




Empowering  
young people

A stylized map of Europe in light blue, overlaid on a dark blue background that represents the Earth. A yellow arc is visible at the bottom of the map, suggesting a globe. The map shows the outlines of European countries.

**How to guarantee inclusivity of  
hands-on approaches at VET,  
education and life-long learning?**

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## **About the YES Forum**

Founded in 2002, YES Forum is a European network of organisations working with and for young people facing challenging situations. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create an environment where young people and youth professionals have equally accessible learning and work-related opportunities in Europe and beyond.

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## Capacity building in the YES Forum

YES Forum members are working with and for young people, each following diverse forms of action and different approaches to learning. As a network, our goal is to ensure that all of our members have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and competences to effectively reach their goals and provide high-quality assistance to the young people they work with. Thus, among others, [we provide room for peer learning and exchange of inspiring practices by regularly organising workshops, trainings and webinars open to our member organisations and for professionals working with marginalised young people.](#)

YES Forum activities for 2022 revolved around three main objectives:

- to enhance the promotion and recognition of education professionals,
- to promote hands-on approaches to make VET, education and life-long learning more inclusive and
- to improve intergenerational dialogue at work.

In this document, we focus on providing an overview of the lessons learned during the implementation of this year's activities related to promoting hands-on approaches for inclusiveness in VET, education and life-long learning.

We provide our networks' recommendations for youth organisations and youth professionals, but also our recommendations directed to policy makers at the EU level to ensure inclusive access and inclusive learning and training experiences for youth.

## Recommendations to Youth Professionals and Organisations

This section is dedicated to our recommendations to youth professionals and youth work organisations within and outside our network who work with young people from various backgrounds. These recommendations are based on our collective experience as a network, and focus on how professionals in the field can adopt more inclusive approaches in their work.

At the YES Forum we consider inclusion an horizontal priority in all activities designed and implemented by youth professionals. In 2022, we experimented, implemented and promoted approaches that contributed to inclusion in education, vocational education and training and internships. A detailed listing of our activities is presented in our ["Report on promoting hands-on approaches to make VET, education and life-long learning more inclusive"](#).

Our position is that both access to learning and training opportunities, but also the learning and training experiences *per se*, should benefit various different profiles of participants. More specifically, YES Forum's recommendations to youth professionals and organizations are the following:

### **Invest in continuous training for youth professionals!**

This year taught us how important it is to dedicate time and resources to train our youth professionals, as this will define the level of success of our interventions. Developments in the field may occur daily, and we should ensure our work is up-to-date and relevant.

Prepare a detailed capacity-building plan at the beginning of the year, connected to your already decided projects. The knowledge produced needs to be transferred to all staff members, whether they are directly involved in a project, or not. Less frequent approaches to learning (e.g. the photovoice method) need even more promotion at all levels.

Moreover, keep in mind that **diversified learning approaches** (workshops, trainings, study visits, etc.) are most appreciated. Learning styles differ, and each approach has a different added value for professionals.

Entrust less experienced personnel with tasks that will give them a sense of ownership and responsibility for their work, while challenging them. Learning by doing and learning by one's mistakes has been a great training tactic for our young employees.

### **Diversify your personnel selection process!**

Do not hesitate to give opportunities to professionals with less work experience. Try to include people who are not necessarily the "ideal candidate" on paper. A possible gap year in a resume or few academic achievements should not be a deterrent to an interview invitation.

Every person comes with their own ideas and personal achievements. Diverse personal and professional backgrounds can bring different perspectives to our daily work.

Make sure you give them incentives to improve on the job and show them how they can grow within your team, and in the field in general.

### **Aim for regular onsite meet-ups and events!**

Invest in organising physical events for your network. Meeting in person overcomes the "camera awkwardness" and gives more opportunities for socialisation, constructive dialogue, and good practices exchange among the participants.

Bring together youth professionals, youth stakeholders, and policy-makers from different generations and different backgrounds. A diverse audience will add value to the sessions' outcomes. It will also bring out interesting input for the policy-makers present, and, at a second level, it will enrich your recommendations/positions/interventions during relevant consultations.

Ensure that your projects' results are shared with social and youth professionals who were not part of the project. Besides the dissemination effect achieved, an outsider's view may improve the quality of future products or provide inspiration and connections for new collaborations and projects.

As important as physical meetings are, we shall not forget all the knowledge gathered through the online activities from the past three years! The new, online, efficient tools for communication and learning developed during the pandemic are valuable and should not be lost.

### **Adapt your young participants' recruitment process to efficiently reach diverse target groups!**

More attention should be paid to recruiting young people with diverse profiles. Personal motivation and goal-setting should be taken into consideration.

Make sure that your candidate participants are aware of the nature of the learning and training schemes' structure and goals.

For a faster and more efficient recruitment process, create long-term connections with local youth and build a stable network with training providers. It is equally important to engage local state actors and stakeholders to participate in the promotion of relevant training opportunities and initiatives through their regular communication channels.

### **Diversify your methods and approaches to fit your target groups' needs and expectations!**

Ensure that the learning/ training material is adapted to the age, interests and needs of your target groups, and that the language used for the written material is easy to follow.

It is important to provide the participants with thorough explanations on how each step followed during their training will benefit them in the long-term.

Specifically in VET, dedicate time to develop the youngsters' social skills (e.g. how to interact with job recruiters, how to present oneself in an interview, job dress code, etc.), assist them in discovering their own talents and realizing that all their assets are useful to access the job market.

Assisted training schemes characterized by youth workers' mediation with training providers and regular counselling before, during, and after the training placements, are particularly effective with young NEETs.

## **Policy Recommendations**

As elaborated in our [\*"Report on promoting hands-on approaches to make VET, education and life-long learning more inclusive"\*](#), a number of policies at the EU level focus on the topics addressed in this report. The term "inclusion" is a keyword in EU communications, and it is mainstreamed in most, if not all, EU Social Policies, strategies, and funding programmes.

Focusing on the EU Education Policy, there are numerous pieces of legislation which frame and support EU members' cooperation in different fields (e.g. vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, etc), aiming at making education and training inclusive. For example, for the programming period 2021-2027, funding programmes like Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC), provide the funding beneficiaries with incentives to make their activities as inclusive as possible.

Nonetheless, it is evident that, since these rules are not legally binding, and practically work as recommendations for the Member States and entities receiving funding through EU programmes, more effort needs to be done to ensure that inclusion can be effectively and practically embedded in education and training policies, programmes and projects.

The experience gained in YES Forum leads to the following policy recommendations:

### **Fill in the gaps in existing EU legislation!**

Ensure there are more incentives for training and internship providers to offer high-quality experiences. The Quality Framework for Traineeships needs to be updated accordingly to support both the internship providers and the interns. For example, especially for smaller-sized organisations struggling, or organisations with no experience in assessment and guidance, some extra support would mean better implementation of the framework. In addition, in support of young people, extra incentives for the provision of benefits like payment for services, access to affordable housing and health care benefits should be provided.

It is important to ensure that existing funding programmes supporting cross-border mobilities, like the Erasmus+ traineeships programme strand, can benefit more young people. University graduates who need to be trained on-the-job should have an equal opportunity to apply for funding, even after their graduation.

Newly established initiatives, like the ALMA programme for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds should receive more attention and visibility. As the programme has already run successfully in several EU countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Germany, etc.), the knowledge gained should circulate among members to ensure that, once applicable in more countries, the programme will run effectively without further delay.

### **Ensure your messages are heard by young people from all backgrounds!**

Young people from all backgrounds need to remain in the spotlight even after the end of the European Year of Youth 2022. The recent proposal for the establishment of a European Year of Skills 2023, which is expected to support, among others, young people's upskilling and reskilling for employability, should highlight once again the initiative's importance for the specific target group.

The legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022 should lead to tangible results that will benefit youth in the future too. Besides raising awareness through communication campaigns and social media, the

results should be made accessible to all young people, even the ones who do not have access to the regular EU online channels.

**Give more financial incentives for the inclusion of young people with disabilities!**

Even if the inclusion of young people with disabilities in learning and working environments is part of the EU social policies, we can see that they are not as included in reality. The contribution of extra financial incentives which could cover any possible additional cost (e.g. installing ramps, creating learning materials accessible to all, etc.) can help learning and training providers to offer them an overall fruitful experience.

More incentives should also be given to organisations to invest in more targeted training of their youth professionals. Dedicated handbooks, workshops or short-term trainings, which prepare youth professionals on how to effectively conduct accessible activities can certainly provide more young participants with high-quality services.