarios, participants gain a deeper understanding of complex issues, which is more likely to inspire empathy and action.

**2. Increased Engagement and Motivation:** The interactive and technological nature of VR, combined with the opportunity to actively participate in project planning and implementation, significantly increases engagement and motivation among young people.

**3. Development of Practical Skills:** Through the action planning and implementation phases, participants develop practical skills like project management, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, which are crucial for their personal and professional growth.

**4. Real-world Impact:** By transforming empathy into actionable projects, it has the potential to create real-world impact. The projects initiated by participants can directly contribute to addressing the issues explored in the VR experiences, leading to tangible community benefits.

**5. Sustainable Engagement:** The end-to-end approach of VR, from empathy building to project implementation, ensures a sustained engagement with the NGO's activities, as participants are involved in every step of the process.

**Expected Results:** Increased empathy and understanding among participants, leading to more active involvement in NGO activities and initiatives. Enhanced awareness of global challenges could also translate into more youth-driven projects and campaigns.

**Method Description:**

**Initial Phase:** Participants engage in immersive VR simulations that depict real-world scenarios pertinent to the NGO's focus and community challenges, like environmental degradation, poverty, or cultural experiences. These simulations are designed to be emotionally impactful and thought-provoking, encouraging participants to understand and empathize with different perspectives and challenges.

**Interactive Phase:** Post-experience, participants engage in interactive sessions where they discuss their feelings, insights, and ideas prompted by the VR experience. This is facilitated by moderators who guide the discussions towards constructive action.

**Action Planning Phase:** Participants are then grouped and encouraged to brainstorm project ideas or activities that address the issues highlighted in the VR experience. They are guided through the process of project planning, budgeting, and resource management.

**Implementation Phase:** Each group is tasked with turning their ideas into concrete projects or activities. They are provided with a mentor from the NGO who assists them in refining, implementing, and evaluating their projects.

This enhanced VR approach not only educates and engages young people but also empowers them to be active agents of change, using their experiences and insights to drive meaningful action in their communities.

## Role play: The Community Youth Park Initiative

**STORY:** In the heart of the small town of Riverview, and abandoned lot sat untouched for years. Overgrown with weeds and strewn with old debris, it was an eyesore for the residents. Many elders in the community remembered a time when the lot was a bustling marketplace, but as businessed moved away, it lost ts charm and purpose. The Riverview local council, after years of deliberation, recently secured a sizeable grant to rejuvenate this lot. Instead of building another commercial complex or a parking lot, theyenvisioned converting it into a green space for the community - a park. They believed this would not only beautify the area but also provide a recreational space for residents. Upon hearing this news, the young members of Riverview were thrilled. For years, they had felt the lack of a space where they could hang out, play, and conduct various activities. Recognizing this as an opportunity, a group of enthusiastic young individuals approached the council with a proposal: they wanted to take the lead on this initiative. Their argument was compelling; they believed that since the park would primarily serve their recreational needs, they should have a significant say in its design and amenities. The council, while supportive of their enthusiasm, had certain reservations. They were concerned about the youngsters' lack of experience in managing such projects and the bureaucratic processes involved. They also needed to ensure the park met broader community needs, including safe play areas for children, benches for the elderly, and pathways for walkers and joggers.

The youth, undeterred by these challenges, started mobilizing support. They conducted surveys among their peers to understand what amenities they desired - a skateboarding rink, an open-air theatre for community performances, art installations, and free Wi-Fi topped the list. They also initiated dialogue with other community groups to ensure the park would be inclusive for all.

As the discussions progressed, challenges inevitably arose. Budget constraints meant not all desired amenities could be included. Safety regulations required certain design changes. Some older community members were wary of the idea of a skateboarding rink, fearing it might become a hub for unwanted activities.

But the youth were not to be disheartened. They organized community meetings, inviting everyone to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions. They roped in local architects and designers who provided pro bono advice. They even started a crowdfunding campaign to raise additional funds for certain amenities.

The journey was not without its hurdles, but the shared vision of a community space that catered to everyone kept the momentum alive. As the project took shape, it became clear that the park would be a true representation of Riverview's spirit - a blend of the old and the new, driven by youthful energy but respectful of the town's history and diverse needs.

## 2. Assign Roles:
### Roles within the Scenario:
1. Youth Leader: An enthusiastic young member who initiated the idea of youth leading the park project. Responsible for gathering youth opinions and liaising with the council and community members.
2. Community Elder: Represents the older generation of Riverview, possessing memories of the lot's past and concerns about the park's design.
3. Local Council Representative: The official from Riverview council who oversees the grant allocation, ensures the project aligns with council regulations, and liaises with all involved parties.
4. Local Architect: Offers design expertise pro bono, ensuring the park's design is feasible, safe, and aligns with the community's needs.
5. Youth Survey Coordinator: Responsible for gathering feedback from young community members about desired amenities and reporting findings to the Youth Leader.

## 3. Preparation Time:
- Each participant/group receives a detailed description of their assigned role, which includes background information, responsibilities, and motivations.
- Participants should take 30-40 minutes to:
* Delve deep into understanding their role.
* Discuss initial strategies and stances they might take during negotiations.
* Formulate key talking points or concerns they wish to address.
*Prepare any props or visuals they believe will enhance their role play.

**4. Role Play Execution:**

Set a clear timeframe for the role play, e.g., 45 minutes.

During the execution:

• The Youth Leader opens the discussion by presenting the vision for the park and the survey findings.

• The Community Elder voices concerns, memories, and hopes regarding the new park.

• The Local Council Representative provides constraints, such as budget limitations and council guidelines, while also mediating discussions.

• The Local Architect provides insights into the feasibility of proposed amenities and offers alternative solutions when necessary.

• The Youth Survey Coordinator presents statistical feedback and offers suggestions based on youth preferences.

Encourage participants to negotiate, problem-solve, and find common ground, embodying the spirit of community collaboration.

**5. Debriefing Questions and Reflection:**

Post role play, gather everyone for a reflection and debriefing session.

*Potential Debriefing Questions*:

1. How did you perceive the varying perspectives each role brought to the table? Were there any surprises?

2. What aspects of the scenario posed the most significant challenges in reaching a consensus?

3. Were there moments when you felt your role's voice was overshadowed? How did you (or could you have) address(ed) that?

4. How important was communication in arriving at decisions? Were there moments of miscommunication, and how were they rectified?

5. How did the process reflect the actual challenges of community-driven projects, and what strategies could be applied in real-world scenarios?

**Reflection**:

• Let participants share their personal takeaways, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and understanding in community-driven endeavors.

• Discuss the role of youth leadership in community projects and how to ensure that all voices are heard.

## Online engagement

This activity is built in order to maintain the attention of the group and to increase the engagement of youth volunteers on small tasks.

**Aim**: increasing online interactivity, increasing the spirit of a community, providing short-term tasks

**Learning objectives:**
I. To understand how the group interacts and when they are the most eager to be involved (monthly or specific periods) – for the organizers.
II. Accomplish short-term responsibilities in a funny way – for the youth volunteers.

**Reason for developing such a method (needs analysis):** The Gen Z is spending more time online; more than 80% of them use video games; they have mental health issues due to recent historic events; they want to be listen and respected; they live their parents houses later; they care about inclusion, climate change; they want to be fast recognized for their initiatives; lack of long-time attention

**Activity**: Develop a strategy to integrate the youth volunteers, weekly, by providing easy tasks which can be done independently or in group, inside or outside. Think this action as a manner to keep the group connected and integrate all the volunteers in tasks which can be also helpful for the organization sometimes. Try to create funny, catchy, and easy-to-do tasks.
Create the group on the network most used by your volunteers, such as Discord, Instagram, WhatsApp or TikTok.

Provide the task at the settle day (for example Monday) with a deadline for another day (the next day, or after 7 days, such as Tuesday or Sunday. The tasks should be funny, engaging and to be realized in 5-10 min max. It would be better to follow the conversation and to see who is not involved. You can use these challenges to find some research for the further activities or invite them through a challenge to create other challenges, you will need as many ideas as you can find!

It is important to have evidence with who has accomplished the challenge and who didn't. If there are many challenges in a row without being accomplished by one person, check what is happening. Be also involved in resolving them, or in the actions which required engagement.

Examples of tasks:
1. Find a name for the group. Let's vote the most appealing name. you are not allowed to vote your own proposal!
2. Post a picture with your favorite animal.
3. Send a video while imitating your favorite influencer. Let us guess who it is.
4. Send 1/3 challenges for this group. (It is important to have such a challenge after few weeks with activity, so they can understand which sort of challenges are expected from them).
5. Send a picture from your favorite activity with another volunteer.
6. Name 3 things that you would implement if you were the president of the organization.
7. Send a picture with you doing the tasks for the next activity.
8. Let's make a playlist. Add your favorite song.
9. (Using aleatory algorithm, like those for Secret Santa), send a good vibe message, in this group, to the person you just received!
10. Create a TikTok/Reel about…your favorite activity/ your reasons why volunteer/ (add any idea that can be as well helpful for the organization)
11. Send you morning smile
12. Find 3 other volunteers to send us a nice new picture together (larger groups are accepted)

**Materials needed:** an online group for such discussions (different or not than the usual one).

**Evaluation and feedback:** To evaluate how this method is evolving, try to follow the answers, to see how many volunteers are involved. After some weeks, analyze as well if the engagement of volunteers was impacted over organizational tasks.

## Which hat?

This activity is designed for the process of evaluation of a team and to increase the development of organizational capacity. This method can be used, as well, in conflict resolution if the volunteers / youth workers allocate themselves other tasks or complain about the others activity.

**Aim**: To create a story with several characters in order to understand how the team is working and which tasks need space to be integrated by more persons or can be done by one. To define the mapping of roles from your organization, through volunteers/ youth workers eyes To collect information about strengths, opportunities and traits from the cultural organization

**Learning objectives:**
1. To understand your roles and how you combine them within the team

**Reality check:** Sometimes it's easy to don't understand what the others are doing and how you can combine different roles as well within daily work. On the other side, especially in small teams, but it can be common as well for bigger groups, one person can have multiple roles (hats). Due to the variety of the roles, within a group can appear conflicts or doubts which are decreasing the functionality of a team.

**Activity**: This is an imaginary exercise which is created around the roles of a person within one organization and how the volunteers can interfere with more types of activities for which they are responsible. This activity can be created visually with multiple hats designed and the explanations above, or just each person can write for itself. If it's chosen the visual type of presentation, it can be made on papers, or using digital tools. As well, this exercise works in ono-a-one sessions which will provide deeper answers and more time to think about the dynamic between different roles.

1. Starting point: one person can at the same time a daughter/son, a sister/brother, a mother/father, a wife/husband, a friend, a professional etc., so they are wearing different hats during life.
Each person has to think about all the roles that they have within the organization (volunteer, learner, team player, team leader etc....).

Once they have realized all their roles, the participants have to think about the attributions and the tasks of each hat, but also the qualities and the added value. When finished, the participants can add the name of the persons who share the same roles (for bigger teams)
You can provide a semi-guided interview for the participants, to be able to think about their roles, such as: On which topics did you enjoy working the most? How does it look a perfect day within this organization for you? With whom did you work the best? What qualities does this person have?

3. When everybody realized the hat map of their roles and how each role looks like, they have to answer individually to the following questions: How are their multiple hats work together? What a hat with multiple tasks would say to the hat with lower tasks? Are they working together; if yes, how often do they meet? What is the learning from each hat? These questions can be used when they present to everyone (if there is time to hear all the persons), or in small groups. The questions can be adapted to the need for which this exercise is used.

For conflict solving is recommended to use questions like What was the starting point of the conflict? Which of your hat reacted first and how? How did the other react? In which quality do you think the other reacted? How did you expect to react? What would you have done differently?

4. Think about the conclusions of this exercise, even if it was presented in small groups or in the big audience. What are the outcomes and the learning points for them?

5. If you find it necessary, once they are ready, you can make them think for other persons which are not sharing the roles with them, for examples the coordinator.

**Materials needed:** A) one idea is to have physical hats (like birthday coifs) which should be as different as possible, to allow to participants the possibility to choose as many roles as they feel necessary; B)Use drawing or digital drawing/collage materials in order to create the needed visual; for the participants with more imagination, or for individual sessions, you can implement this method without nay visual aspect, only using the power of thoughts.

**Evaluation and feedback:** - Short-term: check with the participants how did they feel, what did they learn from this exercise and if they would change something in implementation; a visual representation of the roles within the organization; Medium/Long-term: to understand how the organization is working based on the capacities of people and how the roles interfere one to each other during several months.

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# CHAPTER 4: INNOVATIVE METHODS APPLIED TO YOUTH WORK

The active involvement of young people in the process of making decisions pertaining to issues that affect them is known as youth engagement. Young people who are involved not only give themselves a boost but also invaluable contributions to their communities. Of course, young people may see the positive effects of their activities and learn skills to support both their own and the community's overall development. However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, a number of challenges may arise during this process that discourage young participation. For this reason, details regarding a few new techniques that can help organizations increase youth interest and engagement in a variety of their events will be given in the one that follows.

It is known that every organization works and uses personalized methods that work best for each of them regarding their management or implementation of their activities. However, since their shared objective is the involvement and dedication of young people, we cannot disregard the fact that they all employ some common techniques. According to the research that has been done, some dos and don'ts have emerged that are common to all the organizations interviewed and are listed in this booklet. In addition to these, there will be other strategies that may be utilized by groups and organizations to encourage youth involvement in society while also sustaining their interests.

It is crucial to realize that, prior to figuring out how to get young people moving, we need to emphasize the subjects that interest them. Some of them could be issues around sports, the environment, diversity, art, inclusion, human rights, education, economic empowerment, or active citizenship. Afterwards, we are able to talk about the approach we'll take to make an impact on them and how we can maintain interaction with the young people who are participating.

## Methods

The primary approaches used in the field of youth work are derived from non-formal education (NFE). These approaches mix group and individual education and foster reciprocal learning. They are varied, interactive, and learner focused. The goals of NFE are to prepare students for civic engagement and to acquire

real-world experience. NFE engages learners' bodies, thoughts, and emotions since it is a holistic approach. Finally, it is true that these approaches and strategies vary from generation to generation. This implies that they are always suitable for adaptation to the generation that is deemed young at that time. Because of this, it's critical to consider the interests and capabilities of Generation Z in the modern world.

Youth policies and work practices in particular need to help young people reach their full potential as self-sufficient members of society, so they can make plans for their lives and take part in democratic citizenship. Furthermore, in a democratic society such as ours, involvement is a fundamental component of citizenship. Participation by young people is a method to better society and bring about positive changes in their lives, not an end in and of itself.

## Design thinking

One methodology that offers a solution-based approach to problem solving is design thinking. When applied to complicated challenges that are unclear or undefined, it is very helpful since it helps to comprehend the requirements of the people involved, reframe the issue from a human-centric perspective, generate a ton of ideas during brainstorming sessions, and take a hands-on approach to prototyping and testing. Acquiring knowledge of the five phases of design thinking will enable you to utilize the approach in your job and address intricate issues that arise in our businesses, nations, and worldwide. Design thinking is an innovative problem-solving process rooted in a set of skills. But talking about the human-centric perspective, it's important to be clear about the significance of the user- centric as well. This approach prioritizes what is needed for the user by identifying the problem in terms of the user and applying their needs as the standard for accepting solutions. But what is the user-centered process? Understanding people and their environments, determining user desires and pain spots, creating solutions to fulfill those needs, and assessing the finished products to make sure they satisfy users' criteria are all part of the method known as user- centered design.

Design thinking in 3 basic steps:

a. Understand the problem b. Think of an original solution c. Check out your concept. d. Implement

## Understand the problem

In design thinking, the first step is to identify the issue you are attempting to solve before looking for answers. Occasionally, the issue you really need to solve isn't the one you started with. They erroneously attempt to sympathize by solely drawing parallels between the issue at hand and their personal experiences. This gives you the impression that you comprehend the problem entirely, which is untrue. However, the true issue is almost always more complex, wide-ranging, or unique than what people first think.

## Think of an original solution

Assume you have never used a walker before and are building a new model for elderly and rehabilitative patients. Could you properly comprehend the needs of the clients? Without a doubt, not if you haven't spent a lot of time watching and conversing with actual customers. There's a good reason why human-centered design is another term for design thinking. How would one go about learning how to construct a better walker? Prototyping and testing— more on that later—are essential components of the design thinking process because they let designers try things, fail, and figure out what works. Customers are also involved in testing, and their ongoing participation offers crucial user input on possible designs and use cases. Additionally, it's critical to comprehend additional participants or stakeholders, such as those who are offering a thing or those. Understanding additional stakeholders or participants is also crucial. Examples of these include those who are interested in participating in life cycle activities or in marketing a product.

The second step in the design thinking process is coming up with solutions for the problem. Generally speaking, brainstorming is the initial stage in this process. During brainstorming meetings, keep everything to yourself (well, except from criticism). It's possible that seemingly inconceivable ideas will lead to useful solutions, but if you immediately dismiss every absurd thought, you'll never get there. Naturally, we will not be able to develop the crazy and insane ideas if we do not first consider them.

## Check out your concept

It's identified what the problem is. You've had discussions with individuals who show interest. Following a brainstorming session, you and your team have produced a wide range of ideas and worked together to hone those thoughts down to the ones you feel have the best potential of solving the given problem.

We can't come up with a solid solution by only brainstorming concepts, ideas, or pictures. We use prototyping and modeling to investigate possible solutions. We plan, create, test, and then repeat. Effective design thinking requires this iterative process of design. It is essential to keep going through this cycle of testing, prototyping, and getting user feedback to ensure that the design is sound and that you can build and support it.

Implement

There is no room for more practice or thoughts during this phase. It's just about time for you to get up and begin!

## Problem Solving

Moreover, and equally essential, the concept of "problem solving" comes to the fore. Problem solving is the process of identifying an issue, determining its underlying cause, locating, prioritizing, and selecting viable options, and finally implementing a solution. As we can understand, there is a common ground with the above-mentioned method (design thinking) since they have a common core.

One fundamental life skill that is necessary for success in all aspects of our lives—at work, at home, and in school— is the ability to solve issues. Every day, we solve problems without giving our methods much thought. The process of recognizing an issue, formulating potential solutions, and choosing the best course of action is known as problem solving. There are very little variations when putting the strategy into practice, but the fundamental procedures remain the same when dealing with a difficult circumstance.

**Steps:**
1. Define the obstacle/situation
2. Create/find options/alternatives
3. Assess the options/alternatives
4. Develop the plan/strategy and monitor the outcome

1. Define the obstacle/situation
Make an assessment so that you can focus on the actual problem instead of just its symptoms.

2. Create/find options/alternatives
Once the "what should be" model has been determined, this goal standard serves as the foundation for creating a plan for exploring potential alternatives. During this phase of problem solving, brainstorming sessions and group problem-solving methods are both beneficial. A large number of different solutions to the problem should be developed.

3. Assess the options/alternative
Competent problem solvers evaluate several aspects before to selecting the best solution. All parties likely to be concerned will accept the alternative. The alternative meets organizational specifications.

4. Develop the plan/strategy and monitor the outcome
Participating in the implementation process is one of the best methods to get support and encouragement. The finest answers emerge from issue solving techniques and methods of gaining clarity that are kept up to date and adjusted to account for new information.

Ultimately, there is an unbreakable link between young people and the problem-solving approach. It's an idea that helps young people become more adept and resilient in dealing with day-to-day challenges by encouraging them to use their imagination and creativity to come up with solutions. To be more precise, if we look back at the do's and don'ts guide, we will see that organizations frequently struggle with the declining relevance of their younger members and participants.

On the other hand, many of them may be ready to make a major shift in their lives at this time. Therefore, by using this technique and adhering to it, people can first recognize the significance of the issue they are facing, work on it calmly, and discover novel solutions to dealing with it. As a result, they will be proactive, inventive, and determined while also being more conscious of their community and society and involved in initiatives that will truly help them.

# Inclusion

How could we describe the word INCLUSION?

*''In the European youth sector, "social inclusion" is a popular and pervasive concept, presented both as an end (or goal) of youth policy and youth work programmes and as a means towards the "process of individual's self-realization within a society, acce ptance and recognition of one's potential by social institutions, integration (through study, employment, volunteer work or other forms of participation) in the web of social relations in a community" (Kovacheva n.d.: 2). According to the Social Inclusion Monitor (see official site), social inclusion encompasses six dimensions: poverty prevention, equitable education, labor market access, health, social cohesion and non-discrimination, and intergenerational justice. Although these are collective and societa lly shared problems, it is clear that they have particular relevance for young people. This is true both because of young people's own crucial and vulnerable point in the life course (being in school, entering the labor market for the first time, etc.) and because of the positive effect they can have in achieving and advocating the values and practices of social inclusion for all (non- discrimination, intergenerational justice, fo r instance). In a sense, young people themselves are both a means to and an "en d" of social inclusion.''*

It is highly probable that an individual who examines several strategies in youth work that could boost young commitment and prioritize active involvement won't be able to recognize the connection or bring up inclusion as a tactic. This is untrue. Including everyone is essential. Inclusion is a key element when talking about tactics for drawing young people in, engaging them, giving them a feeling of purpose and efficacy, and ultimately motivating them to stick with organizations and have an impact together. While this approach to youth work cannot be deemed "new" or among the most current, there are certainly many new innovations in this field that can be used as a tool to help increasing people's commitment and level of participation. Educators, trainers, facilitators, and people in general seem to have been using it and paying greater attention to its characteristics and possibilities in the last few years.

If we consider one of the challenges that the responder groups raised concerns children distancing themselves from the organizations' activities, this becomes even more apparent and logical. This means that organizations, particularly in the beginning, must recognize and meet the requirements of their members in a clear and concise manner, provide them time and space to adjust to the environment, inspire them to do new things, and provide for them while they are operating.

**Three steps**

1. Develop an established schedule for everyone involved.

To make the day interesting, stick to a regular daily routine, but change up the chores that are included in it. Young people and members can be better prepared for shifts, campaigns, and activities if they are informed in advance of upcoming routine alterations and, where appropriate, given visual aids like social stories or other carefully selected supports like buddy pairs.

*2.* Offer them all an accessible visual plan.

Visual reminders like as schedules and cue cards can be used to help members and young people figure out what is coming up, who is in charge of each activity, when they should be in a particular location, and how to go from a particular assignment to the next.

3. Assemble participants for a forthcoming change

If young people who have trouble transitioning between tasks are aware that this is about to happen, they will be better prepared. To help people remember when changes are coming up, use countdown timers, visual aids, or frequent reminders. By doing this, you may facilitate the adjustments and increase their efficiency.

These claim that getting them started—and probably very productively at that —will also give them a fun sense of belonging, which helps these kids feel like they belong to a group that genuinely cares about them and encourages commitment and a desire to stick with it.

**5 stages of inclusion**

**Zero**: Active rejection.
The group/members of it select to reject and marginalize the individual.

**One**: Exclusion.
Neither one attempt is being undertaken.

**Two**: Division.
The individual is kept apart from others in the community but is permitted entry into a particular place.

**Three**: Integration.
The individual is either continually or sporadically in an average environment.

**Four**: Inclusion. (!)
The individual is embraced and joins the group

## Agile project management

What is agile project management?

An iterative and cyclical repetitive method for organizing and directing project operations is called Agile Project Management, or APM. It divides project procedures into more manageable stages. Teams may work rapidly and cooperatively on a project with agile project management, which also allows them to adjust to changing requirements as they emerge. Additionally, it helps development teams respond promptly to input, allowing them to refine their plans at every phase.

Starting with Agile project management has several advantages, the primary one being its flexibility in handling problems that crop up during the project. When required changes are made to a project at the appropriate moment, resources can save, and the project can be successfully completed on schedule and within budget.

**Agile vs Waterfall model.**

Traditional project management follows an approach known as waterfall. The waterfall model follows a sequential flow, where each phase must be completed before moving on to the next. Requirements are gathered at the beginning, and the entire system is developed linearly. This rigid structure can make it challenging to accommodate changes once the project is underway, and the final outcome is not delivered until the end of the development cycle.

By contrast, Agile methodologies are a collection of iterative and adaptive approaches to work that prioritize flexibility, collaboration, and customer feedback. Unlike traditional waterfall methodologies, Agile focuses on continuous release and feedback, and on a constant inspection and improvement of the development process to respond to emerging requirements and developments in the target group's needs and preferences.

Agile methodologies have been developed to operate in unclear and continuously evolving environments. The iterative nature of Agile allows for continuous improvement and the ability to adapt to changing requirements, enhancing the overall responsiveness of the development process.

In Agile, development is divided into small, manageable iterations or sprints, usually lasting two to four weeks. Cross-functional teams work collaboratively, and customer feedback is solicited frequently to ensure that the evolving product meets their expectations.

While waterfall is more suited to projects with well-defined and stable requirements, Agile is better equipped to handle dynamic and evolving project environments. Agile methodologies, including popular frameworks like Scrum and Kanban, emphasize collaboration, continuous delivery of small increments, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, providing a more responsive and customer-centric approach to software development and project management.

**STEPS waterfall:** Requirements → Design → Implementation → Verification → Maintenance

**STEPS agile:** Requirements → Design → Develop → Test → Use → Review

The implementation of the concepts of Agile Management in youth work or development initiatives can improve efficiency, adaptability, and teamwork. By integrating Agile methods

into youth work, one can enhance the overall development experience of young people by promoting a more flexible and cooperative attitude.

**Here you can see a few ways that agile management can be used to youth employment:**

1. Adaptability & Versatility. Agile methodologies are specifically designed to deal with evolving requirements. In youth work, it means that activities and lines of work can be adapted quickly to reflect changes in the needs and interests of the young people they are addressed to. The flexible planning and focus on iterative action can be a significant advantage over more rigid, cumbersome designs that risk turning activities irrelevant or obsolete due to the difficulty to introduce changes in them once they are started.

2. Promoting Youth Leadership. Agile teams are self-organized and self-managed. This way of working naturally allows young people to develop their collaboration and leadership by offering them the chance to take responsibility, make decisions, and participate in the organizing and carrying out of tasks.

3. Frequent feedback and Reflection. A core practice of Agile methodologies is a mindset of constant improvement. This is done through regular inspection of the team's practices and performance to identify strengths and weaknesses and work towards higher levels of proficiency.

4. Empiricism and Visualization. Agile development is based on data-drive decision- making, which allows for lower risks and projects better suited to the needs of their target group. To support this data-driven process, Agile includes a number of techniques and tools to gather, process, and visualize the information.

5. Constant Skill Development. Agile is based on the skills of a self-managing and self-organized team that develops all the skills necessary to do their job. It promotes learning and empowerment among its members as part of the daily requirements of the team.

6. Creating a strong Community. The building block of Agile work is the team, not the individual. By sharing ownership of their work and collaborating closely and frequently, the team members multiply the opportunities for bonding and building meaningful relationships.

For this reason, it's a highly beneficial practice that needs to be embedded in the methodology of a youth worker. It's also beneficial to practice in associations, organizations, classrooms, workplaces, or other environments where people work together in general. Additionally in accordance with the handbook or guide of do's and don'ts, praising hard work is one of the finest ways to motivate stakeholders —in this example, young people— and encourage them to continue participating at high levels, and with this method this is guaranteed.

This document reflects some of the methods that can be used to increase and retain youth engagement in youth work activities.

# CONCLUSION

The current generation of youngsters, known as Generation Z, or Gen Z, born between 1996 and 2010, presents a series of characteristics that make them highly distinctive and different to the previous ones.

Generation Z stands out for being highly educated and pragmatic, with distinct qualities that set them apart. Surveys, mostly conducted in English-speaking regions for commercial purposes, show a consensus on their defining traits. Gen Z usually perceives itself, and is perceived as self-aware, persistent, and possessing a realistic mindset. They're recognized as the most well-educated cohort, embracing liberal values and openness to societal changes. In the European Union, Gen Z is also significantly more culturally diverse than previous generations, including Millennials born a few years before them.

Insights from pre-pandemic and early pandemic surveys reveal Gen Z's expectations and attitudes. They call for policies beyond profit, emphasizing stakeholder capitalism. Priorities include addressing climate change, sustainability, employee engagement, tackling income inequality, and focusing on mental well- being.

Gen Z's particularities extend to their material conditions. Gen Z faces challenges related to intergenerational earnings mobility, having to deal with an ever-declining disposable income, tight job market, increasing inequality, diminishing social mobility, spiraling costs of living, and rise of political extremisms, all while witnessing the increasingly dramatic consequences of climate change. While some of these issues have been present at times before, their conjunction and severity makes Gen Z, together with the last cohorts of Millennials, the first generation in centuries to be expected to have a lower quality of life than their parents.

The already exceptional circumstances of this generation have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that had a disproportionate impact on the lives of the youngsters. In addition to the severe adaptations, it forced on their education, it has significantly conditioned their access to the labor market, and resulted in arguably more insecure, late, and unrewarding employment. This, in turn, have resulted in never-seen-before levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional problems.

## Old tricks for new ponies.

When looking at the characteristics and environment of the new generation from a youth work perspective, it is evident that natural evolution of methods and dynamics has to be accelerated and consciously directed if they are to remain effective. The new generation and their circumstances render obsolete many common approaches and practices with a speed that has caught many youth workers and associations unprepared.

As Gen Z becomes the majority among the youngsters, it is becoming more clear what methods are to be phased out if organizations want to remain attractive and useful to them. Organizations failing to offer flexible participation methods, in content, time, and space, and channeling the energy and engagement of the youth through railroaded paths are facing increasing difficulties to attract and retain their interest.

The difficulty to remain relevant for the youngsters is being ever more noticeable for those organizations that do not count with strong feedback mechanisms and an open participation process at all levels. The interest of youngsters in equality, democracy, openness, and inclusiveness permeates youth work in the form of increased demands for influence and opportunities. Youth organizations are having to find new ways to accommodate the increasing interest for belonging, in the full meaning of the word, and to have a voice in the life of the organization, with fewer of them feeling content in the role of occasional collaborator.

As these demands put additional pressure on the organizations to communicate, promote, adapt, and select their activities and partners, extra effort has to be devoted to their correct development. Organizations without the will or the ability to allocate enough resources to this activities risk losing touch with the youngsters.

### Surfing the wave.

The differences between the younger generation and its predecessors have accelerated the pace of change and made new demands more visible and pressing. Learning from the increasing success of the organizations whose practices aligned with those demands, many others have read the situation correctly and started or intensified their transition to a more open model.

The transition is being generally done along the lines of increased inclusion of the youngsters in the decision-making of the organization, creating or expanding channels for them to be heard and to be able to voice their concerns and interest. Whether it is being done through assigning increased responsibilities to the youth, decentralizing decision-making, reinforced feedback channels, or other methods, it contributes to foster a culture of transparency and a closer alignment with the interests and needs of the youngsters the organization works with.

In turn, this new way of managing the internal affairs of the organizations contributes to the community building role of the organization. By virtue of increasing the collective ownership and increasing the importance of collaboration and communication among the youngsters, youth work is becoming an increasingly effective way of reinforcing social networks and fostering a feeling of belonging.

The feeling of belonging is also addressed by a shift in the way youth organizations relate with youngsters. It is becoming more commonplace to conceive the relationship as bidirectional in nature, in which both parts expect their needs and interests to be recognized. In contrast with a more organization-focused approach, in which the youngster is expected to adapt to the organization, this practice puts both parties on an equal level to reach an understanding about the nature and extent of their relationship. This way offers significant advantages for remaining accessible and relevant to the youngsters.

The shift in preferences, attitudes, and behaviors among the young population points towards the emergence of an ecosystem of significantly different youth workers and organizations. These changes require profound adaptations from a great part of the current actors, but they also align magnificently with core values of youth work like youth empowerment, openness, transparency, collective decision-making, personal growth, and community building. Although the wave of changes may drown some unaware organizations, it offers endless exciting possibilities to those ready to surf it.

# ANEXES

What is Gen Z?

Generation Z comprises people born between 1996 and 2010. This generation's identity has been shaped by the digital age, climate anxiety, a shifting financial landscape, and COVID-19.

Gen Z is currently the second-youngest generation, with millennials before and Generation Alpha after. Like every generation, Gen Z's behaviors are shaped by how they grew up. Young people today have come of age in the shadow of climate doom, pandemic lockdowns, and fears of economic collapse. The first Gen Zers were born when the internet had just achieved widespread use. They're called "digital natives"—the first generation to grow up with the internet as a part of daily life. The generation spans a wide range: the oldest Gen Zers have jobs and mortgages, while the youngest are still preteens.

https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z

Who are they?
Fewer young people in Europe than in the rest of the world

In the EU, the combined share of children and young people (all people aged 29 and under) in the total population of the EU-27 fell from 38.1 % in 1999 (excluding Croatia), to 34.2 % in 2009, and 31.8 % by 2019, while this generation's share of the world population was considerably higher, at 49 % in July 2019. In 2019, the three five-year age groups that together cover the aggregate for children (those aged 0-4 years, 5-9 years and 10-14 years) as well as the youngest five-year age group among young people (in other words the 15-19 age group) accounted for the smallest shares of the EU-27 population aged under 70. The relative importance of children and young people across the world is influenced, to some degree, by relatively high birth rates in Africa and some parts of Asia. In addition, there are major country differences behind these general figures in the EU, with Ireland being the most youthful Member State, with people aged under 29 accounting for nearly 4 out of every 10 inhabitants at the start of 2019. At the other end of the spectrum, the share of children and young people in the total population was lowest in Italy (28.3 %). On a regional level, the differences are even more striking with some east

German, northern Italian and Spanish regions being the least youthful. Although the EU-27 total population is projected to keep growing up until 2026, reaching a peak of 449.3 million, the share of children and young people in the total population is projected to decrease from 31.8 % in 2019 to 28.6 % in 2052. From 2052, the share of children and young people is projected to increase marginally until 2080 but remain below its 2019 level.

Gen Z-ers are the best educated, and are open realists

There have been many surveys to define Gen Z's characteristics – mainly conducted in the English-speaking world, examining them at a global scale and often for commercial purposes – and they seem to concur on a number of features. This generation is described as self-aware, persistent, realist, innovative and self-reliant, in contrast to the Millennials, who have been found to be self-centered, entitled, idealist, creative and dependent. Generation Z is claimed to be the best educated proportionally, as well as liberal-minded and open to emerging social trends. Some would argue that 'searching for the truth' is at the heart of their identity. This includes understanding, connecting, and expressing different individual truths. Originally, known as the iGeneration, referring to the fact that they grew up with iPhones and iPads, these are the first digital natives. In terms of their behavior, this means: they use social media much more than previous generations to stay up to date on current affairs; they care deeply about their own health and well-being and that of the planet; they are much more influenced by digital advertising and digital financial services than older generations; when it comes to travel, they do not wish to own a vehicle and are much more interested in interactive platforms, such as webchats or smart booking platforms. Despite large differences between OECD countries, almost all 15-year-olds (95 %) have internet access at home.

Culturally diverse and socio-economically vulnerable

In the EU, this generation is the most diverse in terms of origins. In Luxembourg, for example, the share of foreign-born children in the 0-14 age group was the highest in the EU in 2019, with one fifth born outside the national territory (13.9 % born in another EU Member State, and 6.6 % outside the EU). There are also big variations between countries in east and west. In Ireland, some 12.0 % of all children were born in another country (no breakdown available); while in Sweden 1.6 % of children were born in another Member State and the share of children born outside the EU was 7.8 % (the highest in the EU), giving a total of 9.4 % of children being foreign-born. At the same time, in Croatia and Czechia the share of foreign-born children is 0.7 % and 1.1 % respectively. When it comes to young adults (15-29 year olds) Luxembourg had the highest share of young

people born in a foreign country in 2019 (41.9 %) followed by Cyprus, Malta, Austria and Sweden, where more than one fifth of young people were foreign born. In addition, the highest shares of non-EU born young people were found in Sweden, Spain and Luxemburg. Meanwhile, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Latvia had the lowest shares of foreign-born young people, at 1.4 to 2.5 % of the total age group. In terms of their socio-economic background, the youngest generation is more affected by 'sticky floors and ceilings' than any other when it comes to intergenerational earnings mobility: in OECD countries since the 1990s, there has been a general trend towards a lack of mobility between the income positions at the bottom and at the top of the social ladder. Looking at the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), the youngest are the most vulnerable and worst affected by poverty and unemployment. That said, poverty is a multi-dimensional issue not only related to income, and thus not only affecting children from low-income families. Based on calculations of household income, close to 25 % of children are at risk of poverty in the EU. However, looking across several other dimensions of poverty, including housing and social activities, about 30 % of children are affected in high-income countries. This trend has strengthened since the 2008 recession. Before the 2008 crisis, the under-25s were not much more at risk of poverty than the over-64s. Now they are nearly 10 percentage points more likely to be poor.

Expectations and attitudes vary according to location

Surveys carried out prior to the pandemic and then revisited in its early days, offer some policy pointers in relation to the expectations and attitudes of this generation. These include a purpose beyond profit – stakeholder capitalism as opposed to shareholder capitalism; 2 addressing climate change and implementing environmental sustainability programmes; more opportunities for employees to be engaged in their communities; structures to reduce income inequality and improve distribution of wealth – but not necessarily in a way of fiscal redistribution; and a greater focus on mental well-being. Yet, these surveys are very often global surveys, in which the nuances between different continents let alone within continents do not feature. However, there are differences in Gen Z views and attitudes between the United States and Europe, and also between eastern and western Europe. Four out five Gen Z Europeans, unlike their generational counterparts in the US, care for the environment, but it is not their number one priority. Most of them also believe that the private sector is better at creating jobs than the public sector. The European Generation Z have a more positive view of globalisation than do other cohorts. Attitudinal differences between east and west, and old and new Member States seem to soften in the younger generation. However, many

younger people in the east still hold more conservative views when it comes to certain values, such as opposing same-sex marriage and putting more emphasis on ethnicity and religion when defining citizenship. In addition, the intensive mobility of better-educated citizens from east to west keeps eastern European countries leaning towards the right.

The impact of the pandemic on Generation Z

Multiple vulnerabilities magnified for many Many would claim that the crisis caused by the pandemic might have the same impact on today's youngest generation as the 2008 recession had on the previous generation, the Millennials. The coronavirus crisis has disrupted their education and future job prospects enormously. Uncertainty has become the norm that, in turn, has also heavily affected their mental well-being. In addition, their safety (child sexual abuse through the internet, cybersecurity or just simple dependency) is also in danger. All affected by disruption of educational institutions According to estimates, 99 % of the world's 2.36 billion children have been affected by some restrictions on movement. School closures have affected 1.6 billion children globally and approximately 76.1 million in the EU; this includes early childhood services and primary school up to lower secondary school. Higher education institutions have also been affected, with more than 25 million students in the EU-27 involved – ranging from upper secondary, to short cycle tertiary, bachelor's, and master's degree courses. Secondary school examinations were cancelled, and higher education institutions had to find new ways to select students. In addition, in an International Labour Organization (ILO) survey, around 98 % of respondents reported complete or partial closure of technical and vocational schools and training centers. This created huge disruption, bringing obstacles but also opportunities. Disruptions in education have placed a heavy burden not only on children and students but also on families with children. By the end of June, the duration of school closures ranged from 7 to 19 weeks across 46 OECD and partner countries. Many strategies were introduced to maintain learning continuity. The size of learning loss is difficult to estimate, particularly in the context of the idea of child development and skills formation where skills beget skills, through a multiplier process, i.e. Skill attainment at one stage of the life cycle raises skill attainment at later stages of the life cycle. 3 In addition, families have a very important role to play in nurturing skills formation. Some early surveys show that the majority of students were unable to learn what the curriculum expected them to learn during the first phase of the pandemic. This will be particularly problematic for students from vulnerable backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, children with special needs (including children with disabilities) and low-performing struggling students who need more support with their learning. Evidence suggests that there is a

strong correlation between educational attainment and employment rates, i.e. higher educational attainment is associated with higher employment rates. 4 This has consequences in the longer term for the economy too. During the first phase of the crisis, pupils up to the age of 18 may have lost one third of a school year of learning, potentially reduce their lifetime incomes by about 3 %, and lower a typical country's GDP by an average of 1.5 % over the remainder of the century. In the same context, early childhood education and care services (ECEC) – the first important institutional step towards skills formation – and other services supporting families with children have a very important role to play. ECEC services across the EU reacted to the crisis in different ways. These services did not have the chance to go online and thus some introduced innovative ways of helping families with children. UNICEF has estimated that 43 out of 58 million five-year olds in 122 countries with available data saw their preschool life disrupted. The crisis strongly highlighted the evidence that public ECEC services are as important for children's well-being and development as for their parents' well-being and labor market participation.

Among the biggest losers on the labor market When it comes to the labor market situation of young people, they seem to be among the worst victims of the outbreak and the follow-up measures. These include employment and income losses and the increased difficulty of finding a job. According to the ILO, a total of 178 million young workers around the world, more than four in ten young people employed globally, were working in hard-hit sectors when the crisis began. Almost 77 % (or 328 million) of the world's young workers were in informal jobs, compared with around 60 % of adult workers (aged 25 and above). The youth informality rate ranges from 32.9 % in Europe and Central Asia to 93.4 % in Africa. Informality, nonstandard forms of work also mean lower levels of social protection. Social protection systems are more likely to protect older workers and the elderly. Even before the crisis, more than 267 million young people were not in employment, education, or training (NEET), including almost 68 million unemployed young people. As a result of the crisis, one in six young people (17 %) who were employed before the outbreak, stopped working altogether, most notably younger workers aged 18 to 24. Working hours among employed young people fell by nearly a quarter (i.e. by an average of two hours a day) and two out of five young people (42 %) reported a reduction in their income. Young people in lower-income countries have been the most exposed to reductions in working hours and a contraction in income. In April 2020, 2.776 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU, of whom 2.239 million in the euro area. In April 2020, the youth unemployment rate was 15.4 % in the EU and 15.8 % in the euro area, up from 14.6 % and 15.1 % respectively in the previous month. Compared with March 2020, youth

unemployment increased by 159 000 in the EU and by 89 000 in the euro area. This increase, which includes NEETs, was four times greater than for the rest of the workforce. The trend continued into the second quarter of 2020. An autumn 2020 UK survey looking into emerging education and work inequalities showed – based both joblessness and reduced working hours – that 18.3 % of 16 to 25 year olds were out of work, compared to 11.9 % among 26 to 65 year olds. The younger generation's earning losses were also significantly higher, 58 %, compared to 43 % for older generations. Research also shows that young workers entering the labor market in recessions suffer a range of consequences, impacting on earnings and jobs for 10 to 15 years, and affecting other outcomes, including general health; and that periods of extended worklessness have long-lasting scarring effects.

Deteriorating mental health
When it comes to the mental health of the under-22/24age-group, they feel the loneliest and report the lowest level of mental well-being. They have also been affected by growing anxiety and depression. Young people whose education or work was either disrupted or stopped altogether are almost twice as likely to have been affected by anxiety or depression as those who continued to be employed or whose education stayed on track. Finally, the pandemic and the crisis also affected some of their rights, most importantly covering their basic needs, such as their access to housing. When it comes to the under 18s, the latest Report Card ranks children's well-being in the rich countries according to three criteria: mental well-being, physical well-being, and skills for life. It shows that even wealthy countries might not provide sufficient well-being for children. The situation has worsened with the pandemic. In addition, many households are facing the prospect of falling into poverty, owing to a drop in their incomes linked to the coronavirus crisis and their limited resources to cope with financial shocks.5 In OECD countries, more than one in three people do not have sufficient financial assets to keep their family above the poverty line for at least three months, should their income suddenly stop. The risk is especially high in households headed by people younger than 34 and people without higher education, as well as for couples with children. These findings further highlight that there are strong interlinkages between mental well-being, educational success and labor market integration that, in turn, have a major impact on the general well-being of society (including civic participation and trust) as well as on productivity growth, and thus on the entire economy.

The sudden increase in use of digital tools risks exacerbating inequalities. Rising inequalities due to the pandemic might leave permanent scars on the youngest  generation. In addition, the digital divide may become even greater. This is particularly  the case because the divide is a complex issue, involving at least three levels: simple  access to digital tools; levels of skills; 6 and, in some countries with nearly universal  access, offline outcomes. The latter concerns disparities in returns from internet use  among users with similar usage profiles, which seems to be due to differing socio-economic backgrounds. This might imply that internet use can magnify existing inequalities, a gloomy outlook during the current digital transformation. Moreover, while on average across the OECD nine in ten students have access to digital devices and internet at home, students in advantaged schools are 15 % more likely to have access to a computer for schoolwork than their peers in disadvantaged schools. In addition, in many homes' devices may need to be shared among parents and siblings, impeding many students from following lessons during school closures.

There are also positive changes. Multiple vulnerabilities relating to age, skill levels, region and socio-economic background are exposing this generation to the worst impact of the coronavirus outbreak and the ensuing crisis. At the same time, Gen Z-ers have innovative ideas concerning the recovery. In recent months they have not only participated in social activism, but they have also come forward with innovative ideas as young entrepreneurs for addressing financial, work or health and safety-related challenges. One survey from the end of March carried out among Millennials and Gen Z-ers reported on elevated feelings of empathy and gratitude due to the situation. The under 18s continued their climate activism online.

Existing EU policies All EU policy areas impact the children and young people of this generation. More than half of all the Commissioner portfolios explicitly target children and young people, predominantly within the EU and also globally at times. There are two main thrusts: protecting and empowering children and young people. However, the initiatives are often scattered and not coordinated across portfolios. Figure 2 below groups them according to the challenges discussed above that Gen Z was already facing prior to or is now facing as a consequence of the pandemic. It shows the interconnectedness of the measures, as one measure can help address several challenges. Grouping them by challenge also highlights that certain Commissioners have a particularly essential role in this matter. (Figure 1.) These are primarily Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social

Rights, second, Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President on Democracy and Demography, and third, Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth. First and foremost, the creation of a new portfolio of Vice-President on Democracy and Demography in the new Commission taking office at the end of 2019, shows that there is a deep understanding and concern about future demographic trends and generational divides. The first demography report of the European Commission highlights the problem of an ever-shrinking workforce in the future, with negative implications for labor markets, productivity and growth as well as for the future of social protection and the welfare state. The shrinking workforce might exacerbate regional differences, as there are regions that consistently lose population, while others grow. Trends concerning the share of young and old people who will depend on the working-age population show that today's generation of children will face an increased burden in supporting the remainder of the population as they move into work. Moreover, population stagnation and the emigration of highly educated early-career citizens that is already being observed in several southern, central, and eastern European Member States will result in a smaller and less educated workforce in those countries. At the same time, a more highly educated labor force should be able to compensate for some of these demographic trends and secure sufficient productivity levels. The forthcoming long-term vision for rural areas should address some of these concerns, including problems of connectivity, access to services and low-income levels. The Vice-President is also responsible for coordinating the design of the new comprehensive strategy on children's rights. This strategy should be action-oriented and target all children globally, encompassing external and internal EU policies. It should be designed with children's participation. It should also continue to mainstream children's rights across all policy priorities. The strategy should build on work that has been ongoing prior to 2019 across portfolios. This work was done in the context of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which explicitly recognized children as human beings with innate rights. The Convention has been ratified by all EU Member States. Article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) focuses, inter alia, on the protection of children's rights, as does Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Over the years, this focus has helped to promote a more comprehensive approach to policies concentrating on children across the EU. It has also promoted a move away from the idea of children as objects in need of protection, towards children as autonomous agents participating in society. Together with Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality, the Vice- President also coordinates efforts to secure a better work-life balance, following the path of the recently adopted Work-Life Balance Directive – an attempt to adjust systems to the changing realities of families.

These include a rising number of single parent families as well as childless households, same-sex couples with children, etc. The coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown measures have resulted in teleworking taking off in all Member States, with over one third of those in employment teleworking. This has consequences for work-life balance, including the right to disconnect, and the change in working time patterns. The European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee is in the process of putting forward a legislative proposal on the right to disconnect. The varying practices exercised in relation to flexible arrangements on working time may spark new discussions around revising the European Working Time Directive, as well as around regulations or guidelines on teleworking. This all falls within the portfolio of the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights. In addition, the Commissioner for Equality focuses on combating violence against women and children. The Vice-President for Democracy and Demography is also responsible for focusing on investing in children and on creating a child guarantee – a long-standing request of Parliament – for the most vulnerable children, so that they get access to basic services: health, housing, nutrition, early childhood education and care, and education. She shares this responsibility with the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, who will focus on it as part of a broader strategy to combat poverty. The Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth must focus on making the European education area a reality by 2025, to allow everyone access to quality education and the opportunity to move between countries. Gabriel has already updated the digital education action plan and is raising awareness of disinformation from an early age. The action plan is also strongly supported by Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President responsible for Europe fit for the Digital Age, and Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President responsible for Promoting the European Way of Life. Finally, Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, is working with the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth on education for a healthy lifestyle, including the mental health of children and adolescents. Children and young people are mentioned among the most vulnerable groups in the first Foresight Report of the European Commission. This report maps the current vulnerabilities and capacities of the EU – reinforced by the pandemic – across socio-economic, geopolitical, green and digital dimensions, with a view to monitoring and strengthening resilience across the EU. It also helps to understand correlations among different vulnerabilities and capacities. It clearly shows the positive impact of both pro-child and pro-youth policies, such as combating youth unemployment or early school leaving, and positive family policies on the general resilience of the system.

In addition, when it comes to young adults, the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights will also be responsible for adjusting social protection systems to the new reality of work. Schmit has brought forward the updated skills agenda, and the new Youth Employment Support programme, including a reinforced Youth Guarantee scheme and specific measures supporting young entrepreneurs who often launch start-ups. He is also responsible for developing an action plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which, along with education, fair working conditions and adequate social protection systems, also includes other principles relevant for the improvement of the lives of the youngest generation, such as access to services and to housing. Finally, Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment and Oceans is making sure that children's toys are safe and do not contain endocrine disruptors. Several funding programmes are particularly important when it comes to supporting Member States in their efforts to design responsive policies and programmes for Generation Z. The most important among these have been within the European structural and investment funds: the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund. In addition, certain programmes target children and young people specifically: Erasmus+, a programme that supports education, training, youth and sports in Europe; the Youth Employment Initiative, which mainly addresses NEETs; the Employment and Social Innovation programme, which focuses on the development of adequate social protection systems and labor markets, with particular attention to vulnerable groups and innovative financial tools, such as microfinance; and the European Fund for Strategic Investment, which targets innovation and infrastructure development. Building bridges and synergies across these programmes for targeted problem solving, i.e. addressing the above-mentioned challenges this generation faces, is of particular importance. Several Commissioners focus on strengthening child protection, often with an external dimension particularly for children in vulnerable situations: migrants, Roma children, children with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, and children affected by crisis situations. These include Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs, who will continue to strengthen the rules for the protection of children. She continues to monitor very closely the application of the legal safeguards concerning migrant children, including the obligation to always take their best interests into account in full respect of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. She will also make sure that victims, especially child victims, are fully protected by the law. For example, child sexual abuse should be tackled through better cooperation between law enforcement agencies. This also includes efforts to combat the sexual abuse of children online more effectively. In addition, Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for the Economy that Works for People,

together with Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture, will combat child labor. In order to target it comprehensively, child labor needs to be defined in a clear manner. Child labor entailing harmful forms of work needs to be distinguished from other forms of child involvement with work that are acceptable and have an educational component. In the same vein, Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice, is continuing efforts to encourage the accession of third countries to existing civil justice conventions, such as the Hague Conventions on International Child Abduction and on the Protection of Children. It is the role of the Commissioner for Crisis Management to make sure that children in crisis situations are protected and that they go to school, even in these crisis situations. Over the years, the European Parliament has been instrumental in putting the future of children and young people on the EU policy agenda and keeping it there. Some highlights include the 2015 promotion of the European child guarantee as a practical instrument to fight child poverty. In 2020, Parliament also called for a strengthened and binding youth guarantee instrument, including action to specifically target young people without work or education and training. Many of Parliament's proposals in relation to children and young people were put forward in the 2017 resolution on the European Pillar of Social Rights (social pillar), and currently in the draft resolution on a strong social Europe for just transitions as an input to the forthcoming action plan on the social pillar. The latter for example calls for youth unemployment to be halved.

Outlook (CONCLUSIONS) When developing policies and programmes for Generation Z at EU level four important points need to be highlighted. 1) The experience of recent years has shown that while the youngest generation can be vulnerable (for example, in terms of poverty and intergenerational mobility) it can also be actively engaged in public policy as has been visible in recent climate marches and other pro-democracy movements. In this context the challenge is to find policies that simultaneously protect and empower, that take account of young people as active agents of their own lives and not only as passive observers. Following the work around youth between 2010 and 2018, the 2019-2027 EU youth strategy marks an important step into this direction. With the active involvement of young people, 11 goals relating to young people's lives and challenges have been agreed, ranging from inclusive societies, moving rural youth forward, quality employment for all and participation for all, to a sustainable green Europe. The strategy called for the mobilization of EU-level policy instruments and action at national, regional and local levels by all stakeholders across all sectors. Recent research looking into the changing nature of welfare states and the way forward from an intergenerational perspective shows that pro-child and pro-youth policies always help to establish a balanced welfare state. This reinforces the importance of social

citizenship that determines the universal nature of entitlements independently from work or residence status This thinking is also in line with the social investment view of the welfare state, which promotes a life-cycle approach to investment and empowerment. 2) Policies need to be generation-fit; they need to reflect the youngest generation's concerns in the first place and not that of older generations' and their projections on the young. For example, there is a mismatch between the dream jobs of teenagers and the contemporary reality of the labor market. Having an ongoing dialogue and understanding between generations is all the more important as young people will have a greater impact in the elections of the future, although the generational divide is not as big as in the US. In the EU, it will be another 15 years before Millennials and Generation Z form a majority of the voting age population. 7 Currently, voter turnout among 18 to 24 year-olds is, on average, 16 percentage points lower than among adults aged 25 to 50. This is why European politicians have been pitching at the older generation. As active members of society, children and young people can participate actively in policy-making. Bringing down the voting age to 16 could contribute to that process. 3) It is important that policies tackle all young people and children under 22 together in a comprehensive manner across portfolios and age groups, as developmentally this is the period during which people grow up and reach adulthood, both psychologically and physically. Moreover, the differences between eastern and western, or old and new(er) Member States need to be considered. Anticipation and foresight should be part and parcel of the EU policy-making process, The forthcoming comprehensive children's rights strategy has the potential to promote a proper vision for and coverage of all children as requested by UNICEF along with 28 child rights organizations in a joint position paper in July 2020. It could span the six priorities of the von der Leyen Commission and not only mention strategies, but also the necessary funding and monitoring and accountability tools. However, it is important that concrete policies across portfolios present, and future also be comprehensive. The recovery instrument Next Generation EU, coupled with the multiannual financial framework for 2021 to 2027, in which several of the old programmes are redesigned and new programmes added, could be a promising incentive for that. Through the Youth Employment Support programme, for example, the goal is for Member States to invest EU funding of at least €22 billion in youth employment. These financial ambitions could also be accompanied by comprehensive policies for the next generation. One such example is the comprehensive strategy for children and youth adopted by the city of Vienna and developed with the participation of children. It contains over 190 measures cutting across sectors with the idea of participatory budgeting. Comprehensive policies could also help to put the

concept of a child's union at the heart of EU policies with a focus on the early years as one of the most rewarding investments in this generation. There is innovation potential in early years provision that could positively disrupt the existing education and training system and make it more responsive to ever-growing expectations and challenges. The OECD's recently created Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE), which aims to put people at the center of the recovery, places a particular focus on children and young people. It is proposing to put forward a comprehensive framework on child well-being in the next two years, based on five pillars: the development of good quality data for monitoring child well-being; appropriate financial resources; clear distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders; high quality provision for the most vulnerable; and political leadership and commitment for child well-being. 4) The EU can take the lead in monitoring the entire generation's socio-economic progress in a multidimensional way with good quality data. As the EU's main monitoring framework, the UNSDGs could serve as an entry point. This would be in line with the latest Court of Auditors' report on child poverty, for example, which calls for a more explicit and targeted approach. In addition, this monitoring mechanism could help to develop evidence-based and tailor-made policy solutions for the multiple challenges this generation faces.

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659404/EPRS_BRI(2020) 659404_EN.pdf

Now in its 12th year, Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey gathered feedback from more than 22,000 Gen Z and millennial respondents in 44 countries to explore their attitudes about work and the world around them. Fieldwork for the 2023 edition was conducted between November and December 2022, with qualitative interviews conducted in March 2023. As the COVID-19 pandemic recedes, we looked back at our last pre-pandemic survey to examine how the last three years have impacted Gen Zs and millennials, and specifically how their experiences in the workplace have evolved since then. Notably, we found that Gen Zs and millennials are now more likely to be satisfied with their work/life balance. They feel they have more flexibility in where they work. They believe their employers have made progress in driving greater diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). And they are slightly more likely to believe that businesses are taking action to address climate change. Broader societal change during this time likely contributed to this progress. The pandemic prompted many to re-evaluate the role work plays in their lives and to seek more balance. This contributed to the Great Resignation, which temporarily shifted more power to employees, enabling them to demand changes they have sought for many

years, including higher pay, and greater action and accountability in areas such as DEI and climate change. It also increased the availability of remote and hybrid work, leading to greater workplace flexibility in many industries. The last few years, however, have left significant negative legacies as well: a cost-of- living crisis spurred by the largest surge in inflation in 40 years, the biggest land war in Europe since the 1940s, rising mental health challenges and burnout, and an increase in physical health issues resulting from a lack of preventative care, among other factors. These issues weigh heavily on Gen Z and millennial respondents. This year's survey explores how Gen Zs and millennials are navigating these challenges, the progress they feel their employers have made, where there is still more work to do, and where they worry about potential setbacks. And it examines how concerns about the economy may be impacting their ability to plan for their futures.

Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey connected with 14,483 Gen Zs and 8,373 millennials across 44 countries. Their responses reveal how the disruptive events of the last few years have shaped their lives and views, and highlight that while they acknowledge some positive change, they remain deeply concerned about their futures.

Employers have made progress, but high expectations for business among Gen Zs and  millennials go largely unmet.
• Satisfaction with work/life balance and employer progress on DEI, societal impact, and  environmental sustainability have improved.
• While respondents acknowledge that their employers have made some progress, the   majority remain unimpressed with businesses' societal impact overall. Less than half  believe business is having a positive impact on society. Gen Zs are slightly more likely  to believe business is having a positive impact (48% versus 44% of millennials).
• Gen Zs and millennials have high expectations for their employers and for businesses  overall. They continue to believe that business leaders have a significant role to play  when it comes to addressing social and environmental issues.

The high cost of living looms large for Gen Zs and millennials.
• Once again, the high cost of living is their top societal concern, with unemployment  and climate change ranking second and third.
• Half of Gen Zs and millennials say they live paycheck to paycheck. They worry that a   potential economic recession has led employers to backtrack on climate action. They  also worry that it will hamper their ability to ask for much needed pay increases, continue  pushing for flexibility, or find new jobs.

• While financial concerns are top-of-mind for both generations, Gen Zs are more likely to expect their personal financial situation to improve in the next year (44% of Gen Zs versus 35% of millennials).
• Gen Zs and millennials are responding to financial pressures by taking on side jobs (on the rise compared to 2022), postponing big life decisions like buying a house or starting a family, and adopting behaviors that save money (and help the environment) such as buying second-hand clothes or not driving a car.

Gen Zs and millennials are rethinking the role of work in their lives.
• While 49% of Gen Zs and 62% of millennials say work is central to their identity, work/ life balance is something they are striving for. Having a good work/life balance is the top trait they admire in their peers, and their top consideration when choosing a new employer.
• Interest in part-time jobs is on the rise— improving career advancement opportunities for part-timers is the highest-ranked solution among respondents for achieving better work/ life balance. However, most don't feel that reducing their hours would be a realistic option as they can't afford the pay cut it would require. They also worry that their workload wouldn't be reduced accordingly, and that they'd be passed over for promotion opportunities, or given less interesting work. Condensed four-day work weeks —giving people more consolidated personal time, while avoiding some of the concerns that respondents have about parttime work—are also growing in popularity. • Gen Zs and millennials clearly value remote and hybrid work and see its benefits. Threequarters of respondents who are currently working in remote, or hybrid roles would consider looking for a new job if their employer asked them to go on-site full- time.

Stress and anxiety levels remain high, and burnout is on the rise.
• Nearly half of Gen Zs (46%) and four in 10 millennials (39%) say they feel stressed or anxious at work all or most of the time.
• Their longer-term financial futures, day-today finances, and the health/welfare of their families are top stress drivers, while concerns about mental health and workplace factors such as heavy workloads, poor work/life balance, and unhealthy team cultures are also at play. Gen Zs and millennials are reporting increasingly high levels of burnout due to work-related pressures.
• Over half of respondents acknowledge that their employers are taking mental health more seriously, and that their efforts to improve workplace mental health are having a positive impact. But mental health support and resources are still under-utilized, likely due to the societal and workplace stigma that still surrounds them.

• Gen Zs and millennials have mixed feelings about social media's impact on their mental  health. Almost half say it has a positive impact, yet more than four in 10 say it makes  them feel lonely or inadequate and that they feel pressured to have an online presence.

Harassment in the workplace is a significant concern, particularly for Gen Zs
• More than six in 10 Gen Zs (61%) and around half of millennials (49%) have experienced  harassment or microaggressions at work in the past 12 months.
• Inappropriate emails, physical advances, and physical contact are the most common   types of harassment, while exclusion, gender-based undermining and unwanted jokes   are the most common types of microaggressions.
• Of those who experienced harassment, around eight in 10 reported it to their employer,  however, a third of Gen Zs and a quarter of millennials don't think the issues were   handled effectively. Women, non-binary, and LGBT+ respondents are less likely to report  harassment to their employer and less likely to feel their organization responded well.

Climate change is a major concern for Gen Zs and millennials, but finances are making it harder for them to prioritize sustainability. • Concerns about climate change have a major impact on their decision-making, from family planning and home improvements, to what they eat and wear, to career and workplace choices. • Gen Zs and millennials are taking action on climate change, with seven in 10 respondents saying they actively try to minimize their impact on the environment. Financial concerns may put a damper on these efforts; more than half of respondents think it will become harder or impossible to pay more for sustainable products and services if the economic situation stays the same or worsens. • Gen Zs and millennials continue to demand greater climate action from their employers and believe some have deprioritized sustainability strategies in recent years. They also see a critical role for employers to provide the necessary skills training to prepare the workforce for the transition to a low-carbon economy.

https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023- genz-millennial-survey.pdf?dl=1

Stress and anxiety levels remain high—with under-represented groups most affected.

This year sees almost no change to the worryingly high levels of stress and anxiety seen  in previous years, with close to half of Gen Zs (46%) and four in 10 millennials (39%) reporting that they feel stressed or anxious all or most of the time. We also see a continuation in the trend of women reporting higher levels of stress and anxiety than men in both generations (54% versus 37% in Gen Zs, and 43% versus 35% in millennials). This trend is becoming increasingly pronounced among Gen Zs, with the gender gap growing from an 11 to a 17-point difference over the last three years. In contrast, the gender gap in millennial stress levels has remained relatively stable since 2020.

Almost half of Gen Zs say they feel stressed all or most of the time.

Women are more affected than men and those with a disability indicate higher stress  levels.
Respondents in under-represented groups also report heightened levels of stress and anxiety. For example, 56% of LGBT+ Gen Zs and 49% of LGBT+ millennials report that they feel stressed or anxious all or most of the time, along with 52% of Gen Zs and 51% of millennials who are part of an ethnic minority group, and 62% of Gen Zs and 63% of millennials who have a disability. This is significantly higher than the overall respondent base (46% for Gen Z and 39% for millennials).

Stress drivers: the mental health "feedback loop" and work-related factors

When considering stress and anxiety, it is important to understand the concerns that may be driving it. Finances and the welfare of their families continue to be the top stress drivers for both generations. As with previous years, concerns about their own mental health also rank highly—with 79% of Gen Zs and 73% of millennials saying that those concerns contribute to their stress levels, creating a worrying "feedback loop". Beyond their personal mental health, Gen Zs also cite the mental health of their generation among their top societal concerns. This is particularly true among Gen Z women, with around a quarter of them citing this in their top three, compared to about one in six Gen Z men and millennial women, and 12% of millennial men. A number of factors contributing to stress levels are directly work-related, such as heavy workload, poor work/life balance, unhealthy team cultures, and inability to be their authentic self at work. Indeed, over 60% of respondents cite these factors as contributing to their stress and anxiety

levels. People are also struggling to disconnect from work, with 23% of GenZs and 30% of millennials saying that they answer work emails outside of business hours at least five days a week.

Generational elements are also contributing to poor mental health.

For the first time, this year's survey also examines how some generational factors may be driving poor mental health in Gen Zs and millennials. Millennials, and to a slightly lesser extent Gen Zs, are reaching an age where they are more likely to have increased caretaking responsibilities. Just over a third of Gen Zs and about four in 10 millennials have daily or periodic caregiving responsibilities for both children and parents or elderly relatives. Among respondents with caretaking responsibilities, over 40% say it significantly impacts their mental health.

The use of social media by younger generations could also be having an effect. Perhaps surprisingly, almost half of Gen Zs (48%) and millennials (49%) think social media has a positive impact on their mental health—yet 46% of Gen Zs say social media makes them feel lonely and inadequate and 45% say that they feel under pressure to have an online presence. With one in five (20%) Gen Zs spending five hours or more a day on video platforms alone, the struggle to disconnect goes well beyond the workplace.

Work/life balance and a culture of respect remain key to well-being.

As noted earlier, respondents say several work-related factors—such as heavy workload, poor work/life balance, unhealthy team cultures, and inability to be their authentic self at work—contribute to their stress and anxiety levels. This year's wider survey questions provide critical insight into these factors for Gen Zs and millennials.

Achieving the right work/life balance remains a priority for many.

Respondents say that achieving a good work/life balance is the trait they admire most in their peers—they also cite it as the top reason for taking up their current role. Overall, the picture when it comes to their current work/life balance is positive: three quarters of Gen Zs and millennials (76%) are now at least somewhat satisfied with their current work/life balance, and around a third (34% of Gen Zs/31% of millennials) are very satisfied a marked improvement compared to pre-pandemic indicators (21% and 18% were very satisfied). This is likely since, for some people at least, aspirations to recalibrate

how—and how much—they work have been realized over the last few years; and employers have had to adapt. However, respondents are concerned that a stagnating or worsening economy could make it harder for them to reach that balance in the future: about a third believe it will become harder, and another approximately 15% believe it will become impossible, to ask for more flexibility at work or improve their work/life balance if the economic situation does not improve. The survey also points to some specific measures that employees would like to see embedded in their organizations to promote more flexible ways of working beyond remote or hybrid working—with condensed four-day work weeks and increased opportunities and career advancement for part-time workers ranking particularly high.

Conclusion

Even with the pandemic receding and a general trend towards more balanced working lives, successive and cumulative challenges continue to undermine the mental well- being of Gen Zs and millennials. The high cost of living weighs particularly heavily on people's minds. In addition to financial security being the dominant cause of stress among Gen Zs and millennials, worries about the future of the economy could impact their mental health for some time—and affect their hopes to achieve a healthier work/life balance going forward. While financial pressures and some of the wider societal factors causing stress, such as inequality and climate change, are not directly within employers' control, Gen Zs and millennials firmly believe that business has a responsibility to help address these issues and drive positive societal change. Organizations that do not do so risk losing talent, as Gen Zs and millennials make career decisions based on their values. And this year's research shows that many stress drivers for Gen Zs and millennials are work-related factors which are directly within employers' control—such as workload, poor work/life balance, and unhealthy work environments or team cultures. Furthermore, inappropriate behaviors in the workplace are happening at an unacceptable level, undoubtedly contributing to unhealthy work environments. These findings indicate that actions by business leaders to promote well-being, while acknowledged by many of our respondents, are yet to buck some worrying trends—from rampant burnout to comparatively high levels of stress and anxiety in younger and under-represented groups, and from continued discomfort in disclosing mental health issues to pervasive stigma in the workplace. With life looking uncertain and challenging for the foreseeable future for many Gen Zs and millennials, employers should increase their efforts to address stress drivers and create open, stigma-free working environments.

In response to this year's findings, they should particularly focus on:

Building cultures where mental health is openly discussed, and where people are  encouraged to seek adequate support.

This year's data points to the continued need for employers to create and maintain cultures that not only prevent mental health challenges from arising in the first place,  but enable everyone to recognize, address and openly discuss stress, anxiety and burnout. This includes offering tailored tools and policies to support mental health and encouraging people to disclose challenges and use those dedicated resources to alleviate them. But a step change in the uptake of resources and the disclosure of issues cannot happen without a permanent shift in behaviors and attitudes. Inclusive leadership at all levels is needed to foster the trust and empathy that will stop people fearing judgment or discrimination. Employers should build capability and set expectations for managers to not only hold but also initiate open conversations around mental health; spot signs and proactively offer support; and be vocal advocates for the well-being of their colleagues.

Enabling people to achieve their work/life balance aspirations.

Considering the high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout still experienced by Gen Zs  and millennials, more needs to be done to satisfy their expectations on work/life balance. With remote or hybrid working becoming common practice, employers should now focus on 'when' people work, not just 'where'. They should look for opportunities to offer models such as condensed work weeks, flexible working hours, and part time roles, and make clear that the careers of those opting for these models will not be penalized. Leaders should also focus on understanding and addressing generational pressures on Gen Zs and millennials, such as caretaking responsibilities. This could mean introducing specific policies, but also making flexible working available to everyone—working to remove stigma around needing to adapt working schedules to care for others. Employers can also introduce guidelines to tackle "always on" habits and encourage people to truly disconnect outside of their agreed working hours and set expectations for managers to lead by example.

Halting and reversing worryingly high levels of burnout.

Although burnout is complex and can have multiple causes and dimensions, employers can and should act to help mitigate this epidemic from spreading. With increased understanding around what burnout is and how it manifests at work, more resources are becoming available to help address it at an individual and organizational level. And while most actions to improve mental health can help mitigate the risks of people becoming burnt out, there are specific steps employers can take, such as incorporating the World Health Organization criteria in training and awareness campaigns. This would help HR and Talent teams; line managers and employees recognize burnout in the first place and encourage people to seek appropriate help at earlier stages.

Stamping out non-inclusive behaviors.

The survey highlights that Gen Zs and millennials continue to be exposed to harassment  and microaggressions at work which negatively affect their mental wellbeing. This emphasizes the need for business leaders to create work environments where reporting issues is encouraged, and inappropriate conduct consistently addressed. Transparency around what constitutes non-inclusive behavior, and trust in the mechanisms available to escalate and resolve issues, are paramount. Specific attention must be paid to those in under-represented groups who experience more frequent workplace harassment, and yet are less likely to report it. In parallel, there must be clear messaging— from the most senior levels of leadership down—on the importance of respectful everyday behaviors in creating and maintaining fully inclusive environments where everyone can thrive.

https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/legacy/docs/deloitte-2023- genz-millennial-survey-mental-health.pdf?dl=1

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