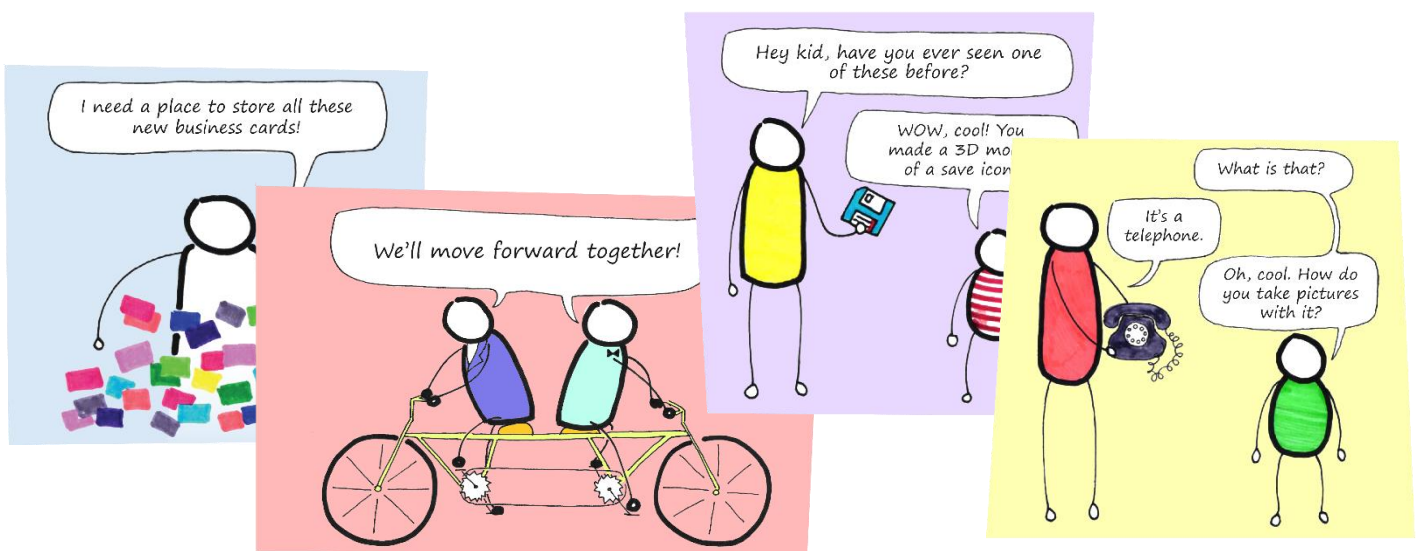


# Intellectual Output 1

## Research on youth work in Croatia, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania

### JOINT REPORT



#### Disclaimer

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## Introduction

This report represents the final step of a research activity on youth work in four partner countries: Croatia, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania.

The process that brought to the finalization of the 4 national reports involved three main activities:

- ➔ a desk research on Open Educational Resources for youth workers;
- ➔ an online questionnaire survey for the self-assessment of competences in the four main thematic areas covered by the project;
- ➔ a series of focus groups for the validation and integration of the results obtained with the previous two phases of the research.

These activities were carried out by gathering data, documents and information with respect to the following specific areas: *Cooperation with relevant stakeholders, Policy impact/influence, Reaching out to young people, Usage/exploitation of digital tools*. Each of these latter is a specific area to be analysed and on which to base the training curriculum to be developed by each partner.

This joint report aims to provide an analytical overview of the main results and features deriving from the national reports, in order to constitute an effective basis for the development of an online training platform for youth workers.

## The desk research: main goals and summary of results

As a first step towards the definition of the most effective and relevant elements to set up the online platform, a desk research was carried out, aiming to meet the needs of youth workers in terms of skills and competences development.

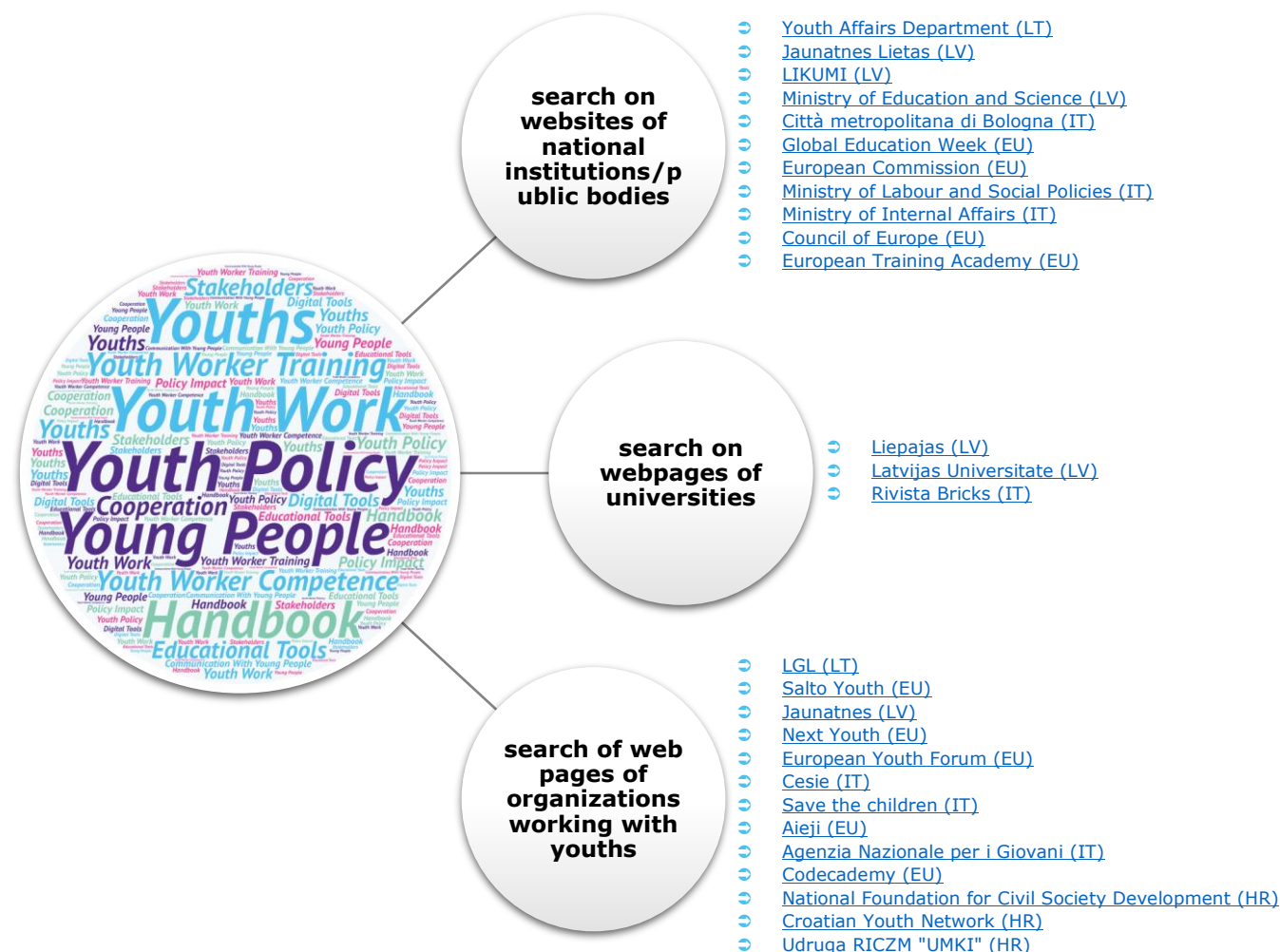
***Indeed, within the framework of the project, one goal is to define which mistakes have to be avoided in new educational resources and another one is to identify those topics that are well covered already and, thus, do not need to be included in the new Youth Work HD educational resources.***

The desk research undertaken by each partner explored the existing Online Educational Resources (OERs) for youth workers with respect to the 4 main areas identified in the framework of the project:

- ➔ Cooperation with relevant stakeholders;
- ➔ Policy impact/influence;
- ➔ Reaching out to young people;
- ➔ Usage/exploitation of digital tools.

## Online research of OERs

In order to identify the most suitable available resources, partners carried out multisource online research based on a common set of key words:



The research was carried out both in the national language (Italian, Croatian, Latvian, and Lithuanian) and in English. In particular, each partner organisation was responsible for the identification of:

- 3 educational resources available in English and at EU level on its area of competence
  - **Langas į ateitį** >>> Cooperation with relevant stakeholders
  - **EGINA** >>> Policy impact
  - **CTK Rijeka** >>> Reaching out to young people
  - **LIKTA** >>> Usage of ICT tools
- 3 educational resources for each of the thematic areas mentioned above available in national language

Searching for and selecting the resources to be analysed with the following questionnaire should be based on the evidence that the main target group are Youth Workers, where the partners accept the following definition:

*"A **Youth worker** is a person that works with young people to engage them in informal education. Youth workers can work both as statutory, those who work as part of a government run initiative and non-statutory, those that work in any other context."*

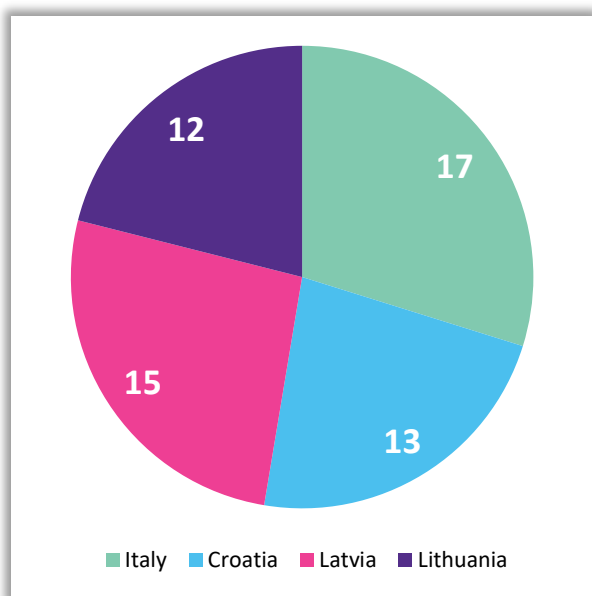


Figure 1 - Number of OERs selected and considered suitable by each partner

As Figure 1 shows, in total, 57 OERs were selected and 54 of these latter were considered as a suitable basis for an in-depth analysis of the youth work sector.

Of these selected OERs, **16** were in **English**, **38** only **in the mother tongue**, while **3** were both **in the mother tongue and English** (and, in some cases, available in other languages).

Overall, the research was of quality, many OERs were analysed, although only 3 on 57 were listed as "not recommended". The selected OERs were all coherent with the topics (Figure 2), although some did not directly address youths (Figure 3). **Most of those were listed as part of all the topics (Policy impact, Reaching out to**

**young people, etc.), suggesting a difficulty to clearly define the differences.**

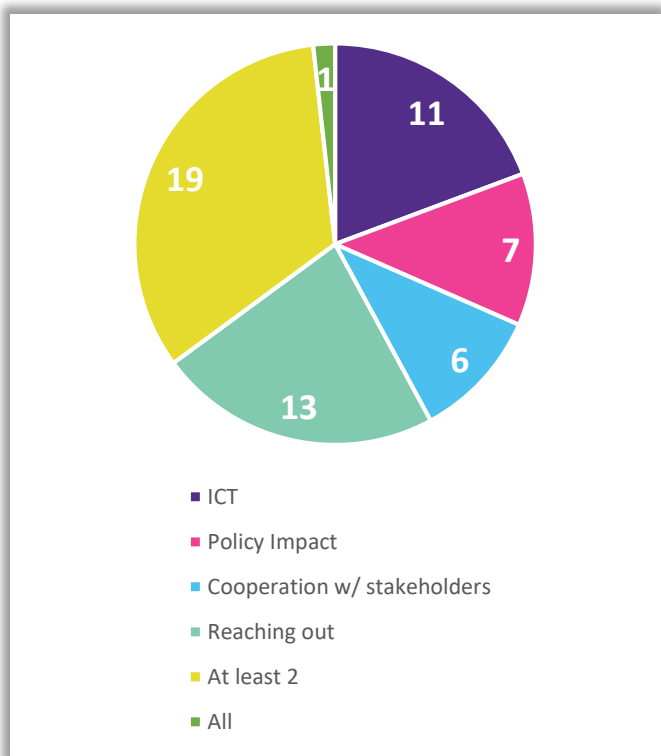


Figure 2 - Topics covered by the selected OERs

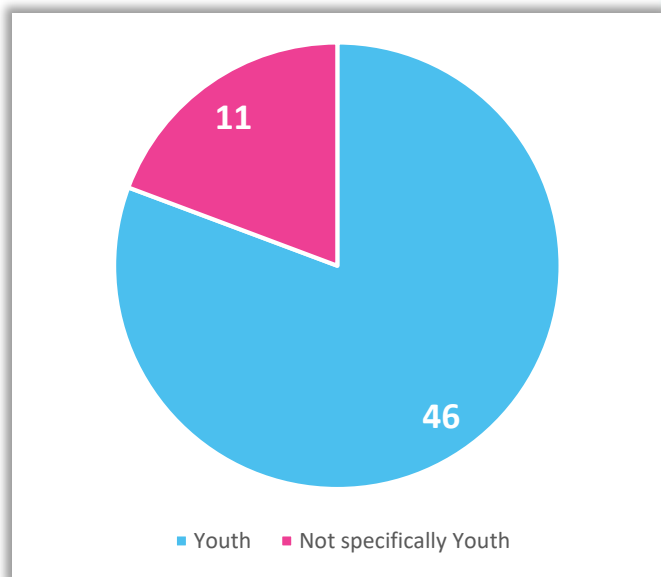


Figure 3 - OERs focussing on youths

With respect to the specific nature of the selected OERs, as Figure 4 shows, most of them are handbooks/PDFs, so they mostly lack the interactivity element.

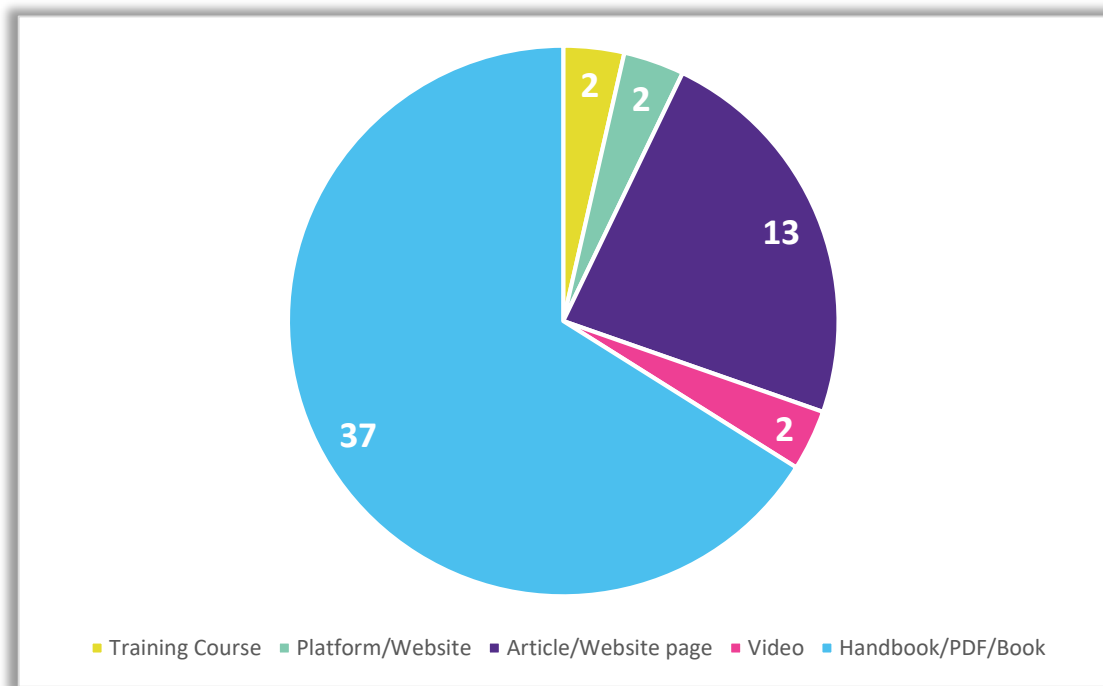


Figure 4 - Nature of the selected OERs

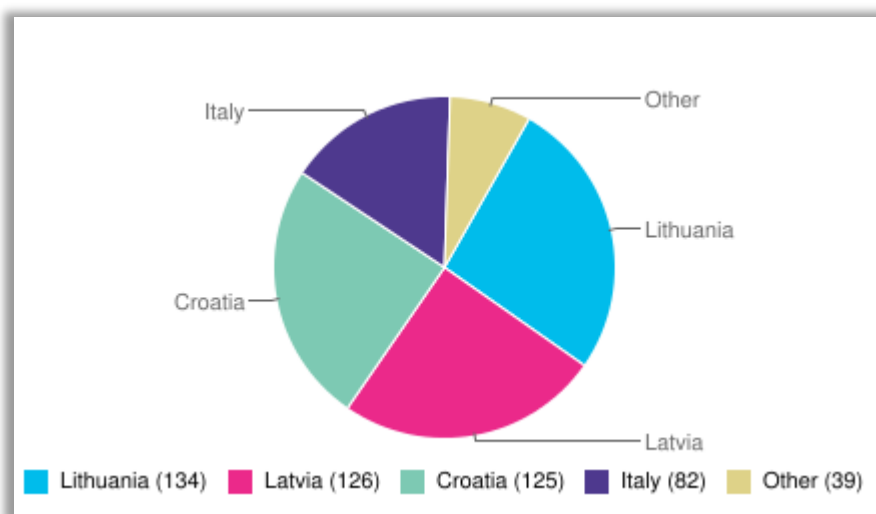
## The online survey: an overview of the main results

### Description of the target group

An online survey for Youth Workers has been carried out from December 2016 until February 2017. The project's partners have widely disseminated the questionnaire both at National and European level, with the final objective to reach and involve minimum 500 youth workers in a research focused on:

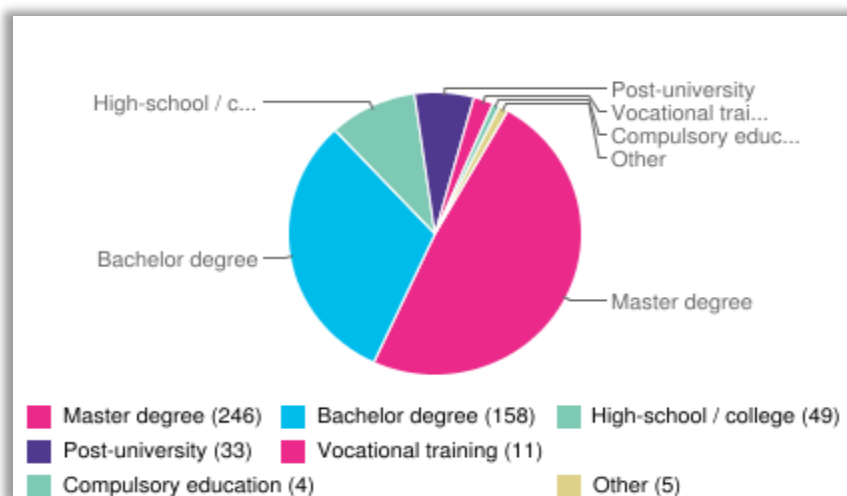
- ⇒ their **training needs** for **improving the impact and the quality** of the work done with the youngsters;
- ⇒ their **learning preferences** with a particular focus on **online environments and blended approaches**.

Finally, we have received 505 feedbacks from youth workers mostly located in one of the countries represented by the consortium, with an **average age of 35/36 years old**, and a definitely higher **female representation (78%)** in comparison to the male one (22%).



Most of the respondents **hold either a Master (49%) or a Bachelor degree (31%)** and they usually work in **Schools or Community centers**, carrying out a wide range of different activities,

**equally addressed to youngsters from 12 to 30 years old**, including mainly:



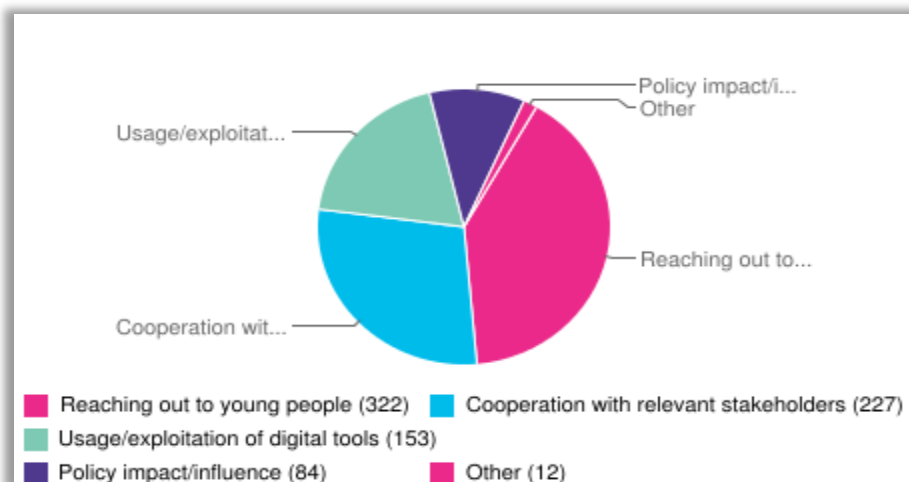
- ⇒ Culture and heritage
- ⇒ Environment
- ⇒ ICT and digital
- ⇒ Sport
- ⇒ Health-care
- ⇒ Religion
- ⇒ Music and Arts

but also Social Work, Training and Education, Employment services,

Rural development, Media and Communication, Public authorities and many other fields.

## Skills' self-assessment

When asked to select the aspects that are more critical and/or important for the quality of their present work with youths, 40% of the respondents selected "**Reaching out to young people**", 28% "**Cooperation with relevant stakeholders**", 19% "**Usage/exploitation of digital tools**" and 11% "**Policy impact/influence**".



Depending on the **357 youth workers out of 505 (more than 50%) have selected more than one training area**

selection made by the respondent, the questionnaire was programmed to show a self-evaluation grid on different key competencies to be mastered by Youth Workers for enhancing the quality and the impact of their work, asking them to self-evaluate their competence level on a scale from 1 (unskilled) to 5 (expert).

## Main competences needed

This section highlights how participants in the online survey responded with respect to the competences needed for each of the 4 areas under assessment.

### Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

Public speaking, persuasive communication, effective presentation of the youths' needs and goals

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.67 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Strategic analysis of stakeholders' priorities and expectations, included the legal and administrative framework, as well as their relevance to the youths and community development

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.18 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Building and maintaining collaborative relationship, through negotiation and adaptability, taking advantage of multi stakeholders cooperation and funding opportunities

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.51 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

### Policy impact/influence

Analytical and critical understanding of policy documentation, statistics and socio-economic trends

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.40 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Strategic planning of activities for policy influence, monitoring and evaluation

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.30 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

### Reaching out to young people

Effective public relation and communication through social media, emotional intelligence and social sensitivity

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.60 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Carrying out needs' analysis for the elaboration of individual mentoring and coaching plans

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.37 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Project management, logistic and organizational skills, problem solving and creativity

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.87 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

### Usage/exploitation of digital tools

Exploitation of digital and online collaboration tools for own personal work

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.80 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Effective use of ICT tools for the training and working activities with the youths

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.48 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

Open digital content production and digital creativeness

- **EVALUTED WITH 3.06 OUT OF 5.00 (Medium level of competence)**

In conclusion, based on the analysis of the data collected with the online survey, it seems to be clear that, regardless the area of competence taken into consideration, the most urgent action is to provide advanced training opportunities in order increase the competence level of youth workers around Europe, thus promoting a more qualified and professional offer to European youths.

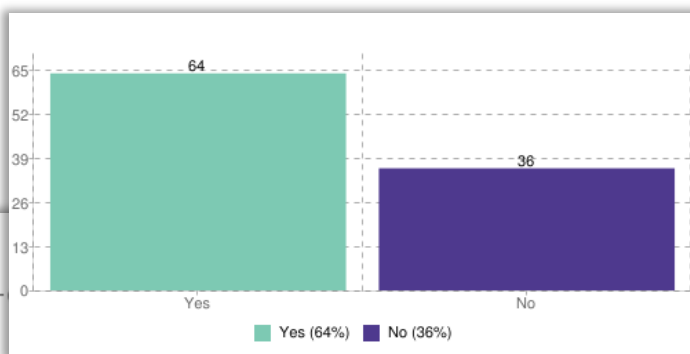
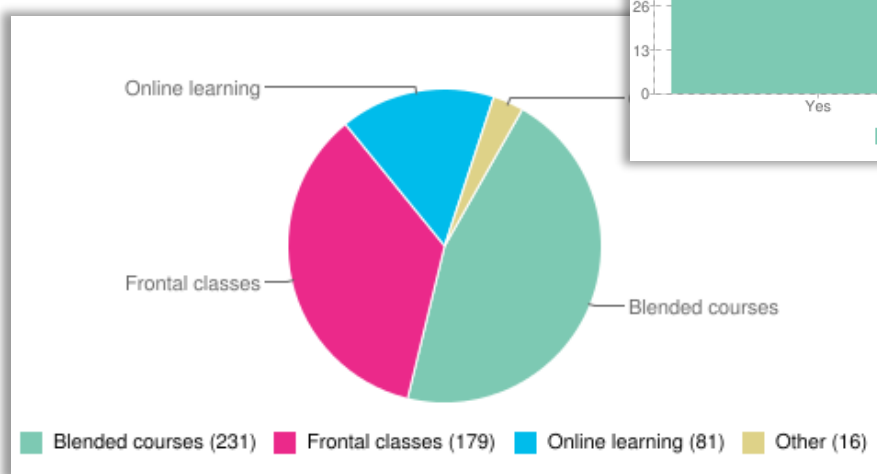
Therefore, besides investigating on the most relevant competencies for the four areas considered in the research, the main reason for carrying out focus groups at national

level consists on trying to identify the pedagogical and methodological elements that will ensure a concrete development at a higher level of youth workers' competencies.

### Preferences on learning methods

The second main part of the questionnaire has been structured in order to investigate on the learning preferences of interviewed youth workers. The aim was also to better understand what features could make the project's eLearning platform more suitable to the needs and expectations of our primary target group.

Although there is a high percentage, almost 50%, of youth workers who



declare to prefer to attend blended courses, it is very relevant to highlight how the 36% of the interviewed sample has never used an online learning platform, which could be also related to the reason why the 35%

still prefer to attend frontal classes. Finally when questioned on what particular features they would prefer to see in the eLearning platform of the Youth Work HD project, the respondents answered as it follows:

- Over 250 preferences**
- it is interactive
  - it is integrated with work you do with youths
  - it is fun and easy to use
  - it allows Collaboration with other participants
  - it is in my mother tongue
  - it provides certificates
  - it includes good practices and references for additional information

- Between 200 and 250**
- it includes right answers and/or feedback to wrong ones
  - it includes quizzes/tests
  - it is very Visual
  - it is structured into small learning blocks
  - it includes Team tasks
  - it provides evaluation of tasks
  - it includes webinars

- Under 200 preferences**
- it provides the opportunity to meet/cooperate with stakeholders
  - it supports Peer learning
  - it is graphically appealing
  - it includes Project based learning
  - it includes online mentors
  - it introduces me to an international learning environments
  - it includes multiple media and of high-quality
  - it is in English
  - it is based on a badging system

## The focus groups: an overview of the main results

The third and last stage in the implementation of the research on youth work in the 4 partner countries consisted in the organization and conduction of focus groups to examine the results of the previous research phases based on the desk research and the online questionnaire.

A focus group research is a qualitative research method/data collection technique that seeks to gather information that is beyond the scope of quantitative research. This research method is particularly useful when the interaction between participants can enrich the topic and the co-construction of the discourse is useful for the research objective.

The Focus groups consisted in a small group of selected participants that were stimulated by a team (the trained facilitator and the observer) with open-ended questions in a discussion type atmosphere in order to generate comparative analysis of a given topic.

Each project partner organized 4 focus groups, one for each thematic area investigated with the online survey for youth workers, namely: (1) Cooperation with relevant stakeholders, (2) Policy impact/Influence, (3) Reaching out to young people and (4) Usage of ICT tools.

For each area, the focus groups investigated into the following key aspects:

- ➔ Competences to be developed for the up-skilling of youth workers;
- ➔ Learning methods to develop these competences;
- ➔ OERs resources identified at national and EU level.

The focus groups have resulted to be a very appropriated and appreciated method of investigation for the purposes of the Youth Work HD research. Indeed, based on the data collected with the evaluation questionnaire distributed at the end of each local focus group, almost all the participants declared that *"the focus group was better than expected", "the topics discussed were interesting", "the questions were easy to understand", "discussion was enjoyable, with enough time for the proposed topics and a good facilitation from the hosting organisation"*.

A comparative analysis of the above-mentioned aspects will be presented throughout the following sections.



## Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

### Main competences needed

From the analysis of all the focus groups implemented, it emerged that participants from all countries believe that being able to maintain an effective relationship with relevant stakeholders is the most important competence to be gained. From the figure below, it can also be drawn that all the most important competences relate to the “relational sphere”, meaning that youth workers must first be able to communicate properly and have the right attitude that allows them to build and maintain fruitful and solid relationships. Moreover, the figure provides an insight on the most important competences highlighted in each country.

Thus, being able to identify relevant stakeholders, as well as being able to effectively cooperate with them by building and maintaining solid and collaborative relationships are the main competences identified as a result of all the focus groups carried out in the framework of the project.

### Learning methods to develop the competences needed

The results of the focus groups across the 4 countries are quite homogeneous, as they mostly highlight that **blended training courses** would be, according to participants, the most effective. This can be mainly due to two reasons:

- ➔ **Online training allows participants to attend lessons whenever and wherever they want**, and this is relevant as some youth workers might live in areas far from the training school/centre, and thus it could be harder for them to take part to all the classes;
- ➔ **Face-to-face lessons** might also be useful, as they will provide trainees with a timely response to possible doubts/problems and will also ensure **a direct and active involvement of the participants in the group**.

In some national cases, specific features emerged, such as the possibility of gaining a certificate in Italy, or the possibility of carrying out tasks like “individual projects”, in Latvia.

## Policy impact/influence



### Main competences needed

The investigation regarding policy impact/influence underlined that participants from all countries found it important to be able to analyse and understand both policies and policy documents. However, this might be somehow difficult, since policy documents – when at national level – mainly mirror the national/local government structures (and the related institutions/bodies).

The different legal framework from each partner country is reflected in the responses of participants to the focus groups. For instance, in Italy, where there is a multi-level articulation of the governmental system where a certain level of discretionality is given, for instance, to the single Region on how to manage several policy areas, the main competence needed seems to be “knowing the territory of living”.

### Learning methods to develop the competences needed

The answers emerging from the focus groups steered the preferences on the learning methods to courses featuring blended activities, which is also in line with what emerged from the previous section on Cooperation with stakeholders. However, with respect to the specific area of policy impact, a need emerged with respect to learning “have an impact” and “influence”, which is something more complex than becoming acquainted on how to read and comprehend a policy document.

Thus, the Latvian participants, for instance, highlighted that webinars on best practices and successful initiatives is important, in order to be acknowledged on “how to influence policies”. Moreover, like in Italy and Lithuania, a need emerged on being provided with a proper online training to gain specific competences on this field.

## Reaching out to young people

### Main competences needed

The responses of the participants were quite homogeneous, as they agreed mostly on all the competences needed. Overall, they highlighted that reaching out to young people implies a process where a youth worker has to activate communication skills, also in terms of correct body language, appropriate and appealing vocabulary, but they should also know how to approach youths and where to approach them. Thus, a youth worker needs to know how to properly use, for example, social networks.

### Learning methods to develop the competences needed

Participants to the focus groups underlined that reaching out to young people is something which implies having gained or possess a number of competences and soft skills, from communication skills to digital competences.

Thus, from the answers it appeared clear that two main kinds of learning methods could be useful to develop these competences: a classical theoretical training where also a series of best practices is presented, but also practical training. The latter should also envisage experiential activities and specific coaching techniques. Moreover, participants should gain a certificate.



## Usage/exploitation of digital tools

### Main competences needed

The use of digital tools is something that should be developed as a transversal feature propaedeutic to all the three areas cited above.

All participants from the partner countries agreed on the need for developing ICT skills/capacities. However, some differences emerged from country to country with respect to other possible competences. For instance, Italian participants found the most urgent need in being able to use digital tools at least as well as youths, since these latter must feel they are relating to someone who “understands their reality”, where virtual means real.



### Learning methods to develop the competences needed

The learning methods which could best support the development of the most important competences mainly relate to interactive courses/training, where participants can access high quality digital contents and experiment them, through quizzes and tests.

The need for an interactive training is highlighted in all partner countries except for Italy, where respondents focused more on developing activities tailored to the specific age of users. Interactivity is an element which was broken down into three features:

- Interactive group work;
- Direct contact with the instructor;
- Possibility of sharing materials/experiences.

Moreover, participants should gain a certificate.



## Conclusions

From the analysis carried out in the 4 partner countries emerged both differences and common points in order to set up an online training platform meeting the needs of youth workers.

After a transversal evaluation of the most relevant features and issues that participants to the online survey and the focus groups pointed out, a good online training course should have the following characteristics:

- ***It should be blended***, thus providing trainees with some flexibility on how/when to attend classes, but also a tutorship to which having recourse in case of need for a timely response;
- ***It should be interactive*** and give participants the chance of connecting with other trainees, share experiences and learn through them;
- ***It should provide a certification***, since in countries like Croatia and Italy there is no formal definition of “youth worker” as a profession, nor there is a specific training path to become such a figure;
- ***It should be visually appealing, simple to use but also with high quality content.***

According to the results of the research activities, such an online platform should help participants easily develop important competences. These latter mostly rely on the **communication** field, declined in terms of **soft skills** (body language, adequate vocabulary, etc.) and **emotional thinking**. The gaining of these abilities is useful to relate with others, being they policy institution representatives, youths or relevant stakeholders, and make actions more effective.

In this framework, also the use of digital tools serves the purpose of “conveying the right message through the right means”, since nowadays the virtual world of social media/social networks opens up a multitude of possibilities to communicate, reach out to people (youths, stakeholders, etc.) and create an effective system of relationships.