

# Research Results



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# Introduction

*"It's not that we use technology, we live technology." - Godfrey Reggio*

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, digital youth work has emerged as a critical component of modern youth services. As the field continues to expand, understanding the current abilities and limitations faced by practitioners is essential to enhance the effectiveness and reach of digital youth work. This research paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities in implementing online youth work, drawing directly from the insights of 200 stakeholders, including practitioners, policy makers, and young people themselves.

This primary research gathers comprehensive data on several key areas: the existing capabilities and constraints of youth workers in the online environment, the obstacles they encounter, and their familiarity with current youth work policies and guidelines. Additionally, the research explores stakeholder perceptions and feedback on the standardization of online youth work practices, offering a nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives within the field.

Furthermore, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of existing tools and resources utilized in online youth work, providing critical insights that will inform the development of targeted strategies and objectives for future initiatives. By systematically assessing these components, this study seeks to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of online youth work, ultimately supporting the enhancement of youth services in the digital age.

The primary research with stakeholders involves gathering information directly from 200 stakeholders, including leaders of youth organizations, youth workers themselves, and even young people actively involved in online youth programs.

The research involves a targeted outreach to stakeholders across Europe who are actively involved in online youth work. Participation was completely voluntary, and included informed consent. These findings will be compiled into a comprehensive report that will directly inform the project's overall objectives and future strategies through the secondary research focusing on the existing policies and resources of digital youth work. Ultimately, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations that guide the project's next steps and contribute meaningfully to the field of online youth work.

It is important to stress out that this is just a primary part of the much wider research paper and the findings will be completed by the secondary part of the research.

## Methodology

The research was examined under the prism of positivist philosophy and was determined as quantitative. According to the positivist understanding, knowledge is measurable, it can be quantified, thus very precise and accurate knowledge of the subjects of examination is obtained. Therefore, positivists prefer a research methodology that allows for repetition and measurable observations, which are then statistically analyzed. In accordance with the chosen research philosophy, the collection of primary data was carried out using a survey method (questionnaire technique), which includes a method of research that systematically collects data from a set of representative respondents in the form of personal views. According to Creswell (2013 p. 328) "a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" and enables the researcher to generalize or draw inferences to the population from the sample results.



In the process of processing, analyzing and interpreting the results of this research, a variety of scientific methods and techniques were used, as appropriate, in order to reach the goals and main objectives of the primary research, as listed below:

- Assessment of current abilities and limitations in implementing digital youth work
- Identification and analysis of obstacles facing digital youth work practitioners
- Familiarity with digital youth work policies and guidelines
- Perception and feedback on the standardization of digital youth work practices
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of existing tools and resources for digital youth work



The methods that were used for theoretical analysis and generalization of certain, previous knowledge about the characteristics, essence, and effects of digital youth work, were the following

- **Inductive method:** this method allowed the researcher to formulate general conclusions about the challenges encountered in digital youth work, the level of awareness on existing frameworks to regulate digital youth work and the confidence/willingness of the respondents to overcome these challenges, on the basis of the collected information and individual observations of the respondents.
- **Deductive method:** this method enabled the researcher to draw specific conclusions deriving from the general conclusions about the concrete needs of the respondents to receive support, resources, materials, training and guidance, as well as policy reforms and changes, in order to overcome the identified challenges.
- **Abstraction and Concretization methods:** this approach enabled the separation of less important information among the collected data, and highlighted the key problems and focus points of the respondents in their engagement with digital youth work, as well as pointed out the optimal ways to overcome these problems.

Overall, the methodological approach in this paper is adapted to finding answers to specific research questions with the aim of achieving the research goals. The use of special and individual methods, as listed, facilitated the processing and analysis of the most complex and less known dimensions of the studied phenomenon.



## Sample

The research employed a sample of 200 participants across Europe, employing the targeted sampling approach for the sample identification. Also known as purposive or judgmental sampling, this non-probability sampling technique was used in the phase of identifying specific criteria for the targeted audience based on their relevance to the research questions. This approach allowed the researcher to target particular segments of the population that were most likely to provide valuable insights to meet

the research purposes, and thus increase the quality of the research results. The criteria set for the sample were:



**Profile:** youth workers, youth organizations, policymakers (specialised in youth policy), experts in the field of youth



**Experience:** knowledge on digital youth work, experience in digital youth work practices, interest in digital youth work, any involvement in digital youth work



**Geographical location:** EU member states and Erasmus+ program countries

This targeted sampling technique provided a sample of 200 stakeholders, encompassing leaders of youth organizations, youth workers themselves, and even young people actively involved in digital youth programs, which offered a focused approach that enhanced relevance and efficiency while maintaining data quality. The demographic section supported the sample selection process of the research to ensure representativeness across the YO landscape, by meticulously considering factors such as organization size (small, medium, large), activity level, and budget size.

## *Time and place of the research*

The research was conducted during the month July 2024 on the territory of EU member states and Erasmus+ program countries.

## *Research instruments*

Combining closed-ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions provides a balanced approach to data collection. This methodology enables researchers to capture both quantitative data for statistical analysis and qualitative insights for a deeper understanding of the subject. The thoughtful design of the questionnaire, informed by literature and previous research, ensures that it effectively addresses the research goals while engaging respondents in meaningful ways. The questionnaire utilized closed-ended questions requiring respondents to choose predefined answers on a 5-point Likert scale. Likert scales are considered reliable because they provide a consistent method for respondents to express their views, allowing for nuanced insights into attitudes and perceptions. The numerical data generated from Likert scales can be easily quantified, enabling straightforward

statistical analysis. This can include measures of central tendency (mean, median) and dispersion (variance, standard deviation).

Closed-ended questions are those that provide respondents with a set of predefined answer choices. These questions are typically structured and offer limited options for responses, which can include yes/no answers, multiple-choice selections, or scales of agreement/disagreement.

Closed-ended questions are used to obtain quantitative data that is easier to analyze statistically. They allow researchers to collect consistent responses from a large group of participants, facilitating comparisons and identifying trends.

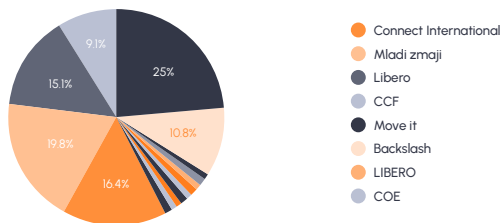
Open-ended questions are those that do not restrict respondents to a set of predefined answers. Instead, they allow for free-form responses, enabling participants to express their thoughts, feelings, or experiences in their own words. Open-ended questions are used to gather qualitative data, providing a deeper understanding of complex issues. They offer insights into the reasons behind respondents' attitudes and behaviors, revealing underlying motivations and context.

## Data processing

To analyze the data collected from this research, a combination of statistical techniques and qualitative methods have been used, both the descriptive statistics and the qualitative analysis and interpretation. The first step was to understand how different levels of experience in youth work relate to stakeholders' perceptions, particularly regarding their activity in the field of digital youth work and any qualitative feedback they provided.

### 1. Which organization recommended you to participate in the research?

232 responses

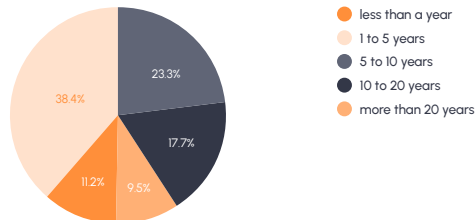


The diversity was well represented in the sample both geographical and the profile of the organizations representing youth organizations from a wide spectrum of activities.

## Experience Levels and Variations of their Perception of Digital Youth Work

### 2. How long do you work as a youth worker / are engaged in youth work activities?

232 responses



#### Less Than a Year of Experience

##### LACK OF CONFIDENCE / NEED FOR TARGETED TRAINING

Newcomers to the field often express a need for more understanding and confidence in using digital tools. Their limited experience can lead to uncertainty about how to effectively integrate digital elements into youth work, highlighting the importance of targeted training and mentorship for this group.

#### 1 to 5 Years of Experience

##### FLEXIBILITY & OPENNESS / NEED FOR EXPERIMENTATION

Respondents with 1 to 5 years of experience frequently highlight the flexibility and accessibility offered by digital youth work. This group often sees digital platforms as a means to expand outreach and engage with youth who might otherwise be unreachable due to geographical or logistical barriers. They are often accommodated on an operational level, especially due to budgetary restraints which are normally overcome on the digital sphere. Their relative newness to the field may also contribute to their openness to innovation and willingness to experiment with digital tools.

#### 5 to 10 Years of Experience

##### DYNAMIC EXPERIENCE / NEED FOR A HYBRID APPROACH

Those with 5 to 10 years of experience focus on the potential for innovative engagement methods. Having established some grounding in traditional practices, this group recognizes the opportunities digital tools offer for creating dynamic, interactive, and creative youth work experiences. They are often at the forefront of blending traditional and digital approaches to maximize impact.

### 10 to 20 Years of Experience

#### FOCUS ON ETHICS & LITERACY / NEED FOR PRIVACY & ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

Respondents with 10 to 20 years of experience emphasize the need for enhanced digital literacy and ethics. This group is aware of the potential pitfalls of digital engagement, such as privacy concerns and ethical dilemmas, and advocates for a solid foundation in digital competencies. Their experience equips them to critically assess the digital transition and advocate for comprehensive digital training.

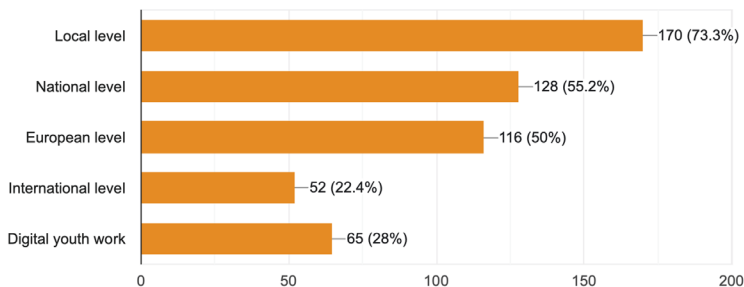
### More Than 20 Years of Experience

#### CONCERNS ABOUT LOSS OF TRADITIONAL METHODS / NEED FOR MAINTAINING PERSONAL NATURE

Practitioners with over 20 years of experience express mixed feelings about the digital transition. While some embrace the shift and recognize the benefits of digital tools, others are concerned about the potential loss of traditional methods. This group often values the deep personal connections fostered through face-to-face interactions and may be wary of the impersonal nature of digital engagement.

### 3. Which levels of youth work are you active in?

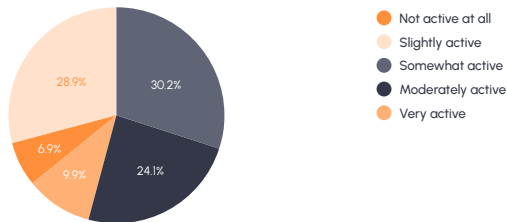
232 responses



The most common response was "Local level," with over 73% participants indicating they are active at this level. Other popular responses included "European level" and combinations of multiple levels (e.g., "National level, European level"). This suggests that most respondents are engaged in youth work at the local level, with a significant portion also involved in broader, international activities.

#### 4. How would you rate your level of activity in the field of digital youth work over the past year?

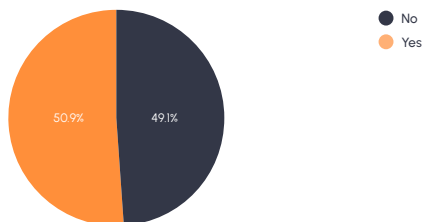
232 responses



"Somewhat active" was the most frequent response, with over 30% of respondents selecting this option. Many respondents consider themselves moderately engaged in digital youth work, indicating that while digital tools are being used, there may be room for increased involvement and activity.

#### 5. Have you received specific education or training to become a youth worker?

232 responses

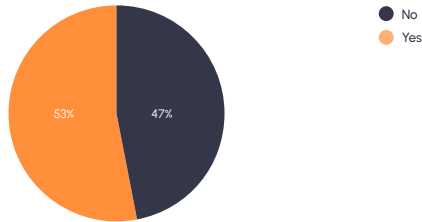


Half of the respondents have received specific education for youth work. The fact that just under half of the respondents have formal education in youth work may suggest a diverse workforce in the sector, where professionals come from different educational backgrounds, some of which may not be specifically tailored to youth work.

In terms of standardization of practices, the data suggests that there may be varying levels of understanding and application of youth work principles. This could affect the consistency and quality of service delivery, highlighting the potential need for more widespread and standardized training opportunities. If only half of youth workers have specific education in the field, it may indicate a relatively low level of professionalization within youth work. This might have broader implications for policy, accreditation, and the recognition of youth work as a specialized profession.

**6. Have you participated in any training or professional development related to digital youth work?**

232 responses



The survey question "Have you participated in any training or professional development related to digital youth work?" reveals a nearly even split among respondents, with 53% indicating they have participated in such training and 47% stating they have not. This distribution provides insights into the current landscape of training and professional development in digital youth work, highlighting areas of progress and opportunities for further development. Nevertheless, this very division does not necessarily indicate that the 47% of the respondents who state not to have attended any official training on digital youth work, have no experience, knowledge or skills in delivering such services. In fact, there is a high possibility that a certain portion of this percentage involves individuals who are self-taught, learned by practice and experience, or even developed through other approaches (peer-learning, self-study, mentoring etc.).

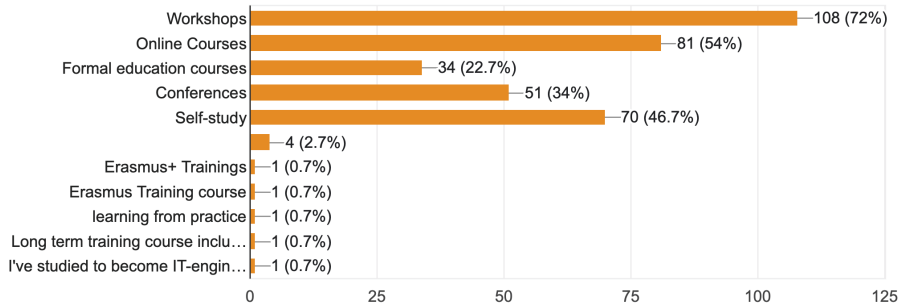
The fact that 53% of respondents have engaged in training or professional development related to digital youth work indicates a significant level of awareness and proactive engagement with digital competencies among practitioners. This is a promising sign, as it suggests that more than half of the respondents recognize the importance of acquiring skills and knowledge specific to digital youth work.

The 47% of respondents who have not participated in any training or professional development related to digital youth work may face various barriers that prevent them from accessing these opportunities. These barriers could include a lack of awareness about available training programs, limited access to resources or funding, or logistical challenges such as time constraints or geographic isolation.

The absence of training among nearly half of the respondents raises concerns about potential skill gaps and uneven adoption of digital practices across the sector. Without formal training, practitioners may struggle to effectively integrate digital tools into their work, potentially limiting the impact and reach of their programs.

## 7. If yes, what type of training or professional development did you participate in?

232 responses



For those who opted for "yes", the majority chose workshops (72%), online courses (54%), and self-study (46.7%), while only 22.7% chose formal education courses. This data shows that still nonformal education providers are dominant in regards to digital youth work.

## Digital Tools and Resources in Youth Work

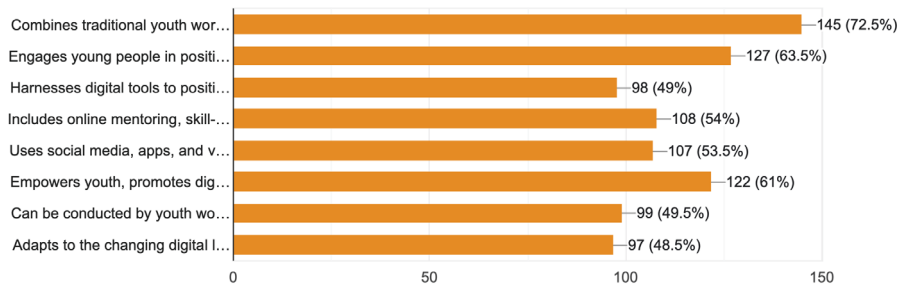
The integration of digital tools in youth work represents a transformative shift that offers both opportunities and challenges. As digital technologies become increasingly pervasive, their potential to enhance outreach and engagement in youth work is widely recognized. However, maintaining quality and ensuring safety within digital environments presents significant challenges. The effectiveness of digital tools in youth work is generally viewed positively, with many recognizing their potential to enhance outreach and engagement. However, there are notable concerns and challenges, particularly around maintaining quality and ensuring safety in digital environments. The need for ongoing training and development in digital competencies is a recurring theme across responses, highlighting areas where further support and resources could significantly benefit practitioners.

Many respondents described digital youth work as a necessary evolution, highlighting its accessibility and ability to reach a broader audience. However, some expressed concerns about losing the personal touch and engagement found in face-to-face interactions.



## 8. Digital youth work (is):

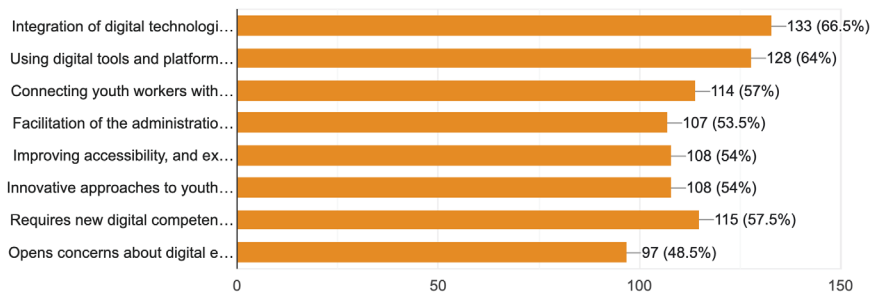
200 responses



The most common perception of digital youth work is that it "Combines traditional youth work principles with modern digital tools," with 72% respondents selecting this description. This reflects a consensus that digital youth work is seen as an extension or enhancement of traditional methods rather than a complete departure from them.

## 9. Digitalization of youth work (is):

200 responses



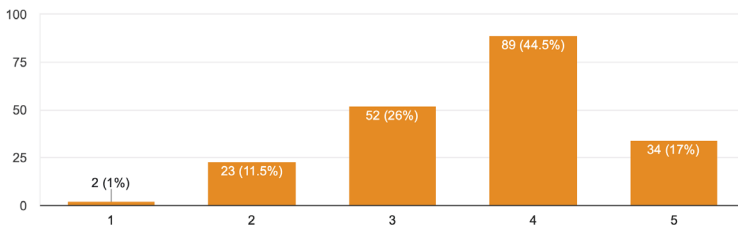
The majority described digitalization as the "Integration of digital technologies into traditional youth work practices," with 66 % responses. Respondents view digitalization as a means to enhance and modernize existing youth work practices rather than replacing them entirely.

## Adaptation of Existing Programs

The adaptation of existing programs to digital formats presents varying degrees of confidence among practitioners, influenced by their experience levels. The ability to transition traditional youth work programs into digital formats is a critical skill, and responses indicate a wide range of attitudes toward this process.

### 11. How confident are you in using digital tools and platforms to deliver youth work activities?

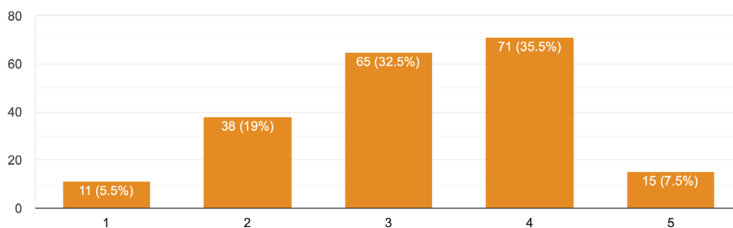
200 responses



The responses showed a moderate to high level of confidence, with an average rating of 4 on a 5-point scale. While respondents generally feel capable of using digital tools, there is still some uncertainty or lack of confidence, suggesting a need for further training or support.

### 12. How confident do you feel in designing and running innovative digital youth work programs?

200 responses



Many respondents indicated a moderate level of confidence, which aligns with their overall digital tool usage confidence. This suggests that while youth workers are comfortable with existing digital tools, they may find it challenging to innovate or create new programs, highlighting a potential area for development.

## High Confidence in Adaptation

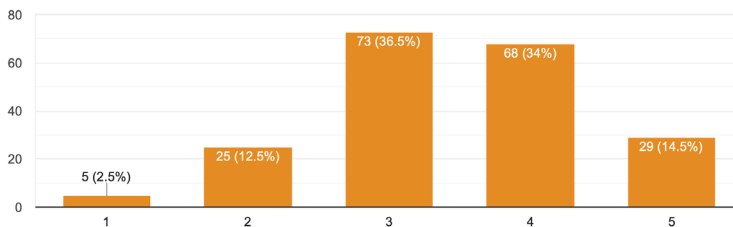
Some practitioners, particularly those with moderate experience (5 to 10 years), express high confidence in adapting programs to digital formats. Their familiarity with both traditional and digital methods enables them to navigate the transition smoothly, leveraging digital tools to enhance program delivery.

## Cautious or Skeptical Attitudes

Practitioners with longer experience in traditional youth work often exhibit more cautious or skeptical attitudes toward digital adaptation. While they recognize the necessity of incorporating digital elements, they may be concerned about maintaining program quality and fidelity in a digital format. Their deep-rooted knowledge of traditional methods informs their cautious approach, emphasizing the need for thoughtful adaptation strategies.

### 13. Do you agree that your existing youth work programs can be adapted to the digital format?

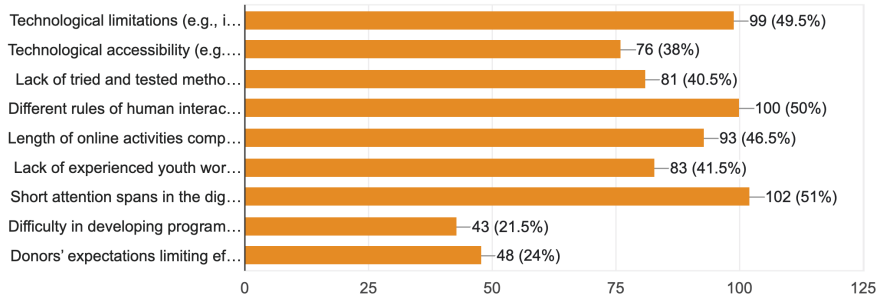
200 responses



Across all experience levels, there is a clear call for enhanced digital literacy and support. Practitioners recognize that digital competencies are essential for effective youth work in the modern era. The need for ongoing training and professional development is a recurring theme, underscoring the importance of equipping youth workers with the skills needed to navigate digital environments confidently. Experience levels significantly influence perceptions and engagement in digital youth work. While newer practitioners are often enthusiastic and open to innovation, more experienced practitioners exhibit cautious optimism, balancing the benefits of digital tools with concerns about maintaining the quality and personal connection of traditional methods.

## 14. What are the key challenges you face in adaption your programs for online delivery?

200 responses



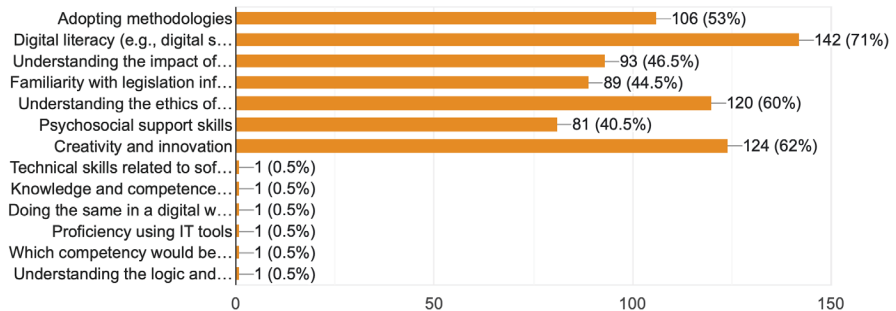
The responses indicate that the key challenges in adapting programs for online delivery revolve around technological issues, the need for skilled youth workers, and the complexities of engaging participants in an online setting. These challenges highlight the need for better tools, training, and methodologies to effectively transition youth work into the digital space. Some of the unique challenges mentioned by respondents in adapting their programs for online delivery:

- Challenges related to both technological accessibility (e.g., lack of internet connection) and managing short attention spans in the digital environment.
- The combination of technological limitations in fostering interaction and engagement, alongside the pressure from donors' expectations (e.g., requiring high participant numbers) is a unique concern.
- Respondents noted the challenge in evolving programs beyond traditional methods when adapting to online formats.
- The difficulty in managing the length of online activities compared to live sessions was mentioned in combination with other issues like interaction rules and internet accessibility.

These challenges highlight the nuanced difficulties youth workers face when transitioning to online platforms, particularly when it involves balancing technical constraints, engagement strategies, and external expectations.

### 15. Which competencies do you believe are helpful in implementing digital youth work?

200 responses

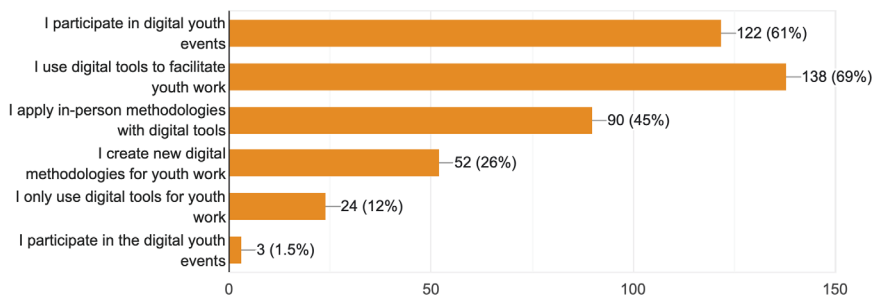


The data indicates a strong emphasis on a combination of technical knowledge (digital literacy, understanding AI, familiarity with legislation) and soft skills (creativity, ethics, psychosocial support) as essential competencies for digital youth work. This reflects the multifaceted nature of digital youth work, where both technological proficiency and human-centered skills are crucial for success.

### Experience Levels and Variations of their Perception of Digital Youth Work

#### 10. In what ways do you engage in youth work in the digital?

200 responses



The digital landscape offers a myriad of opportunities for youth workers to connect with young people, facilitate learning, and create impactful experiences. The survey question "In what ways do you engage in youth work in the digital space?" reveals diverse approaches and varying levels of engagement among practitioners. The

responses indicate a spectrum of practices, ranging from participation in digital events to the development of new digital methodologies, reflecting both traditional and innovative approaches to youth work.

The highest percentage of respondents (69%) report using digital tools to facilitate youth work. This indicates a strong integration of technology into daily practices, highlighting the role of digital tools in enhancing communication, collaboration, and engagement with young people.

A significant portion of respondents (61%) participate in digital youth events, such as webinars, online workshops, and virtual conferences.

Nearly half of the respondents (45%) apply in-person methodologies with digital tools, demonstrating a balanced approach that combines the strengths of both traditional and digital practices. This blend allows practitioners to maintain the personal touch and relational aspects of youth work while benefiting from the advantages of digital tools. The ability to adapt traditional methods for digital formats reflects the adaptability and creativity of practitioners.

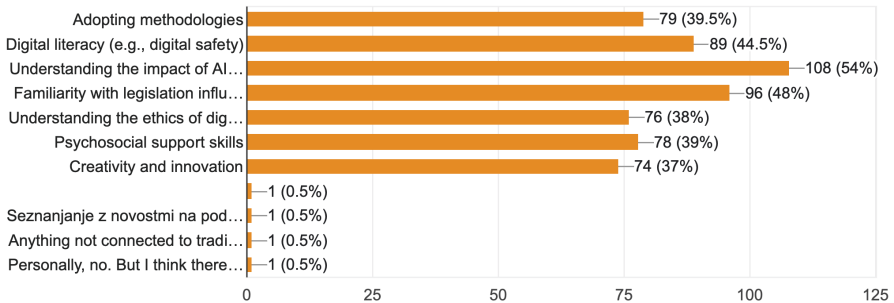


A smaller but significant portion of respondents (26%) are actively creating new digital methodologies for youth work. By developing new digital methodologies, practitioners are addressing specific needs and challenges in the digital space. These efforts contribute to the evolution of youth work and the development of tailored solutions that resonate with young people.

Only 12% of respondents report using digital tools exclusively for youth work. This indicates that while digital tools are widely used, the majority of practitioners still value and incorporate traditional methods alongside digital approaches. For those who rely solely on digital tools, there may be unique opportunities and limitations. While digital-only approaches can reach wider audiences and offer scalability, they may also face challenges in building deep, personal connections with participants.

## 16. Are there specific areas where you would like more training or support?

200 responses



Based on the data extracted from our survey, there is high demand for methodologies and digital literacy:

- Over half of respondents are interested in understanding the impact of AI (54%), as this normally allows practitioners to leverage technology responsibly, ensuring that youth benefit from advancements while being safeguarded against potential risks. Nearly half of them also indicated a need to become more familiar with legislation affecting digital work (48%). This reflects an awareness of the evolving technological landscape and the necessity to adapt to new regulations, while a deeper knowledge of such regulations would ensure compliance with laws affecting youth interactions online, protecting both youth and organizations.
- A significant portion of the respondents (39,5%) expressed a need for more training in adopting methodologies. This suggests that many stakeholders may feel unsure about the best practices and strategies to implement in their work, while additional training would enable youth workers to implement flexible and responsive approaches tailored to diverse learning contexts, enhancing engagement. Nearly half (44,5%) indicated a desire for enhanced digital literacy, highlighting concerns around digital safety and the need for proficiency in navigating the digital landscape. This also includes knowledge of digital safety, to enable the empowerment of youth to navigate online spaces securely, fostering responsible use of technology.
- Ethics in digital work is a concern for 38% of the respondents, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in online interactions which would enable practitioners to make informed decisions that respect privacy and promote well-being

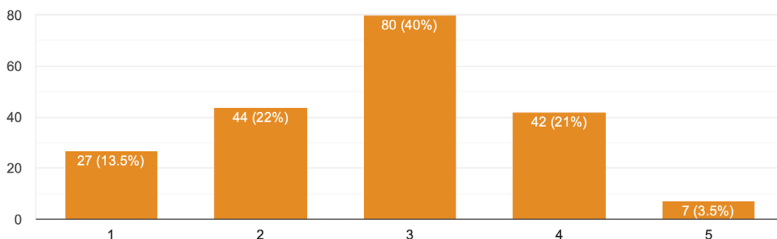
- A significant number of responses (37% each) highlight the need for creativity, innovation, and staying updated with innovations, indicating that these areas of interest are quite widespread among the respondents. Besides, these components are vital for developing engaging digital content and activities that resonate with the interests of young people, making learning more dynamic.
- Psychosocial support skills, while noted by only 0.5%, indicate a niche area where some stakeholders see a need for improvement, potentially linked to supporting youth in online environments. Such skills are essential for addressing the emotional and mental health needs of young people, particularly in online environments where important issues may arise (such as hate speech online, cyberbullying, fake news, propaganda etc.).
- Some respondents explicitly mentioned no need for additional training or expressed preferences unrelated to traditional methods.

## Policy Use and Standards in Digital Youth Work

Digital youth work has emerged as a significant component of contemporary youth engagement, offering both challenges and opportunities. As this field evolves, the importance of robust policy frameworks and standards becomes increasingly apparent. The awareness of existing standards in digital youth work among stakeholders is notable. Many respondents in the study acknowledged the presence of standards related to digital youth work. However, there is a widespread call for clearer and more practical guidelines. This indicates a recognition of the importance of standards but also highlights the gap between existing guidelines and their effective application in practice.

### 17. Are you aware of existing standards related to digital youth work?

200 responses



The responses indicate a moderate awareness level with an average of about 40% of respondents aware of the standards.

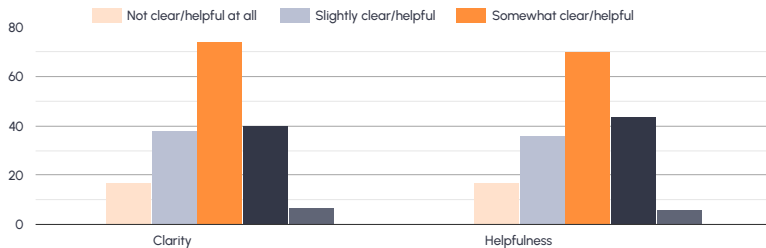


## Clarity and Helpfulness of Existing Standards

The variability in ratings for the clarity and helpfulness of current standards underscores the need for improvement in their communication and implementation. Stakeholders express a desire for standards that are not only clear but also actionable, enabling practitioners to apply them effectively in diverse digital environments. The need for more practical and specific guidelines is evident, as vague or overly general standards can hinder effective practice and innovation.

**18. If you are aware, how would you rate these standards in terms of clarity and helpfulness for your digital youth work?**

200 responses

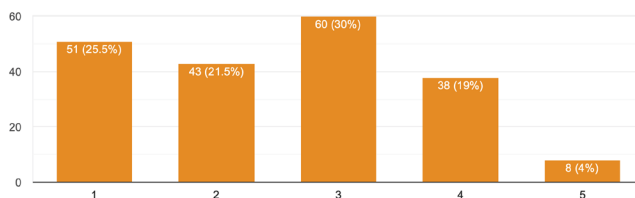


## Youth Work Standards for Length of Activities

A key area of debate is the appropriateness of traditional activity lengths in digital youth work settings. Opinions among respondents were divided, with some advocating for the retention of traditional formats while others called for shorter, more flexible activities tailored to the digital environment. This division highlights the need for adaptable standards that consider the unique dynamics of digital interaction, where attention spans and engagement strategies may differ from in-person contexts.

**19. Do you think that the youth work standard for the length of activities should stay the same when it comes to digital youth activities (e.g. four day seminar)?**

200 responses

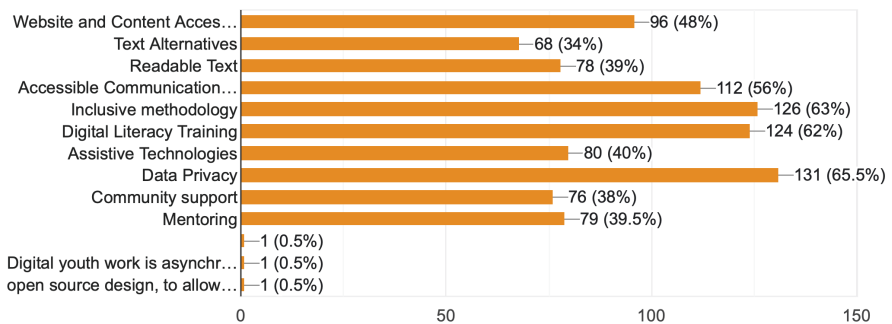


## Standards for Accessibility

The emphasis on accessibility in digital youth work is a critical aspect of standardization. Respondents stressed the necessity of adapting and adding standards to ensure accessibility, including practical guidelines for interaction and engagement in digital formats. Accessibility standards must address diverse needs, ensuring that digital youth work is inclusive and equitable for all participants, regardless of their abilities or access to technology.

### 20. Which of the standards for accessibility in youth work should be added/adapted when it comes to digital youth work?

200 responses



Several key aspects were identified as priorities for standardization in digital youth work:

- **Digital Safety:** Ensuring that digital youth work environments are safe from cyber threats and harmful content.
- **Quality and Recognition:** Establishing criteria for the quality of digital youth work and formal recognition of its impact.
- **Ethical Principles:** Defining ethical guidelines to govern digital interactions and safeguard the well-being of participants.
- **Practical Guidelines for Implementation:** Providing clear, actionable guidelines for practitioners to implement digital youth work effectively.

## Addressing Challenges and Opportunities

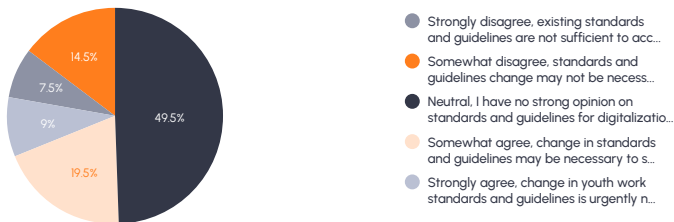
While respondents recognize the potential of digital youth work, they also highlight significant challenges and areas requiring improvement.

**Platform Usage Guidelines:** Developing standards for selecting and using digital platforms, ensuring they meet security, usability, and suitability requirements for youth work activities.

**Content Moderation:** Creating guidelines for moderating content and interactions on digital platforms to prevent the dissemination of harmful or inappropriate material.

### 24. Do you believe existing youth work standards and guidelines adequately cover digitalization in youth work and digital youth work?

200 responses

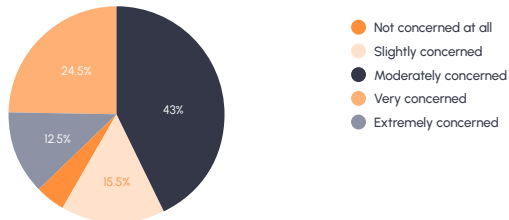


The responses indicate a diversity of opinions on the adequacy of existing youth work standards in addressing digitalization. While a large portion of respondents are neutral, others are divided between seeing the need for change and being skeptical about the feasibility or necessity of such changes. This suggests that more awareness and discussion may be needed in the field to develop a consensus on how to address digitalization in youth work.

## Privacy concerns

21. How concerned are you about the potential risks to your participants personal data privacy on social media platforms like TikTok, especially cons...e the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)?

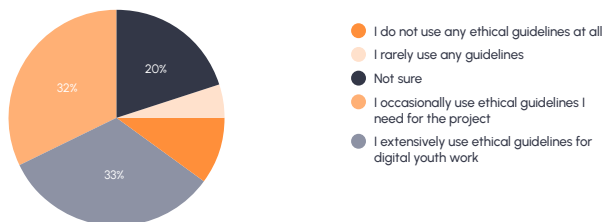
200 responses



Regarding privacy concerns, respondents are moderately to very concerned when it comes to their personal data privacy and that is one of the issues that has to be taken into consideration for future research and elaboration. This indicates a significant level of concern about data privacy, reflecting the need for more stringent measures or education about protecting personal data in digital youth work environments.

22. Do you use any ethical guidelines related to digital youth work or digitalization in youth work?

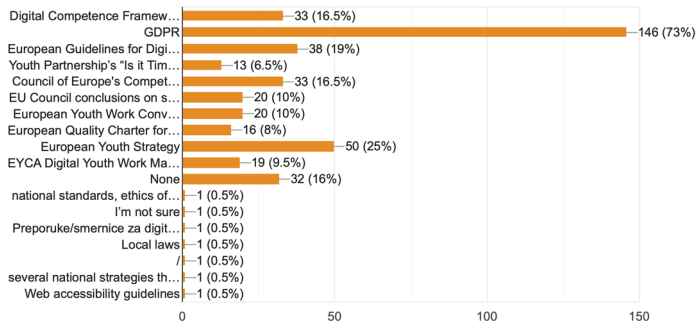
200 responses



This breakdown suggests a significant gap in the standardization and consistent application of ethical guidelines in digital youth work. The results reflect the need for better communication, training, and possibly a review of how these guidelines are made accessible and relevant to practitioners.

### 23. Which standards and guidelines do you use in your youth work?

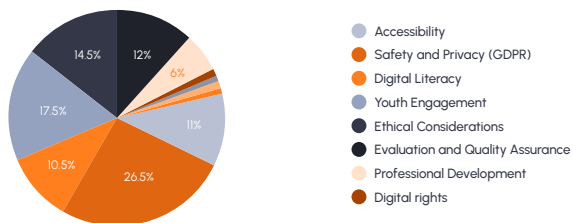
200 responses



The data shows a strong reliance on GDPR across the board, with a mix of other European-level guidelines being used by some respondents. However, a notable portion of respondents indicated that they do not use any specific standards or guidelines, which could suggest a gap in the adoption or awareness of such frameworks in the field.

### 25. What do you find as the most important aspect to be standardized in digital youth work?

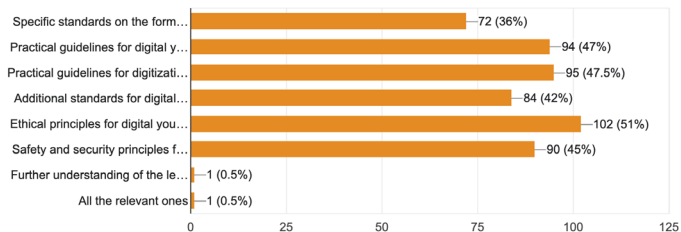
200 responses



These results indicate that Safety and Privacy (GDPR) is considered the most critical area for standardization, followed by Youth Engagement and Ethical Considerations. However, based on common themes in digital youth work, the following ethical aspects are typically important: Ensuring the confidentiality and security of youth data. Compliance with regulations such as GDPR. Informed Consent: Obtaining clear and voluntary consent from youth participants before collecting or using their data. Protecting the rights of youth in digital environments, including the right to access, privacy, and freedom of expression.

## 26. Which standards and guidelines for digital youth work would be most useful if further developed??

200 responses



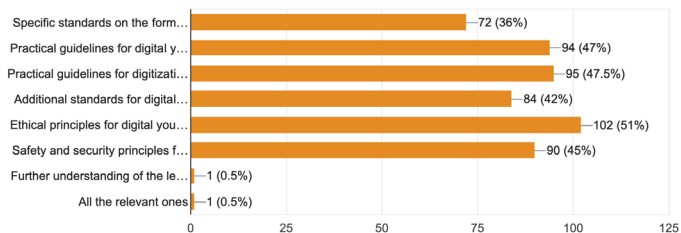
Useful Standards and Guidelines for Future Development:

- Respondents suggested developing specific standards on the format of digital youth work, practical guidelines for both digital youth work and digitalization, and additional standards for quality, recognition, and ethical principles.
- Safety and security principles for digital youth work were also highlighted as crucial areas for future development.

These standards reflect a comprehensive approach to supporting digital youth work, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the digital environment. Implementing these standards can help ensure that digital youth work is safe, effective, and accessible, providing meaningful experiences for all participants.

## 27. What do you see as potential ethical implications of digitalization of your work?

200 responses



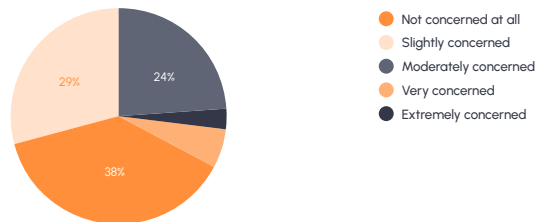
Digital outreach may sometimes lack the depth of in-person interaction, potentially creating superficial connections that do not fully meet the needs of young people.

There's an ethical question around whether digital tools can truly replicate the benefits of face-to-face youth work.

There's an ethical issue in ensuring clear boundaries between youth workers and young people in a digital environment, which could lead to over-engagement outside of agreed-upon professional limits, potentially causing burnout for workers and dependency for youth.

### **28. Do you have concerns that the traditional in-person youth work will be fully replaced by digital youth work?**

200 responses



Concern whether traditional in-person youth work will be replaced by digital youth work doesn't seem to be prevalent. Instead, there is a recognition of the complementary nature of both approaches, with digital youth work enhancing and expanding the reach and impact of traditional methods.

An open-ended question at the end of the survey served a purpose to give us a wider perspective on best practices and examples from their experiences. When it comes to the examples of case studies or best practices for implementing new and creative approaches in digital youth work, here are some key takeaways and recommendations:

- There is a notable gap in the awareness of existing case studies and best practices among stakeholders. More efforts are needed to document and share successful examples.
- Digital youth centers, gamification, and the development of digital tools and courses are emerging as promising practices.
- Interactive and collaborative approaches are valued but require more support and guidance for effective implementation.
- Stakeholders seek standardized processes and clear guidelines to navigate the complexities of digital youth work effectively.

## Limitations of the research

The research may have a limited number of respondents (limited to 200), which can affect the generalizability of the findings. A small sample size may not capture the full diversity of opinions and experiences in the field of digital youth work, and if the sample is not representative of the broader population of youth workers (e.g., only including respondents from certain regions, organizations, or experience levels), the findings may not accurately reflect the views of all stakeholders.

The research often relies on self-reported data, which can be subjective. Respondents may have different interpretations of questions, and their responses may be influenced by personal biases or current experiences. They may be providing answers they believe are socially acceptable or expected, rather than their true feelings or experiences.

This research is just a “snapshot in time”. The data represents a specific point in time and may not account for changes in perceptions, practices, or the digital youth work landscape over time. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into trends and shifts in stakeholder views.

The questions may not cover all aspects of digital youth work, and the available data might miss critical areas or nuances. For example, there might be limited exploration of specific tools, platforms, or policies. Perceptions and practices in digital youth work may vary significantly across different regions and cultures. The research may not fully account for these differences, limiting the applicability of the findings in different contexts.



The digital landscape and related policies are constantly evolving. The findings may become outdated quickly as new regulations, technologies, and best practices emerge.

The interpretation of open-ended responses can be challenging, and there may be a risk of misinterpretation or overlooking important nuances.

Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for understanding the context and scope of the research findings. It also highlights areas for future studies to explore, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of digital youth work.



## Discussion

*"Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road." – Stewart Brand*

This study, through its engagement with 200 stakeholders, reveals that while there is enthusiasm for digital youth work, there are significant gaps in both awareness and skills that need to be addressed. The data suggest that while newer practitioners are more enthusiastic about embracing digital tools, there remains a broader call for enhanced digital literacy and support across all experience levels.

The findings show that stakeholders are aware of the potential that digital tools offer in terms of flexibility and accessibility. However, there is a palpable tension between embracing digital innovation and preserving the traditional aspects of youth work, such as personal interaction and community building. Experienced practitioners often express mixed feelings, with some embracing the digital transition and others voicing concerns about losing the foundational elements of in-person engagement.



### Challenges in Digital Youth Work

The research highlights several obstacles that youth workers face in the digital environment. Key challenges include maintaining engagement, ensuring digital safety, adapting content for digital formats, and addressing the digital divide. Additionally, technical issues and a lack of digital skills are frequently cited as barriers. These findings align with previous literature and research, which underscores the need for ongoing training and development in digital competencies.

The survey revealed a significant skill gap among youth workers, with 47% of respondents indicating a lack of training in digital youth work. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive training programs that equip practitioners with the necessary digital competencies to navigate online environments effectively.

Over half of the respondents expressed a need for training in adopting digital methodologies. This suggests uncertainty around best practices for integrating digital tools with traditional youth work methods, emphasizing the importance of developing clear guidelines and training resources.

Respondents also identified the importance of competencies such as digital literacy, creativity, and understanding the ethics of digital youth work. These skills are crucial for navigating the complex digital landscape and ensuring that youth workers can deliver high-quality services online. However, the research indicates that there is a gap in knowledge about advanced digital skills and innovative program design, highlighting areas where further support and resources could significantly benefit practitioners.

Respondents expressed moderate to high concern regarding personal data privacy, highlighting the need for robust privacy standards and protocols to protect both practitioners and participants in digital youth work environments. Ensuring safe digital spaces for young people is a top priority, requiring ongoing efforts to implement effective content moderation and cyber safety measures.

The digital divide remains a significant barrier, with access to digital resources and tools unevenly distributed among youth organizations. Ensuring equitable access to digital youth work is essential to prevent exclusion and ensure all young people can benefit from these services.

## *Opportunities and Innovations*

Despite these challenges, the research identifies several promising practices and opportunities for innovation in digital youth work. Digital youth centers, gamification, and the development of digital tools and courses are emerging as effective strategies for engaging young people in the online environment. These approaches are valued for their ability to enhance outreach and engagement, offering new avenues for connecting with youth.



Digital tools provide unprecedented opportunities to reach young people who may be geographically or socially isolated, expanding the reach of youth work services and creating more inclusive programs. Digital platforms offer creative ways to engage young people, from gamification to interactive online events, enhancing the overall experience and impact of youth work.

Many practitioners are successfully integrating digital tools with traditional methods, creating hybrid models that maintain personal connections while leveraging digital capabilities. This blended approach allows for continuity and innovation in youth work practices. A portion of respondents are actively developing new digital methodologies, contributing to the evolution of youth work and addressing specific needs in the digital space.

Interactive and collaborative approaches are also highlighted as effective strategies for digital youth work. However, the research emphasizes the need for more documented case studies and best practices to guide practitioners. There is a notable gap in awareness among stakeholders about existing successful examples, indicating the need for a centralized resource that compiles and shares these practices.



## *Standardization and Policy*

The study reveals that while many stakeholders are aware of existing standards related to digital youth work, there is a call for clearer and more actionable guidelines. The ratings for clarity and helpfulness of existing standards varied, suggesting that there is room for improvement in how these standards are communicated and implemented.

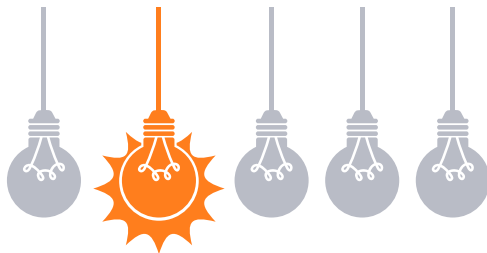
Stakeholders expressed a desire for standardized processes and clear guidelines to navigate the complexities of digital youth work effectively. Key areas for standardization include digital safety, quality and recognition of digital youth work, ethical principles, and practical guidelines for implementation. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on the need for standards that address accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that digital youth work is equitable and reaches all young people.

## Conclusion

*"Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important." – Bill Gates*

The findings of this research have several implications for the practice of digital youth work. First, there is a need for ongoing professional development and training to equip practitioners with the necessary digital skills and competencies. This includes not only technical skills but also an understanding of the ethical and psychosocial aspects of digital youth work.

Second, the development of a centralized repository of case studies and best practices would be beneficial in disseminating successful examples and guiding practitioners in implementing new and creative approaches. This resource should focus on showcasing innovative strategies that have demonstrated positive youth outcomes and can be adapted to different contexts.



Finally, the standardization of processes and the development of clear guidelines are essential for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of digital youth work. Policymakers and organizations should work collaboratively to develop comprehensive standards that address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the digital environment.

Digital youth work offers significant opportunities to enhance the reach and impact of youth services, providing innovative ways to engage and support young people. Indeed, the capacity of the youth worker is not exclusively linked to digital youth work, as many are still engaging with traditional youth work practices, enabling a combination of a variety of competences and expertise among youth organizations. Nevertheless, realizing the full potential of digital youth work requires addressing challenges related to skill gaps, privacy, access, and standardization. By implementing targeted strategies and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the field can continue to evolve and thrive in the digital age, ultimately supporting the well-being and development of young people across Europe and beyond.

## Implications and Recommendations

The analysis of how youth workers engage in the digital space reveals a diverse and dynamic landscape, characterized by varying levels of engagement and innovation. While digital tools and events are widely embraced, there is also a recognition of the value of traditional methods and the need for continuous learning and adaptation. By fostering innovation, supporting blended approaches, and addressing barriers, the field of digital youth work can continue to evolve and thrive, providing meaningful and impactful experiences for young people. Several key competencies for digital youth workers that need further focus have been identified. These competencies address the challenges and opportunities present in digital youth work and are essential for enhancing the effectiveness and reach of youth services in the digital age:

Youth workers need to be proficient in using a variety of digital tools and platforms. This includes understanding how to leverage social media, learning management systems, and digital communication tools effectively.

Knowledge of digital safety protocols is crucial to protect both youth workers and participants from cyber threats, data breaches, and harmful online content.

Youth workers must be able to adapt traditional youth work methodologies to digital formats, ensuring content is engaging and accessible in online environments.

Continuous training in digital skills and staying updated with technological advancements is necessary. This includes understanding the impact of emerging technologies like AI on youth work.

Being informed about relevant legislation affecting digital youth work, such as data protection laws and online safety regulations, is critical.

Understanding how to provide psychosocial support in digital environments, recognizing signs of distress, and knowing how to refer to appropriate services.

Competence in evaluating the effectiveness of digital youth work initiatives, using data to inform practice and improve program outcomes.

Encouraging creativity and innovation in developing new digital methodologies and solutions tailored to the needs of young people and addressing challenges such as the digital divide, technical issues, and ensuring equitable access to digital resources.

Focusing on these competencies will help digital youth workers navigate the complex landscape of online youth work more effectively. Addressing these areas through targeted training and development programs can enhance the overall quality and impact of digital youth work, ensuring it meets the evolving needs of young people in the digital age. The results of the primary research confirm the necessity for the development of a strong and sustainable digital youth work ecosystem ensuring qualitative involvement of all stakeholders with the creation of youth work standards and guidelines which adequately cover digitalization in youth work and digital youth work.

It is evident that defining and implementing international quality standards for digital youth work is essential. These standards should not merely focus on the use of digital tools but should encompass a broader framework that includes principles of non-formal education and promotes digital citizenship. The advancement of digital youth work also requires ongoing efforts to professionalize the field, particularly through capacity building and research. This includes equipping youth workers with the necessary digital competencies, understanding ethical and psychosocial aspects, and ensuring practices are evidence-based.

Furthermore, digital youth work must be recognized as a significant contributor to broader social, educational, and inclusion policies. Collaborative efforts across various sectors are crucial in enhancing the visibility and impact of digital youth work.



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# Re novating

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK



# Desk Research





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## *Executive summary*

Interactions and communications between people, including young people have been under the strong influence of digital technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has also pushed youth work towards online platforms and digital tools, making youth work practitioners increasingly engaging with young people in virtual spaces. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of existing policies, standards, and best practices related to online youth work.

This desk research provides a comprehensive understanding of the policy and standard landscape in the field of digital youth work. This information will be used to develop the project's proposal standards and to advocate for their implementation. The study analysed national government policies, international organisations reports, academic studies, reports from youth organisations, project reports etc.

Even though many times digital youth work is understood as using a digital method and support tools, it was visible that the current policies, frameworks, and existing documents actually acknowledge that digital youth work is not only a method, but an entire approach. Furthermore, the research analysed and identified attempts to promote digital youth work as a completely separate approach or even a separate system from the conventional youth work largely defined in the spectrum of social, educational, cultural, political and leisure youth activities.

The study also analyses the interconnectedness between the use of digital youth work and the main pillars of youth work definition and recognition: political, social, personal and formal. Based on this analysis the study contains conclusions and recommendations of the role of digital youth work.

## *Methodology of the desk research*

The landscape of youth work has evolved significantly in recent years, largely due to the pervasive influence of digital technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has also pushed youth work towards online platforms and digital tools, making youth work practitioners increasingly engaging with young people in virtual spaces. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of existing policies, standards, and best practices related to online youth work.

The research on existing policy and resources regarding digital youth work (secondary research) is done within the project Re-In-Novating which is coordinated by Connect International. One of the overall objectives of the project is to analyse existing digital youth work, innovation efforts, policies, standards and practices. The research involves reviewing and analysing existing policies, standards, and best practices related to online youth work. The research team was consisted of Stefan Manevski and Davor Šerkinić, both experienced youth workers from North Macedonia and Slovenia, working for the Association Curiosité based in France. The research aimed to identify and collect relevant documents and resources, such as government policies, academic studies, and guidelines from international organisations and analyse these documents to identify gaps and overlaps, as well as opportunities for improvement and innovation.

The report on the findings of the desk research provides the project team with a comprehensive understanding of the policy and standard landscape in the field of digital youth work. This information will be used to develop the project's proposal standards and to advocate for their implementation.

The main research hypothesis is that digital youth work is defined and present in the content of existing policy documents and youth work resources used in Europe.



This hypothesis was looked at through researching youth work and its development through various lenses. The report analyses the definition of digital youth work through its presence and visibility in policies defining youth work as an entire system, programme, activities and support tools. It organises the finding into definitions which explain the aim of digital youth work, those that speak about the methods and approaches, the definitions where digital youth work is defined through interactions with others, and those that speak of its impact. The initial assumption was that most

digital youth work examples would fall under methods and support tools, and very few examples would exist under entire approach or methodology. However, it is visible that the current policies, frameworks, and existing documents actually acknowledge that digital youth work is not only a method, but an entire approach. Furthermore, the research analysed and identified attempts to promote digital youth work as a completely separate approach or even a separate system from the conventional youth work largely defined in the spectrum of social, educational, cultural, political and leisure youth activities.

The second set of questions looked at the interconnectedness between the use of digital youth work and the main pillars of youth work definition and recognition: political, social, personal and formal (as defined in the Pathways document). Based on this analysis the study should draw conclusions of the role of digital youth work in the further development and recognition of youth work.

The study analysed national government policies, international organisations reports, academic studies, reports from youth organisations, project reports etc.

The primary objective of this report is to systematically review and analyse existing policies, standards, and best practices pertaining to digital youth work. It also aims to contribute to:

- Defining digital youth work and the level of application/use of digitalisation in youth work as a basis for a systemic analysis of existing policies, standards and practices.
- Identify and collect relevant documents and resources, including government policies, academic studies, and guidelines from international organizations, related to digital youth work.
- Analyse the trend and place of digital youth work in existing policies and best practices for its improvement and innovation.



This report is based on a desk research approach, utilising existing literature, policy documents, and online resources to gather data. For the purpose of the report some thirty documents were reviewed and the relevant definitions and observations are provided in the appendix of this report. The methodology included the following steps:

- Literature Review: Conduct a thorough review of academic literature, government policies, reports from international organisations, and other relevant sources to identify existing policies and best practices in digital youth work, with a specific focus its development and innovation. All project partners contributed to identification of the relevant documents to be reviewed.
- Document Collection and indexation: The resources identified during the literature review, were systematically indexed and the data was organised to reflect the themes of the research.
- Data Analysis: The collected data was analysed to identify trends, patterns, gaps, and overlaps in existing policies. The first part analyses the definition of digital youth work through its presence and visibility in policies defining youth work. The second part analyses the potential for development of digital youth work and its recognition.

This research aims to increase understanding of digital youth work through a comprehensive inventory of existing policies, standards, and practices. It also identifies issues and directions in current policies, highlighting areas for improvement and innovation of digital youth work.

The insights and recommendations for further work are part of the entire report. However, a specific list of some recommendations was drafted at the end of the document to support the process of reflection in the field of digital youth work and engagement with policymakers and practitioners to enhance their awareness of digital youth work.

## *Digitalisation in youth work: an overview*

Digitalisation in youth work refers to the process of integrating digital technologies and digital literacy into the practices, methodologies, and activities of youth work. This transformation should not be merely about incorporating digital tools but also about reshaping the approaches of youth work so that the digital parts are linked with the in-person parts. Digitalisation in youth work includes a broad spectrum of activities, from using online conferencing tools and social media for engagement of young people, to using advanced digital tools for educational purposes and creating hybrid or blended programmes. It represents a new era in youth work, as digital technologies are used to enhance the outreach and impact of youth work.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the new context pushed digitalisation in all domains of public life, including to some extent youth work. Youth workers are increasingly required to be proficient in digital tools and platforms to remain relevant and effective. More and more activities are organised in a hybrid format, and they include online video calls, e-conferences, following online courses or a combination of other tools. The digital transformation in youth work includes the use of a variety of other digital tools and platforms such as social media, mobile apps, and online forums to connect with young people. These tools facilitate communication, engagement, and collaboration.



The notion of blended learning has existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, with various experimentations and attempts at combining traditional face-to-face youth work methods with online activities to create a comprehensive learning experience. Blended learning allows for flexibility and can cater to the diverse needs of young people, but for many years it was criticized for simply not being enough interactive, engaging and thus effective. The recent development of the digital part of the learning and its quality criteria would help to address some of these points of criticism, improving blended or hybrid learning even more.

The digitalization tools very often are put in place with an expectation to encourage young people to participate in online communities and digital platforms to voice their opinions, share ideas, and engage in social and political activities. E-participation is seen as a way to outreach and empower young people, and which is also a role of youth work.

An increasing effect of the rapid digitalization of society is the need to define and apply digital literacy. This also creates the question of the purpose or aim of youth work, what is its role in promoting digital literacy among young people, which involves teaching them how to use digital technologies responsibly and effectively,

understanding online safety, privacy, and the ethical use of digital media. A completely new aspect which is impacting the digitalization process is the digital content creation and sharing digital content such as videos, blogs, and podcasts to engage and work with young people. This is a completely new set of competences which was initially introduced as a step into digitalization, but soon after it became evident it requires more knowledge and systemic approach.

## *The difference between digitalisation in youth work and digital youth work*

While digitalisation in youth work and digital youth work may seem similar, they are not referring to the same issue. In the following part, based on the analysis of different definitions the desk research aims to clarify the difference between these two concepts.

### *Digitalisation in Youth Work*

This is a broader concept that encompasses the integration of digital technologies into all aspects of youth work. The idea behind digitalization is to enhance traditional youth work practices through the use of digital tools and methodologies. Digitalisation in youth work is not confined to any specific activity or setting; instead, it complements the entire framework of youth work.

Digitalisation involves incorporating digital tools into existing youth work practices. It is about enhancing traditional methods rather than replacing them. The primary focus is on how digital tools can support and complement traditional face-to-face youth work activities. For example, using online content hosted in forums to promote further reading about a topic, or online surveys to gather feedback.



The entire process of digitalisation requires significant investment in digital infrastructure and resources, including training for youth workers to develop digital competencies. Digitalisation sometimes can also be about analytics to improve the effectiveness of youth work programs and interventions, based on data from reach of social media, attendance online of events etc.

## Digital Youth Work

Digital youth work is a more focused concept, specifically to youth work practices that are conducted in digital environments or use digital tools as a core component. Digital youth work is not just about enhancing traditional practices but about creating a systemic approach to youth work which opens new opportunities and experiences that are unique to the digital sphere.



Digital youth work involves activities where digital tools and platforms are central to the delivery of youth work. This includes online mentoring, virtual youth clubs, digital learning programmes and even virtual exchange projects. It creates new opportunities for engagement, learning, and participation that are not possible in traditional settings. For example, using virtual reality for experiential learning or gamifying educational content to make it more engaging.

Unlike digitalisation in youth work, which can be to the maximum extent hybrid, digital youth work often takes place in fully digital environments, such as online communities, social media platforms, and virtual spaces. Due to this, digital youth work uses innovative approaches that are based on digital technologies mainly. This can include using virtual learning spaces, e-learning and online conferencing, co-working spaces and even artificial intelligence for personalised learning. Digital youth work can enhance accessibility and inclusion by reaching young people who might not engage in traditional youth work settings, such as those in remote areas or with mobility issues. However, it can remain inaccessible due to the digital divide and lack of connectivity to some remote areas.

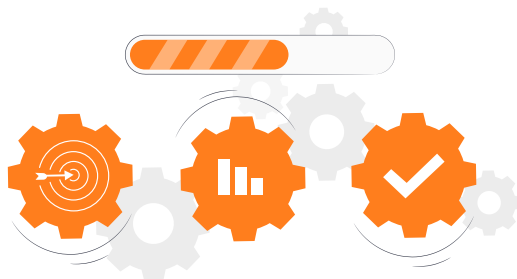
Digitalisation in youth work and digital youth work represent significant developments in the field of youth work. While digitalisation refers to the broader integration of digital technologies into all aspects of youth work, digital youth work focuses specifically on practices conducted in digital environments or using digital tools as a core component. Both concepts contribute to the recognition of youth work in wider society by enhancing visibility, relevance, professionalisation, and credibility.

To effectively conduct digital youth work, youth workers must possess a range of competencies that are a mix of traditional youth work skills with digital literacy and technological skills. Overall, the digital youth work offers new ways to engage and support young people by being present in the spaces where young people are.



## Review of the policies on European level for digital youth work

Digital youth work is not an area of policy on its own, but it is a section mainly in youth policies, and sometimes in education, social inclusion and digitalisation policies. This research gives by no means an exhaustive overview of the existing policies in Europe, but looks rather in the definitions which exist, and which elements constitute these definitions.



The EU has been at a forefront in developing the youth work and youth policy area with regards to digitalisation. The development of digital or smart youth work has also become a relatively new area of youth work policy, based on the assumption that youth work should operate in the online world as well as the offline world. This policy area can be seen in the Council of The European Union Conclusions on Smart Youth Work (2017) and the results of the EU Expert group on developing digital youth work. An expert group set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018, has produced a list of policy guidelines in 2017, including training needs, competences and good practices. A publication titled "Developing digital youth work" contains most of these guidelines and serves as a first example of policy initiative on digital youth work. This document defines digital youth work as "proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work. Youth workers in this context refer to both paid and volunteer youth workers". This document however was created before COVID-19 and with the current level of digital youth work many of the approaches therein can be

questioned – for example, is this approach digital youth work or simply using digital tools in youth work i.e. digitalization of youth work. The COVID-19 has put practitioners into a specific situation to “digitalise” without the opportunity to do the day-to-day youth work. Based on this experience, it was obvious there is a need for new standards on what digital youth work is and how it can work as a complete digital experience.

A set of youth work providers with a focus on digitalisation, media information and literacy and digital citizenship education has produced the European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work. This document is cited across this study several times, as probably the first attempt to clearly define Digital Youth Work, its impact and the value of youth work as an important educational practice which can empower young people in a digitalising society. The guidelines give practical and ethical guidance to youth workers, managers and organisations. They also include a call to action for funders and policy makers for the youth work sector, outlining steps they can take to enable the development of digital youth work for all young people. This work been developed collaboratively between partners in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland and Scotland and they build on the report of the EU Expert Group on Digitalisation and Youth.



The Council of Europe's Recommendation on Youth Work, adopted also in 2017, mentions digitalization only in the context as a benefit from youth work and only limited to digital and information literacy. However, it also mentions again digital media as a challenge which young people are facing, but it does not identify or define digital youth work as such.

The Council of Europe's Youth Work portfolio does not mention at all digital youth work, but refers to being able to use Information and Communications Technology - ICTs in project management. Therefore, in 2023 a consultative meeting and a study was made to “propose specific updates/revisions of the Portfolio that reflect possible developments of the competence framework and include/address new areas of youth work, notable digital youth work competences.” These additions should also come from practitioners of digital youth work.

Some other policies which are not from the Youth field, can have an important implication and role for youth work. Here is an overview:



Digital citizenship is the capacity to participate actively, continuously and responsibly in communities online and offline, through competent and positive engagement with digital technologies (by creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning). Digital citizenship is promoted by the Council of Europe especially through the development and promotion of Digital citizenship education. This is defined as the empowerment of learners of all ages through education or the acquisition of competences

for learning and active participation in a digital society to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities online, and to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in cyberspace. It is clear that youth work has also a role to play in Digital citizenship education, especially, non-formal education and learning. In order to raise awareness of the importance of Digital citizenship education, the Council of Europe declared 2025 a European Year of Digital Citizenship Education.

The EU's Digital Services Act package from 2024 consisted of the Digital Services Act from 2022 and Digital Markets Act aim to create a safer digital space where the fundamental rights of users are protected and to establish a level playing field for businesses. The area of this regulation is broad, but it also covers an objective of making the online world safer which is very relevant for youth work also. An example is that the DSA will introduce stronger protections for people targeted by online harassment and bullying. This includes making sure any non-consensual private images and other abusive, illegal content that are shared can be quickly flagged by users. The regulation also introduces trusted flaggers who are responsible for detecting potentially illegal content and alert online platforms.

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a international legally binding treaty which aims to ensure that activities within the lifecycle of artificial intelligence systems are fully consistent with human rights, democracy and the rule of law, while being conducive to technological progress and innovation. The Convention requires states to establish effective procedural guarantees, safeguards and rights to affected persons in connection with the application of an artificial intelligence system where an artificial intelligence system significantly impacts upon the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. On EU level, the AI Act also has measures guarantee the safety and fundamental rights of people. The AI Act allows the free use of minimal-risk AI. This includes applications such as AI-enabled video games or spam filters. The vast majority of AI systems currently used in the EU fall into this category.

## Definitions of digital youth work

The desk research has analysed over 30 different articles, documents, policy papers and reports and has identified various ways in which digital youth work is defined. In the next pages these definitions are summarised to outline their key features according to the main focus of the definition:

a) defining digital youth work through its aims and objectives

a) defining digital youth work through the approaches it uses

a) defining digital youth work through its effects and impact

a) definition through affiliation or networking and partnerships as a way to define digital youth work

### Definitions based on aims and objectives

Youth work's purpose is to support the personal and social development of young people. The sector's unconstrained non-formal educational approach makes it uniquely placed to respond to young people's needs in a digitalising society and play a significant role in bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusion. Digital youth work uses technology to bring youth work services in the online space, making them accessible and relevant. It can create opportunities and spaces in which young people can develop a critical, innovative and value-based perspective on their roles in the digital societies.

Youth work has the aim of creating an enabling environment for young people to reach their full potential. It is encouraging and promoting critical understanding, self-expression as well as, digital literacy and digital citizenship. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work.

Most definitions of digital youth work do not suggest different aims from the "conventional" youth work in general. However, the fact of using digital media and technology in youth work is very clearly reflected in these definitions. Youth work aims to enhance social inclusion, empower young people to become critical thinkers; and pursue authentic and meaningful communication between youth workers and young people.

Some definitions limit digital youth work to the usage of new technology claiming that it is “not a methodology or a form of work, it is youth work which utilises the possibilities of new technology”. Many definitions of Digital Youth Work acknowledge that in order to do everyday youth work in a digitalised society, where the digitalisation is developing fast, the methodology of digital youth work should be rooted in its aims.

Many existing definitions of digital youth work maintain its aims in relation to youth work aims in general, not as a separate discipline with a separate aim.

For example, the term 'digital youth work' first emerged in the Finnish youth work lexicon in the summer of 2012, when youth work organizations throughout Europe, invited by Verke, met in Finland to discuss the impact of digitalization on youth work and its practices. Already then, the central idea was that the aim of digital youth work must be to comprehensively strengthen the agency of young people in a technologized and digitalized world (Davies 2012; Taylor 2012). With this we can make the link that youth development is at the heart of digital youth work. Another example is the Framework for 21st Century Learning, a tool used to put digital skills, at the centre of learning. The tool defines and illustrates the skills and knowledge young people need to succeed in work, life and citizenship, as well as the support systems necessary for living one's full potential in digital societies. Youth work needs to demonstrate outcomes and the Framework can serve as a tool to help plan and monitor these outcomes.



Digital youth work's aim is supporting young people in living their lives in full potential, as it focuses on understanding and supporting young people's needs and aspirations and helping them navigate through different options. Looking at its aims and objectives, digital youth work is enhancing youth work provision, making it better and more exciting, and connecting it to the new reality of digital technology.

Arguably, several definitions link the aims and objectives of digital youth work to helping young people have their voices heard through digital media and technology and supporting their rights in both digital and in-person spaces. This is an example of how digital youth work enhances the potential and outreach of youth services, beyond the typical approaches. Using words such as empowerment and change in some definitions of digital youth work helps in understanding the expectations put to the usage of IT tools to empower young people and make positive changes. At the same time, makes it obvious that the IT tools on their own will not be able to produce these changes without competent youth workers developing quality programmes and delivering those programmes with the relevant resources.

Some definitions see digital youth work as an effort of remaining relevant by ensuring youth work stays engaging with youth people and reflecting the digital societies.

01

Digital youth work should go beyond the use of digital technologies in youth work and provide a new domain with a holistic view of young people's lives in the digital era.

02

Digital youth work has a role to promote the respect of young people's digital rights and raise awareness of their neglect.

These objectives are often identified as areas to comprehensively be strengthened both within the youth work systems and directly with the youth workers.

The objectives of digital youth work therefore go beyond making youth work up-to-date and appealing to young people by utilising digital technology in youth work services. They are also enhancing young people's technology-related skills, making them able to live in digital societies, know their digital rights, and receive learning and support in the digital spaces where they spend most of their time.

## **Definitions based on Youth Work Approaches**

Digital youth work is not only proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. The approaches of digital youth work take into account the digital spaces from the start, when designing the methodology and approaches. Digital spaces and tools are the key content of the digital youth work's approaches.

In terms of approach, there are two major and contradicting ideas, one being that digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations and online environments in a mixture of these two, and the second idea being that digital youth work is entirely planned, implemented and evaluated as an online system. For the purpose of establishing a clear distinction between these two ideas, digital youth work as an approach should be delivered mostly using digital tools. The approach then means that digital technology becomes the primary tool, the backbone of any activity or in some cases the content of digital youth work.

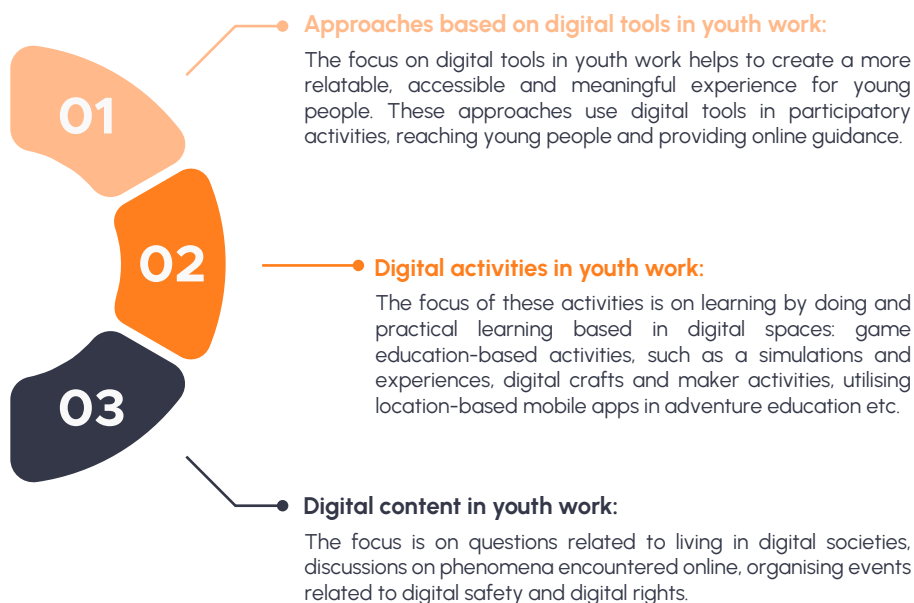
Digital youth work like conventional youth work is delivered by paid or volunteer youth workers and is based on nonformal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. These principles are the core of its approaches and its definitions. In addition to this, digital youth work is a dynamic and rapidly evolving practice co-created by many different actors. It is affected by people, technologies, media, culture, and many other aspects. Because of its complex and unpredictable nature, it might be useful to consider who should be defined as digital youth workers and to what extent such a definition might lead to a better understanding of digital youth work's limitations. This desk review offers also a list of most commonly mentioned competences which help in understanding who is a digital youth worker.



Digital youth work is an important part of the updated approaches to council, contact and assist to young people. Especially in rural and sparsely populated areas it's a way to connect and support young people. Digital youth work can be used as a tool for youth development taking advantage of the online environment. The topic of digital citizenship, rights and opportunities can also be delivered as an activity and serve as content in a youth work setting. However, digital youth work is the one planned and implemented in a digital setting taking into account these issues.

Digital youth work is a relatively new way of doing youth work and it easily raises doubts. It can contradict the established mode of youth work – face-to-face encounters in a physical reality. The task of those developing digital youth work approached therefore is twofold: to seriously listen to resistance and criticism, and to create opportunities for the youth workers to learn about the impact of living in digital societies to young people.

With this in mind, there are several definitions offering some examples of digital youth work practices and approaches:



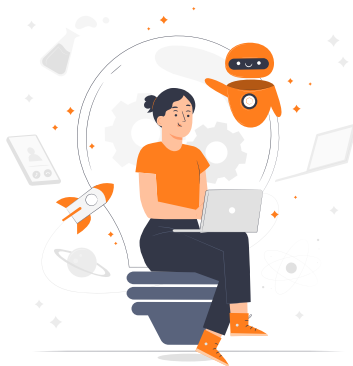
Some argue that digital youth work can even be conducted without digital devices, as in its definition it includes discussing the digital citizenship and rights with young people or guiding young people to protecting their rights on social media. However, most definitions identify proactive use of digital tools as a core element in the approach. Digital youth work is about proactively using or addressing issues in and about the digital spaces and technology with young people.



Some further core elements of the digital youth work approaches include:

- Involvement and participation in the design of the activities and their content including involving young people in the creation of activities, tools, platforms, etc.
- Blended contexts which take into account that there is the online space that interlinks with the physical, or blended spaces and can serve as an instrument, activity, or content.
- Educational aspect with clear learning objectives for young people's personal development in a non-formal learning environment.
- Integration with regular youth work: Digital youth work is not a separate form but a new approach of achieving the core objectives of youth work.

Digital youth work is an emerging practice, and it is, therefore, important to be able to experiment, test, and allow failing. It is a diverse and continually evolving practice which should be complemented with research and knowledge.



Some existing literature also speaks about “smart youth work” which aims to explore the interactions of young people and youth work with digital media and technologies to support and enhance the positive opportunities these interactions create. Smart youth work builds upon the ethics, existing principles, knowledge, practices, methods, and other assets of youth work and harnesses the full potential of technological developments in the digital society. Smart youth work means making use of and addressing digital media and technologies in order to enrich opportunities for information, access to youth work, participation, and non-formal and informal learning by exploiting new spaces and formats for youth work in meaningful ways.

## Definitions based on Networking and Partnerships

Digital youth work can also be defined through the networks and interactions which use this approach. Digital youth work is developed through cooperation and resources are available for digital youth work also through the same cooperation and partnerships.

Many definitions consider new forms of interdisciplinarity in digital youth work. Digital youth work is not just a youth work method; therefore it has to be analysed as an approach which interacts with any other youth work approach (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). It is clear that digital youth work is a separate layer to existing youth work, whereby all involved try their best to navigate the intertwined and fluid realities of youth and their lives in the digital spaces.

For example, the term 'digital youth work' first emerged in the Finnish youth work lexicon in the summer of 2012, when youth work organizations throughout Europe, invited by Verke, met in Finland to discuss the impact of digitalization on youth work and its practices. Digital youth work is internationally underpinned by some theoretical research and best practice learning approaches and pedagogies such as the Clubhouse Network Model. This model is grounded in a constructivist learning approach that draws on research from the fields of education, developmental and social psychology, cognitive science and youth development. It uses new technologies to support new types of learning experiences, engaging young people who have been alienated by traditional educational approaches.

On EU level, the definition and framework by the European Commission, emphasises that digital youth work can happen in any youth work setting and in various forms. Digital youth work, similarly to general youth work in Europe, is heterogeneous, with different levels of expertise and recognition among stakeholders.



Some definitions also promote deeper cooperation between youth and youth workers. For example, the development of smart youth work should be built upon the active engagement of young people themselves, allowing them to best contribute their already existing digital competences as well as to develop additional ones, while also benefiting from respective peer support.

On local level, youth workers in both municipalities and non-governmental organisations have traditionally worked with young people out in the field, in diverse operating environments, which has always required the constant development of working methods and partnerships. Considering the rapid digitalisations of society and the interactions between local governments and NGOs through online systems, it is expected that very soon digital youth work would also address some issues arising from those interactions.

## *Definitions based on the Impact of Digital Youth Work*

Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. Digital youth is part of this broad definition of youth work. Digital youth work promotes the empowerment and equality of young people, and addresses some of their concerns related to digital citizenship and digital rights.



While digital youth work's how-to guidelines are important, it is also important to know its boundaries and pitfalls. The understanding of what does not or cannot work within digital youth work is essential to critically and realistically situating it within the digital societies while aiming to perform the main function of youth work: supporting young people to reach their full personal and professional potential. For decades, youth work has aimed to empower young people to become critical thinkers and active citizens, digital youth work now aims also to create digital citizens, aware of their rights and knowing how to use the digital spaces safely and effectively.

Digital youth work is not static. It cannot be given a definite meaning, structure nor value. It is a continually evolving practice affected by intersectional and socio-technological factors (both for young people and youth workers). It is based on the idea that new technology must be utilised in youth work to make services and activities intended for young people better, more accessible and more meaningful. Digital youth work can be used to create opportunities and spaces for young people to develop their critical, ethical and creative thinking related to technological development and the digital future.

As digital youth work is not a separate discipline but can be connected to all youth work, the implementation methods and forms of digital youth work are also diverse. Its impact therefore is complementing and not in competition with physical face-to-face youth work, as each has its merits. Digital youth work should complement in matching how young people want to engage with youth workers and youth work, and with wider society later on. At its best, digital youth work links seamlessly with other youth work performed by the organisation and the related goals.

Digital youth work prepares young people for e-participation as a new way of taking part in societal discussions. It also builds critical digital competences by fostering critical digital competences and literacy, essential to understand better the information provided online, the risks and opportunities available, and the modes of participation.

A largely discussed impact is also the overcoming of physical distance by providing opportunities to connect with new groups of peers.



Further developing Non-Formal Education through digital media, enhancing personal and digital development is also an impact of digital youth work. It aligns with the principles of regular youth work, empowering and equipping young people for social integration and engagement in society. In this direction, the EU Council conclusions continue in inviting the Member States to include clear goals and concrete steps for developing and implementing digital youth work and assessing its impact on young people and youth work. It sets as an expected impact of digital youth work to promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting an influence and improving their skills and capabilities to function in society. Underlying these objectives are the principles of solidarity, multiculturalism and internationalism, sustainable development, healthy lifestyles, respect for life and the environment, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

## Recognition of digital youth work

The purpose of the desk study was also to analyse the extent or level to which digital youth work is recognised and contributes to wider youth work recognition. In order to organise these reflections around the recognition of youth work and the role of digital youth work the next parts are organised around the four main areas of youth work recognition as defined in the Pathways document of the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, grouped in two bigger areas:

- Social recognition
- Self-recognition
- Political and formal recognition

### *Social and self-recognition of digital youth work*

The social recognition refers to understanding youth work in wider society. In this context, digital youth work is gaining recognition among youth work practitioners for its role in supporting the personal, social, and educational development of young people. As technological tools are applied in every aspect of our lives, digital youth work is mainly seen as a way of integrating traditional youth work practices with modern digital tools and platforms. This integration not only enhances the reach and impact of youth work but at some point, should also contribute significantly to its recognition and validation within wider society.



Youth work, at its core, aims to empower young people, fostering their ability to participate actively in their communities and live with their full potential. Traditionally, this has involved face-to-face interactions in various settings, including youth centres, schools, and community organisations. However, digital youth work has made a shift

in how youth work is conducted, by adding also the online approaches. This evolving practice is not simply another element of youth work but a dynamic, integral approach of digital presence for youth work activities.

The definitions of digital youth work highlight its multifaceted nature, emphasising that it comprises more than just the technical aspects of using digital tools. It is an approach based on digital citizenship and rights, built to support key competencies of youth work into digital environments, and contribute to the main aims and objectives of youth work. The digital presence of youth work therefore helps in the recognition of youth work in wider society, as it demonstrates how relevant youth work is and how well it can adapt to respond to challenges and issues young people face, such as digitalisation.

Another of the key aspects highlighted in the definitions is that digital youth work is not a distinct practice or profession, but rather an approach that uses new technology to achieve traditional youth work goals. This perspective is important for the recognition of digital youth work as a continuity and consistency of youth work practice, with application of a new logic that fits with digital citizenship and rights, and new digital principles of work. The usage of digital tools correctly by youth workers can enhance their ability to reach and engage young people who are mostly using digital communication methods. In this way, the youth work practitioners by creating digital youth work approaches become visible online which also means that their support can improve the recognition of youth work in general.

Digital youth work, as other general youth work approaches, addresses the context in which young people live - the technological changes which open a new way of organisation and functioning of societies – the digital way. In this regarding, digital youth work practitioners can connect with young people in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. This relevance is crucial for the recognition of youth work, as it shows that the field is following up with the evolving needs and realities of young people. When youth work is seen as relevant and responsive, it gains greater legitimacy and support from the broader community.



The definitions also emphasise the importance of professionalising digital youth work, recognising that while many youth workers are familiar with digital tools in their private lives, professional usage of these tools requires specific skills and knowledge. This professionalisation is important for the recognition of digital youth work in the IT, digitalisation and tech sectors, because it allows youth workers to combine their expertise and dedication to effectively integrate digital tools into youth work practices. It challenges the perception that youth work is merely casual or informal, instead presenting it as a field that demands continuous learning and professional development.

Another significant aspect of the definitions is the emphasis on the aims and objectives of digital youth work, which include strengthening the agency of young people in digital societies. This aim aligns with the broader objectives of youth work, which focus on empowering young people to be active and engaged citizens, therefore being fully responsible and aware digital citizens. By framing digital youth work in terms of empowerment and agency, the existing definitions help to further promote the importance of youth work in society. They show that youth work is not just about providing activities or services but about fostering the development of capable, confident individuals who can navigate responsibly on different digital platforms, aware of their rights and using the available opportunities.



The historical context provided in the definitions, particularly the emergence of the term digital youth work, also contributes to the recognition of youth work. It situates digital youth work within a broader narrative of adaptation and innovation in response to societal changes. This historical perspective helps us to understand better the capacity of youth work for evolution and its proactive approach to meeting new challenges. By documenting the development of digital youth work, the practitioners aiming to promote further youth work recognition actually build a narrative of growth and progress of youth work.

An important element in social and self-recognition is that many definitions also underscore the importance of digital youth work in promoting inclusion and accessibility. In rural and remote areas, digital youth work can provide opportunities for young people to participate and engage with their peers and youth workers. This aspect is particularly important for the recognition of youth work, as it highlights the already existing commitment to reaching all young people, regardless of their geographic location. Digital youth work demonstrates how it is possible to overcome barriers which is the value of youth work in fostering social inclusion and cohesion.

Furthermore, many of the existing policies, documents and reports, show a direct link between digital youth work and enhancing youth development which is also significant for the recognition of the field. Digital youth work is present around young people and can provide key competences and career guidance, learning and innovation competences, and digital literacy. By framing digital youth work in terms of its expected outcomes, it helps to position digital and all other youth work as a field that contributes to tangible, measurable benefits for young people. This focus on outcomes is important for gaining recognition from policymakers, funders, and the broader community, as it provides evidence of the impact and value of youth work.



The existing policies also highlight the importance of digital youth work in supporting young people's rights, especially digital rights. Youth workers have also a new role, to help young people in understanding and claiming for their digital rights in both digital and in-person spaces. Digital youth workers have also an advocacy role for recognition of youth work by bringing forward their work on protecting young people's rights and facilitating their participation in society.



In addition, the recognition of digital youth work as an emerging field of research supports the broader recognition of youth work. Theoretical research and best practices from digital youth work can contribute to the development of evidence for the effects of youth work in general. Research is important to establish credibility and legitimacy of youth work, as it can show that the field is grounded in knowledge and principles, and that the approaches are also rooted in andragogical science. By highlighting the research and practice dimensions of digital youth work, digital youth work can further be developed as a profession with an evidence-based background and standards.



The reviewed literature also emphasises the role of digital youth work in fostering critical digital competences among young people. Digital literacy is increasingly important for everyday tasks, from job applications to simple administrative tasks, so ensuring young people understand what is at stake with the digitalised society is crucial to safeguard their rights online. By highlighting the role of digital youth work in developing critical digital competences, it helps to position youth work as a vital contributor to young people's lifelong learning.

The interconnectedness of digital youth work with all areas of youth work shows that digital youth work is not an isolated discipline but has many interactions with various other forms of youth work, education, social work etc. This interconnectedness is important for the recognition of youth work, as it shows that the field is cohesive and comprehensive, addressing the full spectrum of young people's needs and experiences. By demonstrating that digital youth work complements and enhances traditional youth work, these definitions help to build a cohesive and unified image of the youth work field.

## Enhancing Self-Recognition through Digital Youth Work

A clear definition of digital youth work provides a comprehensive framework that not only helps the field gain recognition in wider society but also fosters better self-recognition within the youth work community. Self-recognition is critical as it strengthens the identity, purpose, and cohesion of digital youth work practitioners. It enables all digital youth workers to align their practices with shared aims and standards, enhancing the overall effectiveness and professionalism of their work.

The existing definitions as indicated in the previous part, help in clarifying the scope and objectives of digital youth work within the existing youth work field. One of the key ways how clear aims and objectives for digital youth work help in self-recognition is by clarifying the scope of digital youth work and who are those delivering it. Digital youth work is an approach that integrates the key youth work aims and principles, however, clearer definitions provide a clear understanding of what digital youth work includes and which practitioners should see their work as such. It also helps to prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations about the nature of digital youth work, fostering a more cohesive and unified professional community.



There are not a lot of examples of self-recognition of digital youth workers that leads to having a clear professional identity and role definition. Many sources identify that digital youth work comes with a clear need for capacity building and improvement of the professionalism and continuous learning of youth workers. Possibly with more specialised certification and networking spaces, some crucial elements for developing a strong professional identity among practitioners will be addressed. By recognizing that digital youth work requires specific skills and knowledge, the creation of communities of practice would validate the expertise and efforts of youth workers. This validation is essential for self-recognition as it encourages practitioners to take pride in their work and to see themselves as skilled professionals in digital youth work. It will be also motivating youth workers to engage in training and education to enhance their competencies and add professional digital youth work expertise to their portfolios.

The integration of key competencies of digital youth work into youth workers training, as highlighted by some examples, supports the continuity between traditional and digital youth work. This helps practitioners to understand that their youth workers skills and principles remain relevant and valuable in digital contexts but need to be upgraded. Digital youth work can be an extension of their existing competencies helping youth workers to better recognize their ability to adapt and innovate, and to bring their work in the digital spaces where young people are spending a lot of their time. This recognition fosters confidence and a sense of accomplishment, reinforcing their professional identity and commitment to the field.



Digital youth work sets the importance on relevance and adaptability in approaches of youth work. By showing that digital youth work connects with the realities of young people's lives and adapts to technological advancements, a clear self-recognition of digital youth workers encourages them to stay up-to-date and responsive to digital trends. This focus on relevance helps youth workers to recognize the impact and significance of their work and promotes a forward-thinking mindset, encouraging them to embrace change and innovation. This adaptability is a key aspect of professional self-recognition as digital youth workers face it faster and need specific competences to deal with such ambiguity. The definitions of digital youth work provide a shared vision and set of aims that can unite practitioners. By outlining the aims of digital youth work, such as strengthening young people's access to youth work and awareness of their digital rights, it is possible to create a common framework that youth work practitioners can identify with. This shared vision helps to build a sense of community and joint aims among youth workers, fostering collaboration and mutual support.

The process of self-recognition is also about the diversity of methods and contexts in which digital youth work can be implemented. By recognizing that digital youth work can take place in various settings, involve different tools, and address a wide range of topics, the definition of who is a digital youth worker should always validate the diverse approaches and practices within the field. This validation is important for self-recognition as it affirms that there is no single "right" way to conduct digital youth work. It encourages practitioners to experiment with different methods and to see their unique approaches as valuable contributions to the field.

The process of self-recognition also would encourage youth workers to engage in critical reflection and continuous improvement of their practice. A clear digital youth work policy would guide practitioners to regularly evaluate their practices and seek ways to enhance their effectiveness. This critical reflection is a key component of self-recognition, as it involves acknowledging both strengths and areas for growth. By engaging in ongoing evaluation and improvement, youth workers can develop a deeper understanding of their professional identity and the impact of their work. Digital youth work is a professional, evidence-based field that integrates research, policies and practices, which give credibility for youth workers to have self-recognition within the broader landscape of youth work and social services. When youth workers feel confident in the legitimacy of their field, they are more likely to take pride in their profession and to advocate for its value.

At the end of the day, self-recognition is fostering a sense of belonging and community of practice. Without it, digital youth work cannot further develop as a field, as it will always be seeking and providing a common language and framework for development. When practitioners share a common understanding of what digital youth work entails and what it aims to achieve, they are more likely to feel connected to their peers and to the broader professional community. This sense of belonging is important as it also provides a support network that can offer encouragement, resources, and collaboration opportunities.

## *Political Recognition of Digital Youth Work*

Talking about digital youth work, it is important to highlight that the political recognition is crucial for securing the necessary support, funding, and policy frameworks that enable its effective implementation and sustainability. In order to achieve this, a clear policy which defines digital youth work plays a big role by providing clarity, demonstrating impact, and alignment with broader policy goals. In the following part we will explore more in depth how definitions and policies can help to gain political recognition for digital youth work.



It is important to clarify the scope and purpose of digital youth work, as political stakeholders often need clear and concise definitions to understand new concepts. Digital youth work policies provide this clarity by showing what digital youth work entails, its objectives and implications. In order to make it easier for policymakers to grasp the concept of digital youth work, it is important to integrate new technology within the traditional youth work goals and practices that are familiar to them. By doing this, the stakeholders will be able to easily see the relevance and potential benefits of digital youth work.

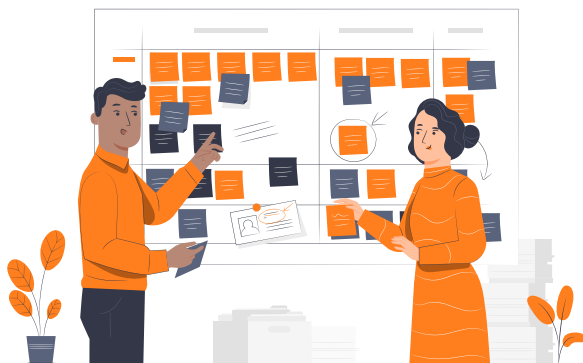
Digital youth work aligns with several key policy priorities, including digital literacy, youth empowerment, social inclusion, and innovation in education. The definitions of digital youth work emphasize these connections by highlighting how digital youth work supports young people's development, enhances their digital competences, and promotes their active participation in society. When these alignments and connections are clearly shown, relevant stakeholders are more likely to politically support digital youth work. Furthermore, policymakers are more likely to recognise and support digital youth work if they see it as aligning and contributing to their broader policy goals.

Digital youth work, similarly, to general youth work in Europe is heterogeneous, with different levels of expertise and recognition among stakeholders. Young people are both active users of their digital rights, and vulnerable to their violations. Digital youth work has a role to promote the respect of young people's digital rights and raise awareness of their neglect.

The EU Council Conclusions continue in inviting the EU Member States to: "Include, where applicable, in their youth strategies or other relevant policy plans, clear goals and concrete steps for developing and implementing digital youth work and assessing its impact on young people and youth work. These goals should be based on knowledge, evidence and data regarding young people's digital competences, and the needs for youth work services".

In order to receive political recognition, it is often important to demonstrate the evidence of the impact and the outcomes. Therefore, the digital youth policies should emphasize the positive effects of digital youth work on young people's skills, participation, and personal development. By providing a framework for measuring and demonstrating these outcomes, the definitions help to build a strong evidence base. This evidence is crucial for gaining political recognition, as it shows that digital youth work is not only theoretically sound but also practically effective. It is important to note that policymakers are more likely to support initiatives that have demonstrated positive impacts on their target populations.

Besides the above mentioned, the priorities around digital youth work, emphasise the need for specific skills, training, and resources to implement digital youth work effectively. By highlighting these requirements, the definitions make a strong case for the allocation of resources and support. Policymakers are more likely to recognise the importance of digital youth work if they understand what is needed to make it successful. This understanding can lead to increased funding for training programmes, technological infrastructure, and research initiatives, all of which are crucial for the development but also the sustainability of digital youth work.



It is important that the political recognition of youth work, also put emphasis on the collaborative nature of digital youth work. This often involves partnerships between youth work organizations, educational institutions, technology providers, and community groups. The focus on collaboration resonates with political stakeholders, who recognize the value of multi-sectoral partnerships in achieving policy goals. By demonstrating how digital youth work fosters collaboration and puts into use diverse resources, the policies help to build political support and policymakers are more likely to recognise and support initiatives that involve cooperation across different sectors and stakeholders.

Digital youth work addresses several pressing societal challenges, such as digital exclusion, youth unemployment, and the need for digital skills in the workforce. Therefore, the policies around digital youth work should highlight how the field contributes to overcoming these challenges by providing young people with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed in a digital world. By clearly linking digital youth work to these broader and overarching societal issues, the definitions make a compelling case for political recognition, and policymakers are more likely to support these initiatives.

In addition, the political recognition of digital youth work can be built including its role in promoting inclusivity, access to digital rights and equity within the society, particularly by reaching marginalised and underprivileged youth. By highlighting how digital youth work can bridge gaps in access to resources and opportunities, the recognition of digital youth work builds on the advocacy efforts for a more equality and inclusion. This focus on inclusivity is particularly important and needed when working with political stakeholders who prioritise social inclusion and justice. Policymakers are more likely to recognise and support initiatives that promote inclusivity and provide opportunities for all young people, regardless of their background.

Digital youth work policies have to also provide the basis for a sustainable and long-term investment in the field. It is important to highlight the need for digital transformation based on the needs of the current environment and communities, and the need for continuous adaptation and learning in digital youth work. Therefore, it is important to request sustained support and this long-term perspective within the political recognition, as it encourages policymakers to think beyond short-term solutions, focus on sustainable development and systematically invest in the future.

The development of digital youth work also means establishment of international standards and best practices. It is very much needed to organise more spaces which help to create a consistent framework on various levels – International, European and national/local. For political stakeholders it would be important to look into best practices from other countries and regions when setting the ground for their policies, making this a very important aspect to international recognition.



## Competences of digital youth workers

To understand the multidisciplinary and unpredictable nature of digital youth work, it might be useful to take a step back and contextualise it in the current understanding of what youth work is. For decades, youth work has been grounded in a set of values and driven by its unique philosophy. For example, youth work aims to enhance social inclusion, empower young people to become critical thinkers; and pursue authentic and meaningful communication between youth workers and young people. Youth work includes a variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on nonformal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making (Council of Europe, n.d.).



Just as the boundaries of youth work are not set, digital youth work is not static. It cannot be given a definite meaning, structure nor value, but it can be defined and can have quality standards. Digital youth work is a continually evolving practice affected by intersectional and socio-technological factors (both for young people and youth workers). In simple terms, digital youth work can be messy and unpredictable, it might be useful to think of it as an additional approach to existing youth work, fit to answer the challenges of the digital reality, engage with young people digitally and promote digital citizenship and rights to young people.

Digital youth work is a dynamic and rapidly evolving practice co-created by many different actors. Digital youth work is affected by people, technologies, media, culture, and many other aspects. Because of its complex and unpredictable nature, it might be useful to consider who should be defined as digital youth workers and to what extent such a definition might lead to a better understanding of digital youth work's possibilities and limitations. Based on existing knowledge on youth workers' digital educational and career paths, it is visible that digital youth work should go beyond the use of digital technologies in youth work and provide a new domain with a holistic view of young people's lives in the digital era. Digital youth work is an emerging practice, and it is, therefore, important to be able to experiment, test, and allow failing.



Youth workers conducting digital youth work should possess a range of competences that blend traditional youth work skills with digital literacy and technological proficiency. These competences are not final, but can be used as a reflection for further training activities, research, assessments of youth work and even policy frameworks that define and support youth work. They are presented in thematic groups as this can facilitate their use for education, training, advocacy, policy or other purposes.

## Technical Competencies

1

Digital Literacy including understanding and effectively using various digital tools, platforms, and technologies, awareness of their design, ability to choose from different provided options or to combine them and awareness of their shortcomings and risks.

2

Social Media Competences which go beyond navigating and using social media platforms to engage and communicate with young people, ability to integrate social media in the learning process, knowledge of risks related to data safety and security on social media, critical thinking skills related to social media content etc.

3

Content Creation such as the ability to create engaging digital content, including videos, graphics, and interactive media, using different online and offline tools with an educational purpose.

4

Data Privacy and Security including strong emphasis on data protection principles and practices to ensure the safety and privacy of young people online.

5

Ethical Use of Technology such as promoting ethical behaviour and digital citizenship among young people, and ensuring digital rights are safeguarded in the education process.

6

Legal Awareness and understanding of the legal implications of digital activities, including copyright, data protection, and online conduct.

## Andragogical Competencies

1

Digital pedagogy such as applying teaching and facilitation methods that make use digital tools and online environments and ensuring a full learning process for the young people.

2

Blended and integrated learning which happens online and connects with the offline world to create comprehensive learning experiences.

3

Non-formal education principles such as facilitating young people's participation in the learning process and creating a learner-centred activities.

4

Communication Skills including the ability to effectively communicate with young people through digital and non-digital means and ensure the communication flows clearly. Ability to deal with ambiguous situations and make sure that the communication flows regardless of the interruptions and challenges.

5

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence such as understanding and responding to the emotional and social needs of young people in digital contexts and addressing emotional reactions from young people through digital means.

## Adaptability and Innovation Competencies

1

Critical Thinking including analysing digital media and technology critically to assess their impact on young people and their rights. Ability to identify risks from using digital technology and finding ways to mitigate those risks.

2

Problem-Solving including addressing and resolving issues that arise in digital youth work, such as cyberbullying or digital addiction, as well as, finding flexible and open methods to overcome barriers in the learning process.

3

Innovation such as experimenting with and implementing new digital tools and approaches to enhance youth work.

## *Collaborative Competencies*

1

Teamwork and working effectively with colleagues and other stakeholders in digital youth work projects, including the ability to identify and put in use each other's strong points.

2

Networking, building and maintaining professional networks within the digital youth work community, tech companies, social workers, educators and academia following digitalisation issues.

3

Cultural Sensitivity and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds and how they intersect with digital engagement.

4

Project Management including planning, implementing, and evaluating digital youth work projects based on available resources, including digital tools and funding.

## Lifelong Learning

1

Continuous Learning, meaning keeping up to date with the latest technological advancements and digital youth work practices and openness to try out new tools and approaches in the digital youth work programmes.

2

Professional Development through ongoing training and education to enhance digital competencies and awareness on digital citizenship and rights.

## Recommendations for stakeholders in the field of youth work, policy makers, and practitioners

*The first set of recommendations from this analysis is that in the policy sphere there is a need for enhancing visibility of digital youth work and defining clearly international quality standards for digital youth work.*

1

Definition of quality standards for digital youth work should go beyond using digital tools and platforms. These quality standards should allow youth workers to develop youth work learning programmes following the principles of non-formal education

2

Strengthening the promotion of digital youth work as a response to the need to build digital citizenship education based on understanding of digital rights. These efforts in promoting citizenship education as an outcome of digital youth work are in line with promoting the importance and benefits of youth work in general.

3

Digital youth work is also an answer to the need for lifelong learning of youth workers so they would be able to understand and respond to the contemporary societal trends and technological advancements. This relevance can enhance the perception of youth work as a forward-thinking and dynamic field.

4

Digital youth work enables youth workers to question and work around the limitation of a physical space as a community, which would allow them to address specific groups of young people who are scattered around different spaces, approach and engage with youth from rural and remote areas, create networks of communication and exchange and innovate in the service provision.

***The second area of recommendations is linked with the need for further professionalisation including two major interventions – capacity building and research.***

1

The competencies required for youth workers to develop and contribute to the development of digital youth work are not impossible to attain, but there is a clear need for further training and support. These capacity building measures should go beyond simple digital skills and knowledge, and ideally should include more competences listed in the framework proposed in this document so that youth workers can enhance their expertise and professional skills.

2

There are needs related to ensuring digital youth work is evidence-based practice. The consistent monitoring and reporting, analysing and knowledge creation in digital youth work will support this evidence-based practice. By collecting and analysing data, digital youth workers can understand the effectiveness of their programmes and interventions, as well as introduce modifications.

3

There are many ways to achieve recognition for digital youth work and youth workers. One important starting point is to highlight the specialised approaches, competences and effects that are surrounding digital youth work practice. It can start with simple collection of educational and learning pathways of digital youth workers or include even more detailed training programmes.

*Further recommendations related to advocacy for policy frameworks include the following set of ideas:*

1

Digital youth work should be at the forefront of innovative youth work. The impact of digital youth work should not be limited only to youth policies but also should inform social policies, educational policies and various work related to inclusion and digitalisation.

2

Digital youth work provides a space for young people practice digital citizenship. Such opportunities should go hand-in-hand with all the processes of digitalisation of society and supporting youth participation and empowerment.

3

Digital youth work encourages collaboration with other sectors, such as education, social work, IT and digital technology, academia etc. These collaborative efforts can strengthen the recognition of youth work and provide new ways for connecting young people with the society in which they live in.






## Appendix: Overview of policies, background documents and definitions consulted for the desk research

N	Scope	Type of source	Name of organisation /institution	Link to source	Year	Relevant text
1	Finland	Guidelines	Verke Finland	<a href="#">🔗</a>	2019	Digital youth work promotes the empowerment and equality of young people. Youth work has the aim of encouraging and promoting critical understanding, self-expression, and other activities and having an impact via the media culture and digital technology. Digital youth work is developed through cooperation / Resources are available for digital youth work
2	Europe <sup>1</sup>	Policy document	EU Comission	<a href="#">🔗</a>	2017	The expert group used the following working definition of digital youth work: Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work. Youth workers in this context refer to both paid and volunteer youth workers
3	Europe	Policy document	EU Comission	<a href="#">🔗</a>	2018	The most important factors affecting the uptake and use of technology occur at a personal level. They largely depend on personal attitude towards technology and social media, the respective confidence level of practitioners in using it and the ability to actually define digital youth work in a way that matters to them and their practice.
4	Europe	Guidelines	Verke Finland and partners	<a href="#">🔗</a>		Digital youth work can use technology to make youth work services more accessible and relevant. It can create opportunities and spaces in which young people can develop a critical, innovative and value-based perspective on the digital transformation, and become the coconstructors of a positive digital future. Youth Work is Relevant and Responsive - Youth work and youth policies are proactive and give due consideration to technological development and digitalisation, and they identify the positive and negative impacts of digitalisation on society, including on youth work practices and services - Youth work services are more accessible and relevant for young people, including reaching those who may be geographically and socially isolated - Youth workers have an agile and critical mindset towards digital technology, and have competences to deliver quality youth work - Increased collaboration and international global networks and networking
5	Europe	Research report	Limitation of digital youth work	<a href="#">🔗</a>	2022	While digital youth work's how-to guidelines are important, it is also important to know its boundaries and pitfalls. The understanding of what does not or cannot work within digital youth work is essential to critically and realistically situating it within the ever-changing landscape of digital transformation while aiming to perform the main function of youth work: supporting young people to reach their full personal and professional potential. For decades, youth work has aimed to



<sup>1</sup>Refers to Council of Europe's member states



						empower young people to become critical thinkers and active citizens. To understand the multidisciplinary and unpredictable nature of digital youth work, it might be useful to take a step back and contextualise it in the current understanding of what youth work is. For decades, youth work has been grounded in a set of values and driven by its unique philosophy. For example, youth work aims to enhance social inclusion, empower young people to become critical thinkers; and pursue authentic and meaningful communication between youth workers and young people. Youth work includes: a variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on nonformal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making (Council of Europe, n.d.). Just as the boundaries of youth work are not set, digital youth work is not static. It cannot be given a definite meaning, structure nor value. Digital youth work is a continually evolving practice affected by intersectional and socio-technological factors (both for young people and youth workers). In simple terms, digital youth work can be messy and unpredictable. It is, therefore, impossible to draw specific boundaries as to where digital youth work begins and ends. Instead, it might be useful to think of it as an additional layer to existing youth work, whereby all involved try their best to navigate the intertwined and fluid realities of youth in the digital age. Consider new forms of interdisciplinarity in digital youth work and its definition Digital youth work is a dynamic and rapidly evolving practice co-created by many different actors. Digital youth work is affected by people, technologies, media, culture, and many other aspects. Because of its complex and unpredictable nature, it might be useful to consider who should be defined as digital youth workers and to what extent such a definition might lead to a better understanding of digital youth work's limitations. As there is limited knowledge on youth workers' digital educational and career paths, it might be useful to carry out research in this area to understand how new forms of interdisciplinary teams can enrich the definition of digital youth work. Digital youth work should go beyond the use of digital technologies in youth work and provide a new domain with a holistic view of young people's lives in the digital era. Digital youth work is an emerging practice, and it is, therefore, important to be able to experiment, test, and allow failing. Digital youth work is a diverse and continually evolving practice and field of research. Digital youth work has been dealing with an identity crisis. As it stands, the practice continues to search for its meaning and recognition. In the context of this paper, digital youth work is understood as an evolving practice affected by intersectional factors (both for young people and youth workers). Grounded in the values of youth work and the wider context of digitalisation, digital youth work aims to empower young people to become active, mindful, responsible individuals.
6	Europe	Policy document	Finnish National Agency for Education		2022	Digital youth work, similarly to general youth work in Europe is heterogeneous, with different levels of expertise and recognition among stakeholders.
7	Europe	Guidelines	Finnish National Agency for Education		2023	Young people are both active users of their digital rights, and vulnerable to their violations. Digital youth work has a role to promote the respect of young people's digital rights and raise awareness of their neglect. Digital youth work has a role to promote the respect of young people's digital rights and raise awareness of their neglect.










8	Finland	Report	Finish National Agency for Education		2022	The Council Conclusions continue in inviting the Member States to: "Include, where applicable, in their youth strategies or other relevant policy plans, clear goals and concrete steps for developing and implementing digital youth work and assessing its impact on young people and youth work. These goals should be based on knowledge, evidence and data regarding young people's digital competences, and the needs for youth work services"
9	Europe	Policy document	EU Council		2017	<p><b>UNDERSTANDING:</b>          "Smart youth work" as the innovative development of youth work encompassing digital youth work (I) practice, and including a research, quality and policy component.</p> <p><b>UNDERLINES THAT:</b>          Smart youth work aims to explore the interactions of young people and youth work with digital media and technologies in order to support and enhance the positive opportunities these interactions create. Smart youth work builds upon the ethics, existing principles, knowledge, practices, methods and other assets of youth work and harnesses the full potential of technological developments in the digital society. Smart youth work means making use of and addressing digital media and technologies in order to enrich the opportunities of all young people for information, for access to youth work, for participation, for non-formal and informal learning, by exploring new spaces and formats for youth work in meaningful ways; support the motivation, capacity and competence building of youth workers and youth leaders to be able to develop and implement smart youth work; create better understanding of youth and youth work and support the quality of youth work and youth policy through more efficient use of data-driven developments and technologies for analysing data. Smart youth work builds upon the needs of young people, youth workers, youth leaders and other stakeholders supporting youth. It also takes into account the wider societal context, including globalization, networking, e-solutions etc., providing opportunities for experimentation, reflection and learning from these experiences. Development of smart youth work should be built upon the active engagement of young people themselves, allowing them to best contribute their already existing digital competences as well as to develop additional ones, while also benefiting from respective peer support. Smart youth work shall respect the privacy and safety of all young people, and safeguard their rights. (I) Expert group on Risks, opportunities and implications of digitalisation for youth, youth work and youth policy'. Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method — digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.) Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments — or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work</p>
10	Finland	Publication	VERKE and EYWC		2019	Digital youth work is more focused on the use of digital media and technology in youth work and its practices Firstly, one task of youth work is to understand how digitalisation is shaping societies and what impact it will have on young people and youth work. Technology is present in every area of young people's lives, which means that every young person is somehow connected to digital cultures, whether they use digital media actively or passively. If youth work is to keep up with the times and social changes, it must be curious, adaptive, flexible, open-minded, bold and experimental with new technology. Secondly, the key role of youth work is to support the empowerment of young people and their capacity to be active in a society that is becoming more digitalised and






					<p>technologised. To achieve this, youth work must reach into the world of young people's experience, and operate in the environments inhabited by young people, including digital cultures and environments. An even more important role for youth work involves preventing a digital divide between young people, by ensuring that they have access to digital technology, and by enhancing their technology-related skills. What is new, on the other hand, is the impact and scale of digitalisation within society. The process of digitalisation has also irreversibly changed the civic skills that will be required among young people in the future, as well as the ways in which young people manage their social relationships. This means that the digitalisation of youth work is an absolute requirement for keeping up with the times, and it is no longer appropriate to distinguish digital youth work from face-to-face activities, or treat it as a separate method or branch of youth work. Similar thoughts are reflected in a definition of digital youth work drawn up by several experts across Europe.</p>	
11	Finland	Publication	VERKE Finland		2017	<p>Simply put, digital youth work means applying digital media and technology to youth work. Ideally, the use of digital media and technology supports the organisation's own objectives and operations of youth work. According to the understanding gained over the years in Verke, the objectives of digital youth work can be roughly divided into two bundles: 1) Making youth work up-to-date and appealing to young people by utilising digital technology in youth work services and 2) Enhancing young people's technology related skills.</p> <p>WITH TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES having changed the way in which young people use the web, youth work that utilizes digital technology has reached a turning point. It is therefore no longer appropriate to distinguish digital youth work from face-to-face activities, or treat it as a separate method or branch in youth work. In fact, digital youth work should not be defined solely as youth work done online, but should cover all forms and methods of youth work. Digital youth work cannot indeed even exist without traditional forms of youth work. The term digital youth work first emerged in the Finnish youth work lexicon in the summer of 2012, when youth work organisations throughout Europe, invited by Verke, met in Finland to discuss the impact of digitalisation on youth work and its practices. Already then, the central idea was that the goal of digital youth work must be to comprehensively strengthen the agency of young people in a technologised and digitalised world (Davies 2012; Taylor 2012). This idea is still easy to endorse. Compared to many other countries, Finnish digital youth work has been characterised by work via online services, particularly the social media, while using a variety of chat tools to reach out to the young. In fact, many Finnish youth workers have found it difficult to grasp what 'digital media' might mean outside the social media. There was a demand for the concept of digital youth work in parallel with online and web-based youth work to describe the diversity of digitalisation in youth work. (Lauha et. al 2017.)</p> <p>THE NEW YOUTH ACT ENTERED into force in Finland at the beginning of 2017. The purpose of the Act is to promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting an influence and improving their skills and capabilities to function in society; support the growth, independence and sense of community of young people and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and adoption of skills necessary for this purpose; support young people's free-time pursuits and engagement in civic society; promote non-discrimination and equality among young people and the realisation of their rights; and improve young people's growth and living conditions. Underlying these objectives are the principles of solidarity, multiculturalism and internationalism, sustainable development, healthy lifestyles, respect for life and the environment and cross-sectoral cooperation. Under the new Youth Act, municipalities are responsible for youth work. Municipalities are required to create the necessary preconditions for youth work and activities by providing</p>



					<p>services and premises for young people and supporting their civic engagement. Young people will always need safe premises and support for informal social and independent activities. Youth centre activities are a traditional form of youth work that is available in almost all Finnish municipalities. However, not all young people visit youth centres, or they visit them very infrequently. Instead, they spend their time outside of school in places such as streets, shopping centres, cafés, public transport — and the digital world. Youth workers in both municipalities and non-governmental organisations have traditionally worked with young people out in the field, in diverse operating environments, which has always required the constant development of working methods and partnerships. The same goes for digital youth work.</p> <p>The capabilities required in digital youth work are not only limited to technical and cultural issues, but are also related to core competencies of contemporary youth work. Even though many youth workers use digital media plentifully in their spare time, meaning that the phenomena and technologies are familiar, it requires refined professionalism to connect digitality to the goals of youth work and to adapt the methods of youth work into digital operating environments.</p>
12	Finland, Ireland	Publication	<p>HUMAK University of Applied Sciences, Finland.</p> <p>Maynooth University, Ireland</p>		<p>Digital Youth Work is not a methodology or a form of work, it is youth work which utilises the possibilities of new technology. This module encourages you to view Digital Youth Work as a way to undertake everyday youth work in our contemporary society, where the digitalisation is developing fast. The term 'digital youth work' first emerged in the Finnish youth work lexicon in the summer of 2012, when youth work organizations throughout Europe, invited by Verke, met in Finland to discuss the impact of digitalization on youth work and its practices. Already then, the central idea was that the goal of digital youth work must be to comprehensively strengthen the agency of young people in a technologized and digitalized world (Davies 2012; Taylor 2012). This idea is still easy to endorse. However, the concept of digital youth work was not firmly established until a few years later. This was partly because online and web-based youth work had gained a strong foothold in the professional terminology of youth work. On the other hand, only certain approaches to realizing the potential of the digital media and technology had become established in youth work. Digital youth work is an important part of modern-day techniques to council, contact and help the youth. Especially in rural and sparsely populated areas it's a way to get the youth participating. Digital Youth Work is about the digitalization of a society and how youth work and youth work practices are responding to that transformation in society. Digital Youth Work can use number of different methods, approaches and tools. It can be an activity or a tool. It can be a type of content that can be used in existing youth work or new types of activities. One of the really important things about Digital Youth Work is that it's not a stand-alone piece of youth work. It's underpinned by the same ethics, values and principals as youth work in general.</p>
13	Ireland	Guidelines	National Youth Council of Ireland		<p>Digital youth work is an emerging term to describe the area of youth work that uses digital media and new technology to enhance outcome focussed youth development. The term is used to describe work that can happen in face-to-face situations, social and group settings as well as in online environments - or in a mixture of these. It is relevant to all youth work pedagogies and can enhance all types of practice. Digital youth work should be defined in relation to youth work goals in general, not as a separate project with a separate goal. Digital youth work can be used as a tool for youth development, facilitated by a physical space or an online environment. Digital youth work can also be delivered as an activity and serve as the subject matter or content in a youth work setting. Digital youth work takes many forms and varies depending on the organisation, the infrastructure, funding and resources available</p>

						<p>to youth workers at the time. Digital youth work is internationally established and underpinned by theoretical research and best practice learning approaches and pedagogies. One of the most widely known is The Clubhouse Network Model*. This model is grounded in a constructivist learning approach that draws on research from the fields of education, developmental and social psychology, cognitive science and youth development. It leverages new technologies to support new types of learning experiences, engaging young people who have been alienated by traditional educational approaches. Outcome focused youth development is at the heart of digital youth work. The Framework for 21st Century Learning is a tool used to put digital skills, known as 21st century skills, at the centre of learning. It defines and illustrates the skills and knowledge young people need to succeed in work, life and citizenship, as well as the support systems necessary for 21st century learning outcomes. 21st skills and knowledge are defined as: LIFE &amp; CAREER SKILLS, LEARNING &amp; INNOVATION SKILLS (THE 4Cs**), INFORMATION, MEDIA &amp; TECHNOLOGY SKILLS, 21ST CENTURY THEMES &amp; KEY SUBJECTS. Youth work needs to demonstrate outcomes and the Framework is a great tool to help plan and monitor these outcomes.</p> <p>* For more information see <a href="http://www.computerclubhouse.org">www.computerclubhouse.org</a>. ** 4Cs are known as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication</p>
14	Europe	Policy document	CoE-EU Youth Partnership		2021	<p>Digital youth work should be seen as part of a mixed mode and not in competition with physical face-to-face delivery, as each has its merits and should complement each other in matching how young people want to engage with youth workers and youth work. Digital youth work is a relatively new way of doing youth work and it easily raises doubts. It can contradict the established mode of youth work – face-to-face encounters in a physical reality. The task of managers is twofold: to seriously listen to resistance and criticism, and to create opportunities for the staff to learn about the meaning and use of new media to young people. Digital youth work is a complex phenomenon linked with a global trend of digitalisation and the digital cultures of young people – the ways that young people use, modify and are used by digital media. Most probably all this has a crucial effect on youth work as we know it. The definition above argues that digital youth work is not separate from youth work, but an essential element of it.</p>
15	Finland	Guidance	Verke Finland			<p>Digital youth work is based on the idea that new technology must be utilised in youth work to make services and activities intended for young people better, more accessible and more meaningful. Digital youth work can be used to create opportunities and spaces for young people to develop their critical, ethical and creative thinking related to technological development and the digital future. Digital youth work is focused on digitalising the youth work sector and the practices within. Digital youth work is not a separate discipline or method within youth work, but rather something intertwined with all areas of youth work. Digital youth work can, for example, be implemented in the context of cultural youth work, youth participation, youth information and counselling, open youth work or outreach work – in other words, any and all forms of youth work. At its best, digital youth work links seamlessly with other youth work performed by the organisation and the related goals. Because digital youth work is not a separate discipline but can be connected to all youth work, the implementation methods and forms of digital youth work are diverse. Digital youth work can even be conducted without digital devices. Digital youth work can, for example, be discussing the phenomena related to gaming culture with a young person or guiding young people to be respectful to others on social media.</p> <p>Some examples of digital youth work practice:</p>

						<p>1. Digitally as a tool in youth work The focus is on digitalising youth work operations to make them more accessible and meaningful. Utilising digital tools in participatory activities reaching young people through social media online guidance for vulnerable youth</p> <p>2. Digitally as an activity in youth work The focus is on learning by doing and practical applications: game education-based activities, such as a game development club digital crafts and maker activities utilising location-based mobile apps in adventure education.</p> <p>3. Digitally as content in youth work The focus is on questions related to digitalisation: discussions on phenomena encountered online, organising events related to digital youth cultures, such as YouTuber meet and greets utilising digital media, such as blogs, in self-expression.</p>
16	EU	Publication	Foroige			<p>Foróige is a prominent youth organisation that works with young people through more than 600 Foróige clubs in Ireland, reaching over 50,000 young people aged 10-18 each year. True to their purpose of enabling 'young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their development and in the development of society', at Foróige they have designed a new approach to Digital Youth Work.</p>
17	Europe (CoE)	Research	Dr Alicja Pawluczuk SALTO PI		2020	<p>The key message from the data is clear – digital youth work should be recognised as an essential field of youth work practice and not merely considered as a set of ad hoc digital activities. For a number of years now, youth workers have been on the front line when it comes to responding to young people's unique challenges associated with their digital lives – the COVID-19 pandemic has brought their efforts increasingly into the foreground.</p>
18	Europe (CoE)	Research	Dr Alicja Pawluczuk SALTO PI		2024	<p>Digital youth work refers to the utilisation of digital tools and methodologies to support the personal and social development of young people. It encompasses a broad array of activities that utilise digital technology, including social media, online gaming, digital making, and virtual reality, to engage young individuals in educational, social, and creative endeavours.</p> <p>The primary aim of digital youth work is to enhance young people's capacity to actively participate in society, improve their skills for the contemporary digital world, and foster their overall well-being. This approach recognises the significant role that digital technology plays in the lives of young people today and seeks to leverage these tools to support their development in positive and meaningful ways. Digital youth work can take place in a variety of settings, including schools, youth centres, and online platforms. It involves not only the use of digital tools for communication and engagement but also the teaching of digital skills and critical thinking about digital media and technology.</p>
19	Finland	Article	Lasse Siurala, Aalto University		2020	<p>Youth work and digital youth work are educational fields. Aligning contradictory perspectives – a tough nut to crack. The study outlined 5 tentative perceptions of DYW. Out of these 5, the youth work community of practice seemed to favor three; critical digital literacy, safety on the internet, and being at the forefront of digitalization. On closer look, the differences between these 3 are quite deep, they even appear as contradictory perspectives</p>

20	Finland	Publication	Verke Finland		2019	According to this first shared definition, digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work activities. Furthermore, digital youth work should be seen as a tool, activity or content in youth work, or even all of these simultaneously. As STEM education (Science, technology, engineering and maths) and digital youth work collide more and more, it is becoming more important to teach youth not only about the possibilities of technology, but also about the responsibility of using it. The latest European definitions, however, confirm the oft-repeated mantra digital youth work is not a separate discipline but can be integrated into any form of youth work. All digital youth work should always be underpinned by youth work goals and values. With this kind of activity the goals can be varied: maybe we want to increase or broaden the appeal of our existing crafts workshops, maybe engage more girls to experiment with technology, perhaps we want to teach coding, or maybe we just want to provide meaningful leisure activities.
21	EU level	Conference report	Digital youth work: youth workers' balancing act between digital innovation and digital literacy insecurity, Proceedings of ISIC, The Information Behaviour Conference, Krakow, Poland		2019	Digital youth work is perceived as a vital part of youth engagement practices, and defined as 'values-led practice working with young people that takes account of the digital dimensions of young people's lives' (Taylor, 2012) as well as the area of youth work that implements digital technologies to enhance outcomes of youth centred initiatives (Harvey, 2016). The concept of digital youth has grown in importance in light of the technological developments and digital skills demands of the 21st century. According to most youth workers, digital youth projects enhance opportunities for self-directed and participatory learning for young people.
22	Scotland	Report	Youthlink Scotland		2023	27% of digital youth work projects focus on cyber resilience compared with 4% of non-digital projects. A further 33% of digital youth work projects cover cyber resilience 'a little bit' compared to 15% of non-digital projects. Digital youth work includes both in-person and online. It takes place in groups and one-to-one delivery. The most common delivery method is in-person group sessions. Digital youth work includes: using digital tools as a way to connect with young people, activities that focus on specific technologies, supporting young people to develop skills and knowledge. Cyber resilience skills and knowledge are incorporated into digital youth work activities that also contribute to national youth work outcomes. Digital youth work contributes to young people knowing when to share decision making with a trusted adult. Digital is part of youth work practice across many communities in Scotland, contributing to meeting the diverse needs of young people. Our survey asked questions about both online safety (helping people stay safe online) and cyber resilience (keeping data and devices safe). Digital youth work is growing in Scotland, as more and more youth workers take action to support young people in their online lives, enable the development of digital skills and share together in the fun of digital activities.
23	Scotland	The national agency for youth work	The national agency for youth work		2023	Types of digital youth work activities: 70% of projects (50 of the 71 responses to this question) deliver activities for young people using digital technology ('occasionally' or 'regularly'), 48% deliver activities focused on specific technologies 68% deliver activities to young people aiming to provide training, or to develop digital skills or knowledge.

24	Scotland	Material for training	National agency for youth work and the collective voice of the sector.		2019	Digital youth work isn't only for those with strong technical skills, it's based on the willingness understand young people's life contexts, to learn from them and to support them to navigate their lives. It's also about making the most of new technology to make our youth work offer even better and more exciting. For this we need to be able to try new things out – some things work, some don't, it's ok. Digital youth work includes utilising our skills to help young people have their voices heard through digital media and technology and supporting them to have their rights upheld, in the digital world as well as the physical one. For youth work to stay relevant we need to engage with and reflect the digital world. Digital Youth Work is youth work for a digital age, youth work for the 21st Century It is based on understanding the importance of digitalisation in young people's lives; that their lives are lived both offline and online, that the internet of things surrounds them, that digital literacy is now a core skill, and that young people without access to the online world or skills to navigate it are at a disadvantage compared with their peers.
25	Europe	Article	Henrique Gonçalves SALTO PI			In fact, digital youth work is neither the magic formula for all inclusion and diversity issues, nor the backup of face-to-face youth work. These examples showed us that digital youth work is not only about supporting offline activities but also about using IT tools to make a change and empower young people
26	Europe	Article	Michael Di Paola SALTO PI			We as youth workers usually very much trust our empathy and intuition, but we should also study and read what has already been written about this new field of action of ours, at a time when most of us were not even considering what is now called digital youth work.
27	Belgium	Article	Vrije Universiteit Brussel		2022	Inshort, digital youth work stands for the use and discussion of digital media and technology in different types of youth work contexts, e.g. online, physical or blended and in diverse ways, i.e., as an instrument, an activity, or as content. It also pursues the same objectives as regular youth work. Furthermore, digital youth work offers the opportunity to involve youngsters in the creation of activities, tools, platforms, etc. The virtual world is an inherent part of youngsters' daily lives. Digital media also offers the possibility of e-participation, which may be perceived as more accessible for young people.
28	Belgium	Article	Vrije Universiteit Brussel			..Digital youth work entails youth work where digital media/technology is featured and/or discussed. Activities then do not necessarily need to entail actively working with digital tools/platforms, such as coding, but also focus on, for instance, discussing the challenges of social media. What it, however, always includes, is an educational aspect where young people get the chance to work on their personal development in a non-formal environment. In that sense, it can be an asset for improving digital competences. As mentioned above, youth work strives to empower and equip young people for social integration and engagement in society. With a significant portion of our daily activities now occurring online, digital literacy is essential for tasks like job applications or doing our finances. In this context, digital youth work aligns with the principles of regular youth work. It offers opportunities, such as overcoming distance and fostering critical digital competences, but it also presents challenges.
29	Europe	Article	Center for Social Informatics, Edinburgh Napier University, UK		2019	Digital youth work is an emerging field of research and practice which seeks to investigate and support youth-centred digital literacy initiatives.

30	Europe	Article	Verke Finland			The participants defined Digital youth work to include - among other things - new competencies, new possibilities for participation, deeper cooperation with youth & youth workers, non-formal education through digital media, peer journalism and fostering chances for young people to connect with new groups of peers. All in all, these definitions don't look that different from youth work goals in general. That is also what many participants brought forward in their presentations: Digital youth work is not a separate form of youth work, but rather a new way realizing the core competencies of youth work. The expert groups first draft on the definition of digital youth work also agrees with this statement.
31	Europe	Article	Women and Family Studies Research Center			Digital youth work is part of the field of youth; its practices are focused on the values and basic aims of youth policy as well as youth work.





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# Re novating

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

