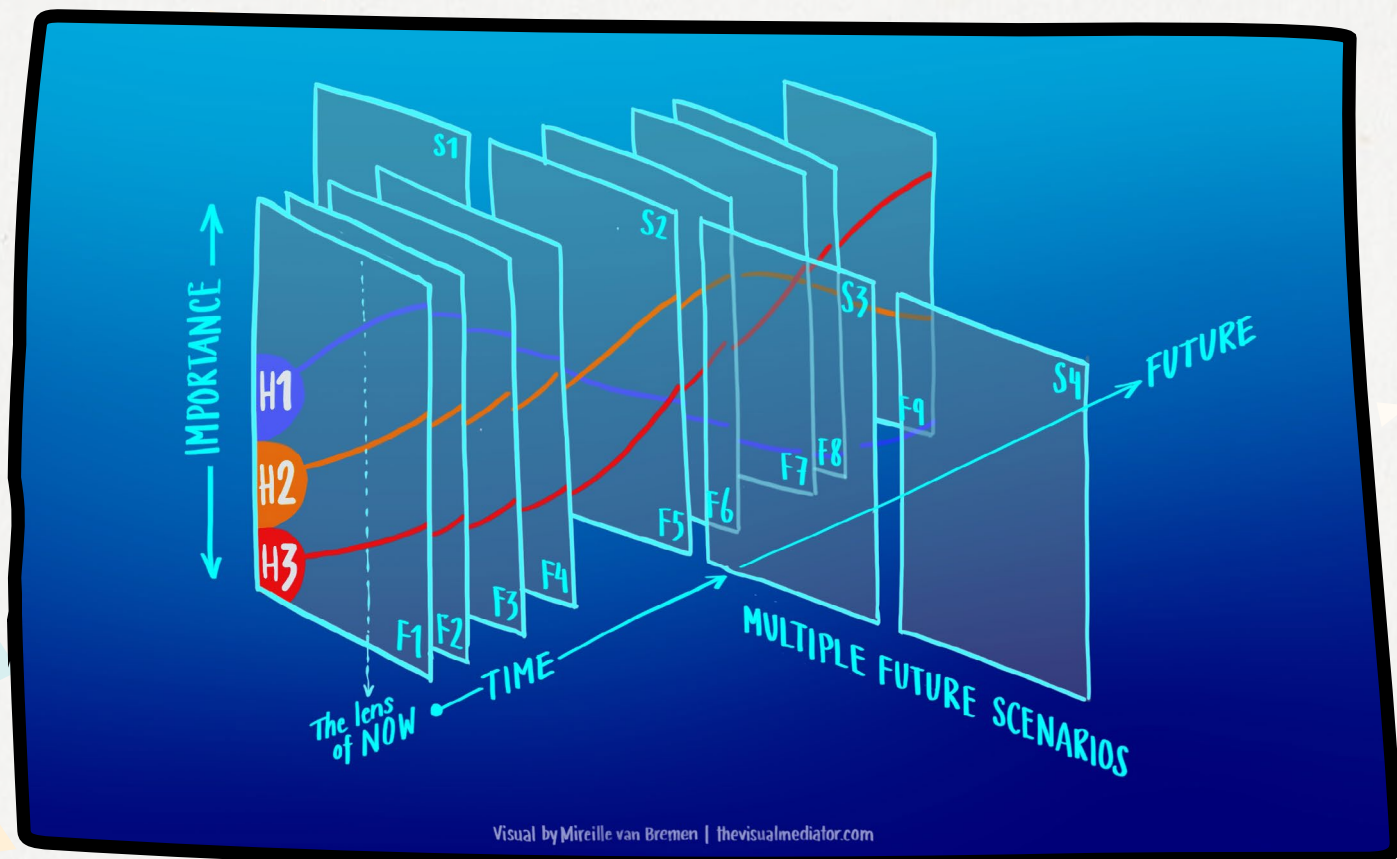




European Academy on Youth Work



# FUTURES OF YOUTH WORK

by Gisele Evrard, Darko Marković, Özgehan Şenyuva and Aleksandra Szymczyk

## RESEARCH REPORT



## Editorial

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### Authors (in alphabetical order):

Gisele Evrard, Darko Marković, Özgehan Şenyuva, Aleksandra Szymczyk

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Sonja Mitter Škulj

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**RESEARCH** REPORT  
2024

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# 01

## Executive Summary

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**Context**

**Research Methodology**

**Key Findings**

- Cross-cutting themes
- Trends and scenarios

**Recommendations**

**Conclusion**

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## CONTEXT

In the face of uncertainties and complexities that characterise rapidly evolving societies, the European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW) identified a pressing need to look beyond the present and anticipate the future.

The 'Futures of Youth Work' research report explores the evolving landscape of youth work in the context of emerging global challenges, including technological advancements, climate change, shifting demographics and changing societal values. The project aspires to 'envision' the European landscape of youth work in the year 2050 through the Foresight methodology of Horizon Scanning and aims to equip the youth work sector with the insights and strategies needed to navigate an uncertain future while maintaining its core mission of empowering young people.

The EAYW aims to promote the development of quality youth work, to support its capacity to react to current and future developments, and to contribute to creating a common ground on youth work and youth work policy. To this end, it focuses on supporting innovation in youth work, as a response to the trends, challenges, and uncertainties faced by young people in today's fast-changing societies. The EAYW offers a platform for reflection, exchange, and knowledge gathering on trends and developments in and with relevance to the youth field in Europe, and on innovative youth work responses to these trends and developments. In this way, it contributes to a European youth work ecosystem that supports quality development and innovation in youth work.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed foresight methods, including horizon scanning, expert interviews and scenario development, to explore potential futures for youth work by 2050. A diverse group of signal spotters and experts from various fields contributed to identifying the trends, drivers and scenarios that could shape the future of youth work.





## KEY FINDINGS

### » CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

- ★ **Technology:** While offering new opportunities for personalised and immersive education, technology also poses risks, such as digital exclusion, mental health impacts and the challenge of maintaining human-centred values.
- ★ **Climate and sustainability:** Climate change is a significant concern, with young people increasingly engaged in climate activism. Youth work must prepare for climate-induced migration, support eco-conscious initiatives and promote resilience in the face of environmental stresses.
- ★ **Values and ethics:** The rise of AI, data privacy concerns and shifting societal values necessitate a robust ethical framework within youth work. Youth work must continue to advocate for human rights, critical thinking and inclusive practices in a rapidly changing world.

### » TRENDS AND SCENARIOS

- ★ **Demographic change:** With fewer young people and an ageing population, youth work will need to adapt by fostering intergenerational bonds and addressing the evolving needs of both young and older generations.
- ★ **Culture, social behaviour and lifestyle:** Youth culture is in flux, driven by global connectivity, economic pressures and technological advances. Youth work must guide young people through these changes, fostering critical reflection, creativity and responsible digital engagement.
- ★ **Democracy, civic participation and rights:** As political landscapes shift and young people seek new forms of civic engagement, youth work must enhance political literacy, foster civic participation and address challenges related to representation and inclusivity.
- ★ **Education:** The future of education is likely to be more personalised and technology driven. Youth work can play a crucial role in advocating for learning models that align with young people's interests and prepare them for future workplaces.
- ★ **Work and economy:** The instability of future job markets calls for youth work to guide young people through career transitions, promote resilience and advocate for fair labour practices in emerging economic models.
- ★ **Mental health and well-being:** With rising mental health challenges among young people, youth work must incorporate emotional intelligence content, advocate for mental health policies and create supportive community spaces.
- ★ **War and conflict:** Youth work in conflict-affected areas will need to focus on healing, reconciliation and fostering intercultural dialogue to build resilient communities.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

The report outlines seven key strategies for future-readiness:

1. **Adopt a reflected sense of agency:** Youth workers should balance honouring the past with openness to future possibilities, thus fostering a realistic and agile approach to change.
2. **A future-ready mindset:** Fostering a future-ready mindset is crucial for youth workers as they navigate an increasingly uncertain world, influenced by shifting towards a culture of hope from one led by anxiety and risk.
3. **Provide structured spaces for future discussions:** Create more opportunities for focused conversations about future challenges, involving a wide range of stakeholders at all levels of youth work.
4. **Future literacy:** Future literacy involves understanding possible futures and developing the capacity to influence them. This requires a shift from 'mere' participation to actively shaping societal outcomes in youth work through a culture of innovation.
5. **Embrace whole-system change:** Address future challenges through a holistic approach that includes both individual development and systemic changes in the youth work sector.
6. **Readiness to rethink the societal role of youth work:** While the core purpose of youth work—empowerment and engagement—remains constant, the societal role of youth work should be regularly reassessed, to ensure that it remains equipped to respond to emerging challenges. This process should also include an awareness and understanding of the boundaries of youth work and its connections with other sectors.
7. **Stay alert to transformation calls:** Be vigilant in recognising when innovation is no longer sufficient and a fundamental transformation in youth work is necessary to remain relevant and effective.



## CONCLUSION

The 'Futures of Youth Work' report serves as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue and action within the youth work sector. It emphasises the importance of collective care, systemic awareness and adaptability in preparing for an unpredictable future. By embracing these strategies, the youth work field can continue to empower young people and contribute positively to society in the decades to come.



## Preface

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**Introductory Words**

**The Project**

**Types of Futures**

**A 'Quantum Mindset'**

**What Are We Talking About?**

- Creating conditions to see what the futures of youth work might be
  - The role of youth work in tomorrow's society
  - Embracing change and preparing for the unknown
  - The big questions to which we might need to respond
- 



The above quote from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus refers to the very nature of existence and the idea that life is in a constant state of flux and that all things are continuously evolving. Heraclitus' view is that stability or permanence is an illusion, and that embracing change is essential to understanding the true nature of things. He used this concept to explore the philosophy of becoming, rather than being, a dynamic process of transformation that defines the universe. His views challenge us to accept change as an occasional 'disruption' and as the essence of life, motivating us to adapt and grow. This idea remains relevant today, reminding us that adaptability and resilience are crucial in facing our world and life's changes and turns. It is also one of the ideas behind the Futures of Youth Work project.

## INTRODUCTORY WORDS

What follows sets the stage for exploring the **transformative nature and role of youth work**, grounded in philosophical reflections and theoretical frameworks and anchored in the concept of constant change. This serves as an intellectual foundation for understanding the evolving dynamics within the field of youth work, anticipating and shaping the future landscape of youth work in Europe.

The 'Futures of Youth Work' project envisions various future scenarios using the Foresight methodology and Horizon Scanning, with the aim of equipping youth workers and policymakers with the necessary tools to comprehend, navigate and influence these potential futures. The following provides a framework that examines the **purpose of the project**, the **types of futures** that can be approached time-wise and future-wise, the concept of a **quantum mindset** that underlines the qualities and principles needed to embrace change, the **pivotal questions driving the future of youth work**, and **possible related future scenarios**. Together, these elements offer a comprehensive guide to understanding and preparing for the dynamic changes and challenges that lie ahead in the field of youth work.

While considering the changing identity and boundaries of youth work, it is important to emphasise the importance of strategic foresight and future literacy. Engaging with these concepts will help equip youth workers with the competencies needed to anticipate and actively shape the future. These are the themes explored in this research report that outline a framework for a transformative journey that seeks to redefine and future-proof the field of youth work.



## THE PROJECT

In the face of uncertainties and complexities that characterise rapidly evolving societies, the European Academy of Youth Work (EAYW) identified a pressing need to look beyond the present and anticipate the future. The Futures of Youth Work Project's aspiration is to **'envision' the European landscape of youth work in the year 2050** through the Foresight methodology of Horizon Scanning. Through its proactive approach, the project aims to **reshape the landscape of youth work in resonance with the dynamic needs of an ever-changing world**, breaking away from conventional paradigms and venturing into unexplored territories of knowledge and practice.

The purpose of the project is twofold: to **generate valuable knowledge about the potential trajectories of youth work in Europe**, and to **generate stimulating conversations around that topic**. The aim is to conceptualise plausible 'trends' that could steer youth work over the next 25 years and sense what it might look like in 2050. By exploring a broad range of uncertainties and mapping out potential outcomes, the project seeks to **identify possible future challenges, changes and needs**. Its ambition is to equip youth workers, youth work practitioners and policymakers with **proactive and actionable recommendations**, effectively guiding their present actions in preparation for future scenarios.

The 'Futures of Youth Work' project contemplates potential futures and actively seeks to shape them. It **recognises the importance of rehearsing these futures using developed scenarios, identifying opportunities and threats, and thus highlighting the capabilities needed to develop or foster for the future**. In essence, the project undertakes a journey to identify and bridge any competency gaps that may hinder the field's readiness for the forthcoming challenges and changes. This undertaking culminates in the definition of specific action steps, which will guide the broader field of youth work on its journey towards becoming future-proof or future-ready.

Moreover, through the project, the **European Academy on Youth Work (EAYW) seeks to strengthen the competencies and capabilities of youth workers and youth work practitioners**, providing them with the necessary resources to envision possible futures. By empowering them to recognise and anticipate developments and needs, the project strives to enable them to become **co-creators of the future**. A key element of this approach is the creation of a dialogue space, welcoming the participation of all those directly involved – youth workers, youth work practitioners, policymakers, young people – in discussions about possible consequences and necessary actions. This collaborative framework will help to collectively decipher the 'so what' of future scenarios and chart the most promising paths forward, ensuring that the project continues to represent a cycle of exploring, learning and adapting. This will support shaping the futures of youth work in an empowered and informed way.





## TYPES OF FUTURES

In Jane McGonigal's book *Imaginable*<sup>2</sup>, **future(s) thinking means to see the future not as a far and fixed point, but as a series of possibilities that are shaped by our actions today**. This requires individuals and communities to get prepared for and influence potential future scenarios, turning what may seem like distant or abstract ideas into tangible, actionable plans.

The plural form of the word 'future' in the 'Futures of Youth Work' project is intentional. Indeed, as we cannot predict the future (such an idea would not only be presumptuous but also completely unrealistic), it is necessary to contemplate the fact that the emergence of multiple futures and future scenarios, which can take many shapes and have a different focus, can be envisioned, sensed and observed. Below, the authors of this report have taken the liberty of adjusting a few of these scenarios, as described in Nikolas Badminton's book *Facing Our Futures: How foresight, futures design and strategy creates prosperity and growth*<sup>3</sup>:

- ★ **An emerging future:** the focus is on sensing. It looks at seeds in the present and is 'benevolent'. It is long-term focused.
- ★ **An upcoming future:** the future that we are facing, and the focus is on the fact that it will happen no matter what. It is medium and long-term focused.
- ★ **A plannable future:** the focus is on strategic thinking and shaping. It believes in a sense of agency. It is short-term focused.
- ★ **A projected future:** it is about 'business as usual' and the continuation of the past and present. It is short-term focused.
- ★ **A preferable future:** It is about wishful thinking and is in line with our values, judgement, what is right and wrong, assumptions, etc. It is short/medium-term focused and is opposite to an unpreferable future.
- ★ **(Our) potential future:** it considers what (we) might become, and the importance of the awareness of that potential within the bigger picture/larger context. It is long-term focused.
- ★ **A possible/probable future:** it relies on thinking about what could/will/might be. It also considers what is 'realistic' from the present 'knowing'. It is short and medium-focused.

Regardless of the type(s) of future(s) to be considered, they call for the need to **adopt a wide range of foresight capabilities**, which include scanning emerging trends, building future scenarios and speculating situations to better visualise possible futures. Following these steps will help the field to anticipate risks, as well as to innovate and create more resilient policies, strategies and approaches to a variety of potential future states.

It is important to underline that as the research report progresses, it becomes clearer how possible future scenarios align with different types of futures. **These futures may vary and will always be contextual:** what appears to be a potential future for one person might already be an emerging future for another. Additionally, different futures can coexist within the same context. Understanding these types of futures is not about guessing which one fits a given scenario; instead, it is about encouraging a deeper reflection on emerging signals, allowing us to sense what is coming and view these signals through different lenses, considering various 'types of future'. It is also about being aware that one's conceptual understanding of future frames the way to approach it.

<sup>2</sup> Jane McGonigal, *Imaginable: How to see the future coming and be ready for anything*. (London: Penguin Random House, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Nikolas Badminton, *Facing Our Futures: How foresight, futures design and strategy creates prosperity and growth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

## A 'QUANTUM MINDSET'

In the same line of thought that 'the only constant in life is change', human beings are encouraged to embrace a 'quantum mindset'<sup>4</sup> – a way of thinking influenced by the principles of quantum mechanics – which involves embracing concepts such as **uncertainty, interconnectedness and the potential for multiple states of being** until committing to only one state.

Below are a few key elements that characterise a quantum mindset:

1. **Embracing uncertainty:** like quantum particles that exist in multiple states, a quantum mindset involves accepting uncertainty and ambiguity as natural components of reality. This allows for flexibility and adaptability in decision-making processes.
2. **Interconnectedness:** the quantum 'chaos' where particles become interconnected and the state of one that can instantly influence another, regardless of distance, encourages a holistic thinking mindset. This perspective emphasises the interconnected nature of systems and environments, implying that actions taken in one area can have widespread effects.
3. **'Probabilistic' thinking:** adopting this approach means contemplating multiple possible outcomes (probabilistic approach) and their possibilities instead of expecting a single result (deterministic approach). This can lead to stronger strategies that consider various potential futures.
4. **Superposition:** the principle of superposition, where a particle can be in multiple states at the same time, encourages thinking in terms of the multiple simultaneous possibilities. This can enhance creativity and innovation by allowing us to consider and combine diverse ideas and solutions.

In the complex and dynamic field of youth work, a 'quantum mindset' might be particularly useful to develop strategies and new models and methods of thinking that can foster more dynamic responses to challenges.

## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

*Changing the identity of youth work has to do with changing the boundaries of what youth is and what it isn't, what youth work is covering, and what is not covering.*

(Gary Pollock)

In a world that is constantly changing, the field of youth work is reaching a crucial moment. The aim of the 'Futures of Youth Work' project is to explore the changing dynamics of the youth work field and outline its possible future directions and transformations. The authors of this research report have a desire to **go beyond understanding the future paths of youth work and guide its development to best serve young people and society at large.**

Youth work has predominantly been about empowering young people and helping them engage actively in society. Today, youth work is facing new challenges and opportunities – from global climate and health issues to rapid technological advances and changing political landscapes. This project plans to use these conditions to imagine various futures for youth work, informed by present trends and creative foresight.

4 Inspired by the principles of quantum learning and 'The quantum mindset and the physics of change' of Melanie Swan, 'The Quantum Mindset and the Physics of Change: A Multidisciplinary Theory', *The Acacia Group Archives* 3, Beginnings and Endings: Embracing or Rejecting Change (2022), last accessed 24 October 2024, <https://theacaciagroup.wixsite.com/mysite/post/the-quantum-mindset-and-the-physics-of-change-a-multidisciplinary-theory>

### » Creating conditions to see what the futures of youth work might be

Inspired by the numerous publications and projects using or referring to the foresight methodology, or by theories and concepts such as the one of liminal space as a transformative threshold in Otto Scharmer's Theory U<sup>5</sup>, this project uses future-thinking strategies to map out the various paths youth work could take. By engaging with concepts such as future literacy and tapping into a broad field of possibilities, the research project encourages stakeholders in the field of youth work to think creatively and critically about the long-term impacts of their current choices and actions.

### » The role of youth work in tomorrow's society

Youth work plays a key role in supporting and developing future generations. By fostering the development of competencies and nurturing values, youth workers make a significant contribution to the societal (as well as political and economic) landscape of the future. This research focuses on **enhancing this role, demonstrating how strategic foresight can be integrated into everyday practices and long-term planning in youth work (and beyond).**

### » Embracing change and preparing for the unknown

The project underscores the importance of adapting to change positively and flexibly. By developing strong, adaptable approaches to youth engagement, the sector can stay effective, regardless of what the future brings and as long as it has a role to play.

### » The big questions to which we might need to respond

Sensing and envisioning futures and future-related scenarios starts by asking ourselves a series of critical and quintessential questions. Some of those explored in the 'Futures of Youth Work' project are:

- Are the current practices in youth work sufficient to meet anticipated future needs?
- What changes are necessary in youth work to stay aligned with global trends?
- How can youth work address societal challenges and embrace new opportunities?
- Why is it important for youth work to be prepared for the future and how can future literacy be integrated into youth work?
- What role does a future-thinking mindset play in youth work?
- How is the concept of agency (individual and/or collective) connected to the traditional emphasis on active participation in youth work? Are there limitations to the current model of active participation in youth work, and do these require a rethinking of agency concepts?
- Is our readiness to let go of outdated practices enhancing our ability to act and influence future conditions?
- How can youth work establish a balance between creating the future and meeting upcoming challenges?
- What role does a culture of innovation play within the field of youth work?



<sup>5</sup> Otto C. Scharmer, Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016).

# 03

## Research Methodology and Data Collection

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The Future Horizons

Horizon Scanning

Interviews

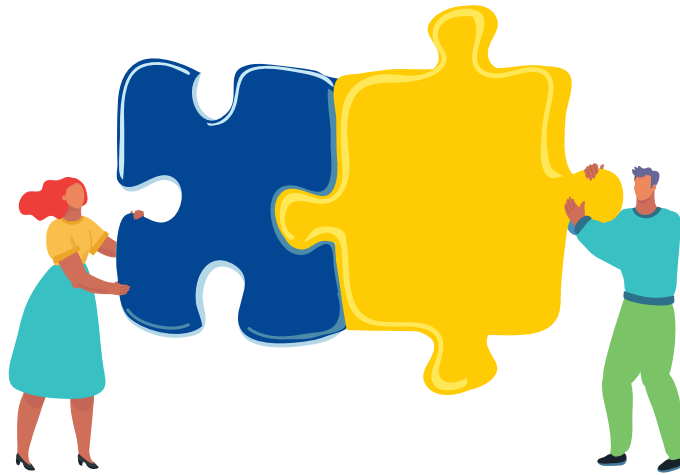
Scenario Development

Self-reflection and Awareness of the  
Research Limitations

- Signal spotters: diversity and constraints
  - Geographical scope: a European focus
  - Research team: subjectivity and reflexivity
  - Addressing the challenges
  - Inviting critical engagement
- 







The ‘Futures of Youth Work’ project employed foresight methods originating from the field of future studies. In most general terms, **futures studies ‘collect and analyse signals and trends from the past and the present, to create scenarios about probable, possible or desirable Futures’<sup>6</sup>.**

Although the discipline was developed in the 20th century, it is useful to remember that engaging with the future and the search for predictive patterns may be as old as humanity itself<sup>7</sup>. In recent years, foresight methods have evolved into a well-established field with strong academic foundations and diverse approaches employed by practitioners in policy-making and decision-making processes. Various methods exist, each tailored to different timeframes and offering varying levels of depth in analysis to address specific organisations’ needs.

On the one hand, while traditional foresight heavily relied on expert opinions, there has been a notable **shift towards participatory approaches that recognise the inherent unpredictability of the future but emphasise the power of imagination**, shaping and inclusive engagement to create desirable futures<sup>8</sup>. These approaches often employ creative storytelling and interactive methods to engage with possible futures.

On the other hand, strategic foresight is a systematic approach to **dealing with uncertainty, defined as the capacity to develop and sustain a range of high-quality forward views and apply emerging insights in practical ways within organisations**. This includes detecting adverse conditions, guiding policy, shaping strategy and exploring new markets, products and services<sup>9</sup>.

Diving into the depths of futures-related studies, this project navigates through waves of signals and trends to sketch out potential futures. Historically, predicting the future has been an age-old fascination, involving methods as varied as oracles and stargazing – ancient practices that included tossing bones or scrutinising tea leaves for hints of what is to come. Today, the Oracle of Delphi has been replaced by the Delphi method, but the fundamental quest to glimpse into the future remains unchanged.

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6 ‘Futures and Foresight for Systems Change’ [Online Course], Systems Innovation Network, last accessed 24 October 2024, <https://www.systemsinnovation.network/spaces/13504261/page>

7 Wendy L. Schultz, ‘A brief history of futures,’ World Future Review 7, no.4 (2015): 324-33; Andy Hines, ‘When did it start? Origin of the foresight field,’ World Futures Review 12, no.1 (2020): 4-11.

8 Riel Miller, Transforming the future: Anticipation in the 21st century. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Stuart Candy and Kelly Kornet, ‘Turning Foresight Inside Out: An Introduction to Ethnographic Experiential Futures,’ Journal of Futures Studies 23, no.3 (2019).

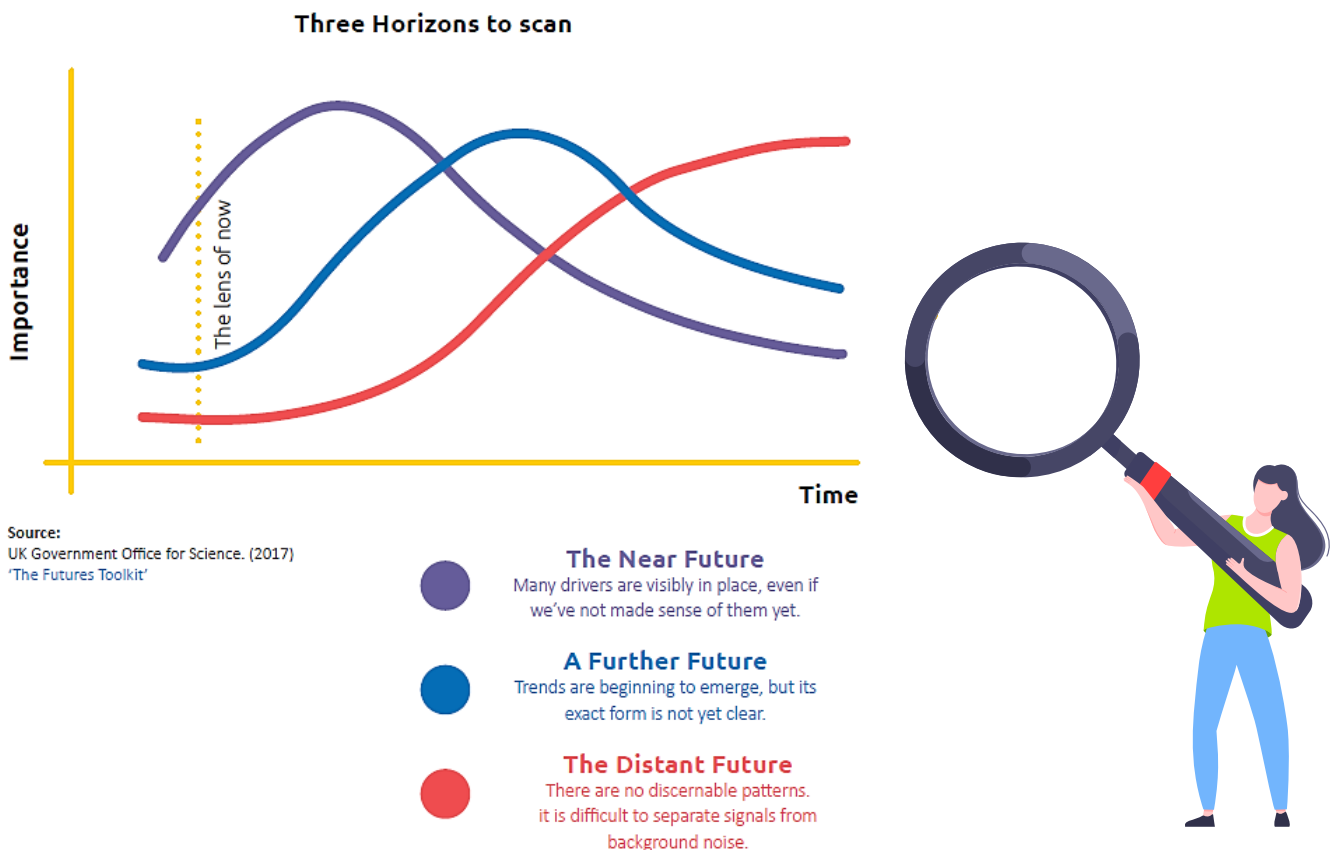
9 Richard A. Slaughter, ‘Developing and applying strategic foresight,’ ABN Report 5, no.10 (1997): 13-27.

**The shift from solitary predictions to more participatory methods marks a significant evolution.** These contemporary approaches are not just about democratising the outlook on the future, rather they enrich and diversify the perspectives, making the process more engaging. By employing creative storytelling and interactive engagements, the field – in the case of this research, the field of youth work – does not merely passively anticipate the future, rather it actively shapes it, creating possible tomorrows with the broad paintbrushes of the collective imagination.

Introducing horizon scanning can be seen as embarking on a grand exploration across time. This method acts like setting sail across a vast ocean, with a crew of futurists scanning the horizons for signs of emerging trends and potential disruptions. This approach offers a structured yet imaginative exploration of what the future might hold, patiently waiting to enlighten and guide strategic pathways.

Horizon scanning is usually the first step of any foresight project. The Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre<sup>10</sup> defines it as a **structured evidence-gathering process, which ‘engages participants by asking them to consider broad sources, typically outside the scope of their expertise’**, encouraging ‘looking ahead, beyond usual timescales and looking across, beyond usual sources’. Horizon scanning is about exploring what the futures might look like, to better embrace and understand uncertainties. This is partially about imagining, it is not about guessing or making predictions; instead, it is about systematically investigating emerging evidence about future trends. The methodologies and tools of futures and foresight are meant to help youth work practice and other stakeholders identify these change drivers understand the various ways they might combine to shape the future landscapes of youth work and contemplate what the most effective strategic response might be.

## THE FUTURE HORIZONS



10 'Horizon Scanning: About', Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre, 2008, archived 17 Apr 2013, last accessed 24 October 2024, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130417073044/http://hsctoolkit.bis.gov.uk/About-7.html>

By adapting from the Futures Toolkit<sup>11</sup> of the Government Office for Science, the research team identified three horizons for Youth Work: Horizon 1 (H1), Horizon 2 (H2) and Horizon 3 (H3). The current situation and near future within the youth work field are referred to as **Horizon 1 (H1)**. H1 represents the elements that are strategically crucial now, in the present. These are **issues that can be easily identified and understood**, ones that youth work stakeholders and organisations are already addressing. So, in essence, H1 focuses on current strategies and immediate challenges that are presently grappled with in youth work.

However, as time progresses, the importance of H1 issues will gradually wane. They might either be incorporated into **broader strategies or be overshadowed by other trends and events**. These are the issues that will constitute **Horizon 2 (H2), the medium-term future**. While it might not be possible to fully comprehend the exact nature of H2 at this stage, some key trends can be identified as well as the driving factors that will shape it. The responsibility of youth work practitioners, researchers and policy-makers is to monitor these factors closely, understand the potential outcomes and adapt their strategies in anticipation of these future needs. Ideally, this should be a **cooperative process that includes a broad spectrum of stakeholders**.

As we move further into the future, H2 will gradually evolve into **Horizon 3 (H3)**, where **new challenges and strategic issues will arise**. Grasping the specifics of H3 is challenging due to the **distance from the present – we are by now well into the future** – making the change drivers that will shape H3 harder to pinpoint. However, the aim of this horizon for youth work practitioners and policymakers is to identify and track these change drivers, allowing them to develop strategic foresight about the potential challenges and choices they might face in the long-term future, while also starting to consider what kind of strategies might be needed to ensure continued success in youth work.

## HORIZON SCANNING

From early September until the end of October 2023, **participants engaged in horizon scanning to identify weak signals, trends and drivers that could impact the future of youth work**. This involved monitoring advancements in technology, shifts in societal attitudes or human ecology, policy developments and innovative practices. Participants were encouraged to **observe and note insights from various sources**, including news, advertisements and casual conversations, as signals could emerge from unexpected sources. Participants were advised to maintain an open and curious mindset, embrace creativity and think beyond the most probable futures. They were encouraged to structure this activity flexibly, devoting time each day or week to systematically scan and monitor diverse sources of information.

The ‘signal spotters’ participating in the project come from diverse backgrounds and expertise, embodying the richness of a global community with a shared purpose. Their **professions range widely – from strategic foresight specialists to pedagogues, social researchers and even financial experts – with many deeply engaged in youth and social work**. Their varied interests span international relations, sustainability, non-formal education, digital innovation and mental health, showcasing an impressive breadth of professional interests deeply rooted in both analytical and creative domains. These spotters are **based across 25 European countries**, adding layers of cultural perspectives to the project. From Europe’s vibrant cities to remote islands championing sustainability, their geographic spread underlines the project’s commitment to inclusivity and the recognition of varied societal needs. Their collective endeavours in youth work – be it leading NGOs, facilitating youth clubs or engaging in policy advocacy – underline a commitment to empowerment and education. Many hold roles as educators, trainers or

<sup>11</sup> ‘The Futures Toolkit’, Government Office for Science, last accessed 24 October 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/futures-toolkit-for-policy-makers-and-analysts/the-futures-toolkit-html>



project managers, where they blend their knowledge with practical skills to foster growth and resilience among youths.

The pursuit of a foresight project of this magnitude has been met with enthusiasm, but also challenges, as not every spotter who embarked on this journey could cross the finish line with their signals due to various unforeseen circumstances. The call for signal spotters was published in July 2023 and by the August deadline, applications had been received from 103 potential signal spotters. Those registered were invited to join the online project Discord community and participate in a half-day onboarding session. Those who engaged in this process, received a **Signal Spotter ID**, resulting in a group of 87 registered signal spotters.

Ultimately, **39 signal spotters submitted their scans**. Their contributions formed the backbone of this research, allowing the team to work with valuable insights. This core of dedicated spotters provided the project with rich data and a multifaceted look into the potential futures of youth work. Some of those initially registered did not participate actively due to lack of time and resources, as well as the perceived difficulties of the task or insecurity over whether they actually had something to contribute. Participation was strictly voluntary, and the original level of interest indicates a high degree of curiosity around the project.

**Two half-day onboarding sessions were conducted** on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2023 for all participants who confirmed their involvement in the project. The sessions introduced the research background, objectives and an overview of the Foresight methodology. Discussions were held on the role of a signal spotter, and an interactive exercise was conducted to help participants adopt the necessary mindset. Guidelines on reporting signals were explained, and the sessions concluded with an overview of the next steps, including a future Resonance workshop planned for February 2024. The aim of the onboarding sessions was to prepare participants to actively contribute as signal spotters, shaping the research and contributing to the understanding of the futures of youth work.

Participants were asked to systematically record their insights and sources. They submitted their scans via a Google Form provided after the onboarding sessions, including a title, a brief written description of the source and a written description of the insight about the future of youth work sparked by the source. Participants were encouraged to submit 1-2 scans per week to maintain momentum throughout the exercise. To facilitate communication and create a collaborative space, an online community on Discord was established. Participants were asked to join, introduce themselves and engage in discussions, sharing reflections and questions about the process.

At the end of this process, **159 scans were gathered**, which included a range of insights from a variety of sources, ranging from news, research, culture and government legislation to dinnertime conversations and personal observations.



## INTERVIEWS

In addition to the horizon scanning process, **seven interviews with experts were conducted in November and December 2023**. The aim of the interviews was to expand on the initial insights from the horizon scanning process and go deeper into understanding the possible scenarios for youth work in 2050. The interviews were conducted with participants from diverse backgrounds, including youth work practitioners, academics, researchers, consultants, experts in digital technology and future studies, as well as professionals from the fields of sociology, anthropology and education.

The interview participants were asked a series of thought-provoking questions aimed at exploring the potential future of youth work in the year 2050. The **questions delved into various aspects that could shape and influence the field, including societal trends, environmental factors, the youth workplace itself, technological advancements, the purpose and role of youth work and its relationship with other fields and stakeholders**. Additionally, the participants were asked to reflect on **what youth work might need to leave behind, embrace or adopt** in terms of practices and mindsets to survive and thrive in the coming decades. The questions encouraged a forward-looking perspective, encouraging participants to consider emerging practices that could contribute to defining and designing the futures of youth work and what new knowledge or understanding might be gained by 2050. These interviews have been transcribed and analysed to inform the development of the trends and scenarios for youth work and are included in the writing of sections of this report, sometimes as quotes to punctuate it.

## SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

The journey of piecing together the futures of youth work began with individual diligence and developed into a collective search. Each member of the research team, working with horizon scans, started on a meticulous examination of trends, potential impacts, and the thematic threads by analysing them. The process wasn't just about connecting the dots; it was a deep dive into understanding the subtleties of each signal and its implications for the field of youth work. In December 2023, the research team gathered in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to expand their insights through a mind-mapping exercise. This collaborative process illuminated the connections between diverse signals, revealing larger patterns and paving the way for more nuanced scenario development (see map of signals on p.20)

Yet, to – as much as possible – transcend personal biases and tap into a wider knowledge pool, the research embraced external voices, which occurred through the seven expert interviews and an important workshop – **Resonance Workshop – held on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024**. The workshop gathered sixteen signal spotters, four members of the Advisory Board and Steering Group of the European Academy on Youth Work, the research team and the project coordinator. This inclusive forum was not merely a presentation of potential futures; it became a **melting pot of ideas, a place where some of the crafted scenarios were not only shared but also challenged and enriched**. With their varied backgrounds, the participants shared their horizon-scanning experiences, providing a practical context to the academic exercise and adding depth to the discussions on future thinking.

These vibrant discussions did more than refine scenarios; they sparked intense debates on the desirable paths forward and the key role of youth work in navigating towards them. As participants reflected on various futures – some inviting, others daunting – the collective focus sharpened on the capacity of youth work to act. During the Resonance Workshop, the **conversation frequently circled back to the question of agency**: How can youth work influence the tides of change, steer away from unwanted outcomes, and shape a future that echoes the core values of the youth work community? This comprehensive approach ensured that the scenario-building stage wasn't just about predicting the future; it was a profound exploration of how to engage with it actively and ethically.

## SELF-REFLECTION AND AWARENESS OF THE RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

In conducting the 'Futures of Youth Work' research, the team was acutely aware of several inherent limitations that influence the transferability and generalisability of the findings.

Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge challenges the idea of objective and detached observation in favour of understanding knowledge as inherently connected to the specific contexts and perspectives of those producing it. According to Haraway, all knowledge is 'situated,' meaning it is shaped by the particular circumstances, experiences and positionalities of the knowers. This perspective argues that rather than striving for an impossible objectivity, it is more honest and productive to acknowledge the partiality of all knowledge and the importance of diverse viewpoints in creating a richer, more nuanced understanding of any issue.<sup>12</sup>

This concept is particularly relevant to the 'Futures of Youth Work' research, which employs methods such as horizon scanning, signal spotting and scenario building. These methods inherently rely on the diverse insights and observations of various participants who bring their unique perspectives to the process. By recognising and valuing the situated nature of these insights, the research embraces a more holistic and inclusive approach to understanding potential futures. Haraway's notion of situated knowledge thus underscores the importance of incorporating a wide range of voices and experiences, making the research more robust and reflective of the complex realities faced by youth work practitioners. This approach aligns perfectly with the goal of creating scenarios that are not only plausible but also grounded in the lived experiences and contexts of those involved in the field.

### » Signal spotters: diversity and constraints

Our signal spotters were recruited voluntarily through channels and networks already utilised by the European Academy on Youth Work and the youth work community. This approach successfully engaged a diverse profile of individuals in terms of age, gender, geography and expertise. However, these participants are primarily engaged in youth work at the European level, often bringing pre-existing perspectives shaped by their professional and regional contexts. This selection bias poses a challenge to the transferability and generalisability of the findings, as the insights may not fully represent the broader global context of youth work.

### » Geographical scope: a European focus

The geographical focus of the research is another limitation. While the aim of the study is to explore the future of youth work in Europe, it predominantly (though unintentionally) reflects Western European perspectives. This Eurocentric orientation, while aligned with the research frame, limits the applicability of the findings to non-European contexts and potentially overlooks significant regional variations within Europe itself. This constraint hinders the comparability and global applicability of the scenarios and recommendations derived from the study.

### » Research team: subjectivity and reflexivity

The composition and perspectives of the research team also influence the study. With their specific profiles, ideologies, experience and positions, the team members bring subjective interpretations to the analysis. Unlike an objective algorithm, the team's insights are inevitably shaped by their personal and professional backgrounds. Recognising this, the team prioritised self-reflexivity and awareness throughout the research process, striving to address and mitigate these biases.

<sup>12</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'; *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (1988): 575-599.

## » Addressing the challenges

To address these limitations, the research team employed several strategies:

- ★ **Self-reflexivity and awareness:** Continuous self-reflection and acknowledgment of inherent biases and limitations were integral to the research process. The team consciously factored these considerations into its analysis and interpretations.
- ★ **Internal diversity:** The diverse backgrounds within the team fostered internal deliberations and critical discussions at all stages, leveraging the varied perspectives to enrich the analysis.
- ★ **Transparency and openness:** The research process was kept open and transparent, with progress and findings shared for external feedback. The Resonance Workshop held in February 2024 served as a crucial platform for presenting and refining ideas, incorporating inputs from signal spotters and advisory board members of EAYW.
- ★ **Continuous feedback loop:** Feedback from the Resonance Workshop and sessions at the EAYW was heavily deliberated upon and integrated into the research. The aim of this iterative process was to validate and enhance the robustness of the findings.

While the scenarios developed in this report are grounded in the signals collected during the research, it is important to acknowledge that they do not provide a complete picture of all possible futures for youth work. Certain topics, such as sex, gender, health and economy, received limited coverage in the signals, resulting in potential blind spots within the scenarios.

It is crucial to recognise that no research can be entirely free of ideology. In his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton provides a comprehensive analysis of ideology, arguing that all knowledge production is inherently ideological. According to Eagleton, ideology is not just about ideas, but about how those ideas are lived out in everyday practices and institutions.<sup>13</sup> This perspective underscores that research and its interpretations are influenced by the values, beliefs and positionalities of those involved. In our case, the research team holds specific values and ideological positions, such as a strong belief in universal human rights and democracy. These values have inevitably influenced our scenario building, hence there are no scenarios that glorify or focus on autocratic governance models. Instead, the scenarios developed within this research emphasise democratic principles and human rights, reflecting our commitment to these ideals. This is not to say that alternative perspectives are invalid, but rather to highlight that our work is situated within a particular ideological framework. Readers should remain mindful of these limitations and consider them when interpreting and applying the findings.

## » Inviting critical engagement

The research team acknowledges that this report is not a definitive conclusion but rather a starting point for further discussion. Readers are encouraged to adopt a critical mindset when engaging with the study, recognising the time and space limitations that accompany it. It is crucial to deconstruct and reconstruct the findings within their own settings, contexts and realities, which are in constant flux.

Embracing this approach aligns with Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, emphasising the contextual and contingent nature of understanding. By continuously re-evaluating and adapting the findings, youth work practitioners can better prepare for and shape the future, ensuring that this study serves as a stepping stone for ongoing reflection, learning and action.

<sup>13</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, (London: Verso, 1999)1.

## Futures of Youth Work

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### Cross-Cutting Themes

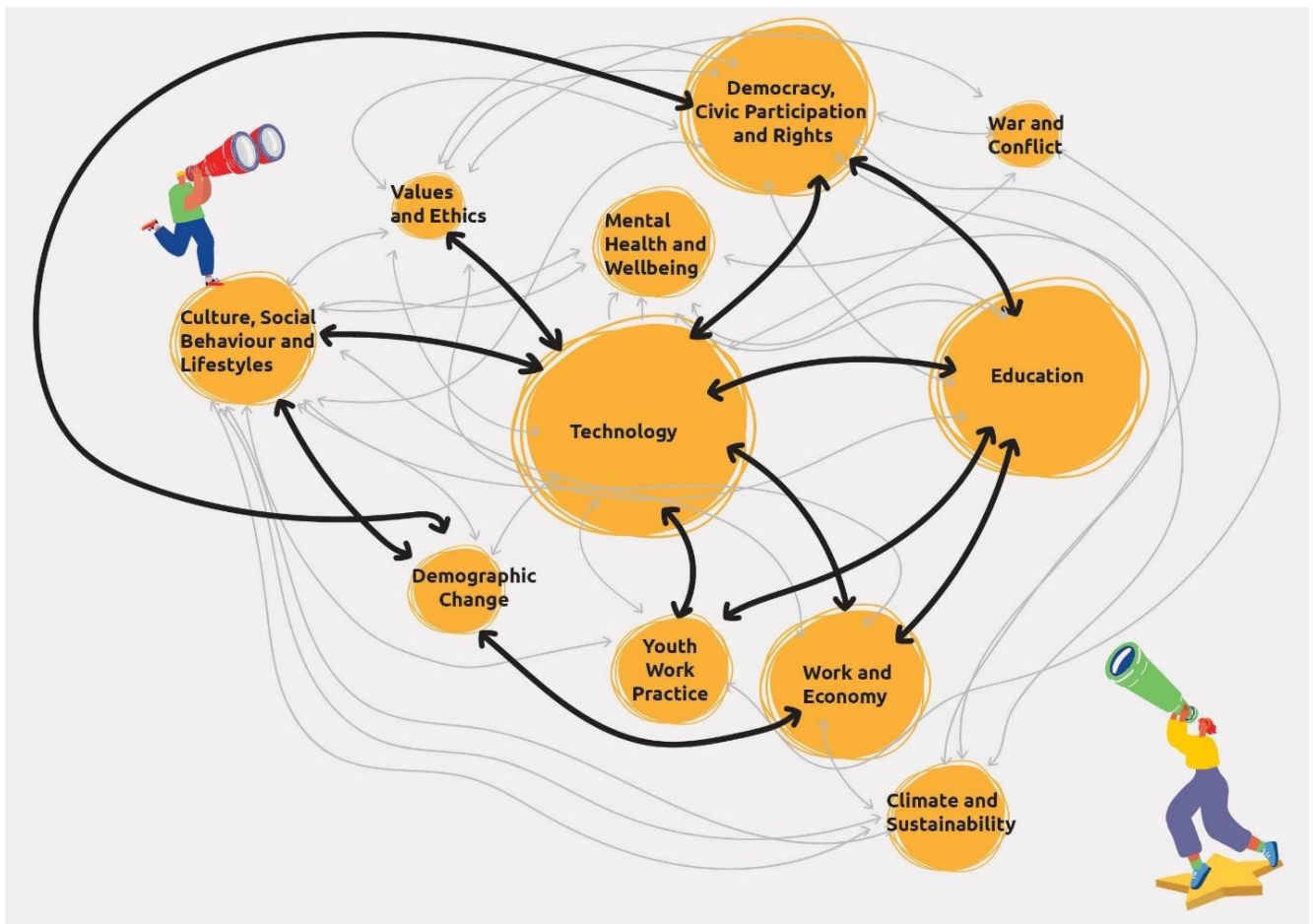
- Technology
- Climate and sustainability
- Values and ethics

### Possible Trends and Scenarios for the Futures of Youth Work

- Demographic change
  - Culture, social behaviour and lifestyle
  - Democracy, civic participation and rights
  - Education
  - Work and economy
  - Mental health and well-being
  - War and conflict
  - Youth work practice
- 



This chapter presents trends and scenarios for youth work in 2050. It is important to note that **these are not predictions of the future, but rather possibilities that may or may not unfold equally across different regions and contexts.** In some places, certain aspects of these scenarios might already be happening, while in others, they may never materialise.



The process of organising the wide-ranging signals, groupings, and connections into the narrative of this report, shown in the graphic above, was a complex one. While the research team made efforts to sense-check ways to categorise and define the relationships between signals, it is possible that a different group of Signal Spotters would identify different signals and that a different group of researchers presented with the same information would come out with a different set of conclusions and understandings. The **research team wants to be transparent about the potentially subjective nature of this process and share its working assumptions that guided the development of this report.**

In continuation of the vision of horizon scanning, the team did not consider some factors more ‘important’ just because they provoked a higher number of scans. It did so in recognition that some issues might be more ‘front of mind’ for a variety of reasons, including because they are a particular set of concerns pertinent in the present day or are the result of decades of given ‘thinking approaches’. This also means that **some crucial topics might have a limited number of signals, either because they concern ‘big’ and difficult-to-think-about issues or perhaps because the signals of issues in Horizon 3 are still ambiguous and difficult to read.**

This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) cross-cutting themes and (2) possible trends and scenarios for youth work. The cross-cutting themes are issues that emerged during the mapping process as transversal and connected ones and are likely to have implications in many areas, including technology, climate and environment, and values and ethics. These issues will continue to recur and relate to the possible trends and scenarios in the following part of the report. Although textual reports require trends and scenarios to be described in order, we **encourage you to read them in a non-linear way, keeping in mind the image of interconnected issues** that influence each other in the process.

Selected quotes from interviews and signals included throughout this chapter are illustrative and do not form the sole basis of scenario building; instead, they provide examples and ideas. The scenarios are developed through a complex, multi-layered process that includes analysing various signals, interview texts, the research team's deliberations, literature reviews and inputs from the resonance workshop and academy feedback. For a detailed explanation of this process, please refer to the methodology section.

While reading this chapter, **remember that the future is not determined, and particular aspects may evoke different emotions or reactions.** Imagining long-term futures can be anxiety-inducing and overwhelming, but there is also the potential to empower ourselves through this exercise. It is crucial to monitor issues that are important to young people and our feelings about the future might influence what will happen. **Our perceptions and attitudes about the future influence what will unfold, and we should strive to understand and navigate this connection.**

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that **futures are not distributed equally, and certain challenges might have a greater impact on those facing poverty, racism, or other forms of marginalisation.**

As you engage with the following sections of the report, consider the following:

- ★ How might the interests, needs and challenges of young people be affected by future trends?
- ★ Which issues trigger particularly strong feelings? Are there trends that feel overwhelming? Which scenarios incite energy and hope?
- ★ Where should we preserve and advocate for our current values, and where is it necessary to be open to adapting them as circumstances change?
- ★ How can youth workers and young people prepare to seize the opportunities that emerge in the future?
- ★ Which challenges can youth workers take on? Where will systemic solutions be needed, and can they be influenced?

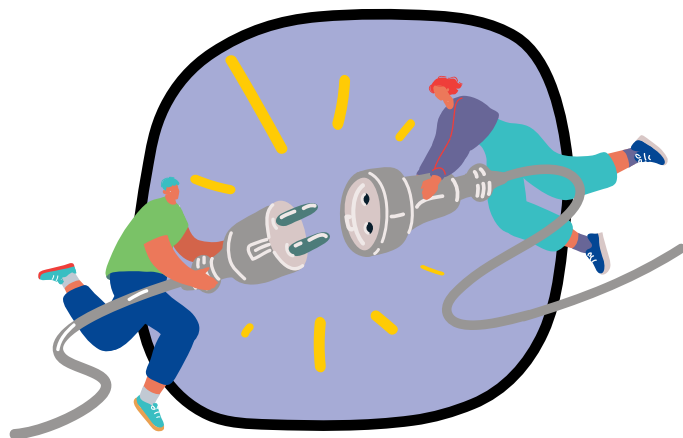






Let's take a closer look at  
Cross-cutting themes





## Technology

Technology emerges as a transformative yet challenging force in shaping the educational and cultural landscapes of tomorrow. A pivotal theme in the findings of this research, technology offers opportunities for personalised and engaging education through virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI). However, it also poses risks such as a loss of analogue skills and a negative impact on mental well-being. Immersive digital spaces enable cross-cultural sharing but personalised and filtered content silos can amplify harmful biases, which need to be addressed at both the platform and policy levels. Therefore, **technology stands out as a double-edged sword, a mixed blessing, and finding a balance between its advantages and drawbacks is crucial.** The increasing integration of technology with human consciousness raises profound questions about what it means to be human and the potential for technology to enhance or augment human capabilities.

A **central mission for youth work could be to keep humans being humans**, ensuring that in technological advancements, the human element remains at the core. However, **technology is also promising in terms of fostering inclusion and enabling participation for those previously excluded due to disabilities or language barriers.** There is a need to address digital poverty and challenge assumptions about universal access to technology.

*As climate crises deepen, technology can provide a sustainable avenue to undertake youth work and forge these collaborative efforts.*

(Rozafa Berisha)

Therefore, looking ahead to 2050, the exponential pace of technological change raises uncertainties as well as possibilities for transforming youth work. AI may become a 'partner' in youth work, co-creating relationships and potentially knowing young people better than they know themselves. **Finding the right balance between leveraging technological capabilities and safeguarding against potential downsides emerges as a key consideration,** requiring careful navigation at the individual, organisational and policy levels.



**Reflection questions and considerations related to the cross-cutting theme of technology:**

- ★ How can the potential of immersive technologies, such as VR and AR, be harnessed for engaging and personalised education, while ensuring young people still develop crucial analogue skills?
- ★ What measures can be taken to ease the risks of technology and its potential negative impacts on mental well-being?
- ★ While digital spaces enable cross-cultural sharing, how can the challenges be addressed in relation to content silos and filter bubbles that can amplify harmful biases?
- ★ How might the role and purpose of youth work evolve in a world increasingly shaped by technological advancements? What skills and mindsets will youth workers need to develop to effectively navigate and leverage the technological landscape of the future?
- ★ Should youth [work] programmes and initiatives adapt to incorporate emerging technologies? How can it be done responsibly and inclusively?
- ★ What ethical considerations should guide the integration of technology in youth work, particularly concerning issues of privacy, data security and digital well-being?



## Climate and sustainability

The signals point to climate change and sustainability as a major area of concern. Climate anxiety is prevalent among youths, coupled with environmental stresses. An **increase in youth climate refugees is anticipated, requiring expanded roles in integration and trauma care**. This leads to a need for both psychological and material support systems. However, **there is also growth visible in eco-conscious youth engagement around concepts, such as degrowth, eco-entrepreneurship and localised sustainability efforts**. Climate-induced migration may exacerbate prejudices and widen cultural divides while disrupting traditional knowledge-transfer pathways. Initiatives such as global digital archives, VR cross-cultural experiences and nature-based therapies could help heal divisions. **Youth environmental activism is demanding systemic changes** through interventions such as degrowth-oriented policies, climate-related funding for green reparations, reversing extractive trade practices and democratising global governance structures to truly endorse sustainability principles. The **tensions between maintaining global connectivity while enabling more localised living also emerge as an area requiring futures thinking and scenario planning**. Environmental challenges such as climate change and conflicts over resources are expected to increase exponentially, leading to more chaos and breakdown in existing systems. However, this breakdown could also drive breakthrough innovations and new approaches. **Resilience, both individually and organisationally, is emerging as a crucial capacity required to navigate these challenges**.

*We may be beyond the point of prevention and mitigation for many ecological changes, requiring a fundamental shift in consciousness.*

(Peter Merry)

While environmental issues like climate change are critical, perspectives differ on their urgency and priority for young people. There may be more pressing realities for young people in the short-term time frame. Nonetheless, **the increasing engagement and activism of young people around climate justice and environmental justice is a positive development** that augurs well for the future.

**Reflection questions and considerations related to the cross-cutting theme of climate and environment:**

- ★ How can youth work prepare to support the anticipated rise in climate refugees? What best practices have been shown to work well with migrant populations and where are there still areas for development?
- ★ What role can youth work play in areas such as integration, language support, trauma care and providing psychological/material support systems? What approaches can we take to prevent exacerbating prejudices and cultural divides?
- ★ What can youth workers do to empower young people to engage with climate issues while mitigating climate anxiety and environmental stress? What support structures need to be integrated into youth work to promote resilience and well-being?
- ★ As youth environmental activism demands systemic changes (degrowth policies, climate finance, restructuring trade/governance), what role can youth work play in channelling this activism constructively and preparing young people for engagement in policy/decision-making spheres? Should youth workers become advocates themselves?
- ★ How can youth work equip young people to navigate the tensions between maintaining global connectivity while enabling more localised, sustainable living models? What futures thinking and scenario planning is needed in this domain?
- ★ As sustainability principles increasingly influence multiple domains (policy, business, culture), how can youth work equip the next generation with the relevant skills, mindsets and experiences to thrive in this evolving landscape?





## Values and ethics

In the realm of values and ethics, multiple **signals highlight arising areas of concern, such as AI ethics, data privacy and deepfakes – indicating technology as a domain requiring robust ethical safeguards to prevent potential harm.** There are also insights pointing towards deeper value shifts, such as rising pragmatism and short-term thinking, which youth work could help address through initiatives fostering meaning-making. The risks of radicalisation, propagated by divisive propaganda and conspiracy theories amplified within algorithmic echo chambers, underscore the **need to build critical thinking resilience through techniques such as counter-narratives, empathy-building programmes and positive media literacy.** Reconciling complex ethical debates around rights, inclusion and pluralism remains an intricate challenge in demographic changes reshaping community identities, necessitating dialogue capacity alongside efforts to preserve cultural heritage. The **role of youth work crucially includes nurturing critical thinking abilities, upholding human rights principles, surfacing excluded viewpoints and facilitating open dialogue to help shape ethical futures.** A recurring theme in the interviews is the **need for youth work to take a more active role in advocating for societal change and evolving governance models** as communities struggle with substantial shifts.

*Youth workers cannot remain on the sidelines of these processes.*

(Nerijus Kriaučiūnas, emphasising the importance of civic engagement alongside young people)

There is also a risk of public funding leading to complacency within existing systems rather than challenging problematic norms or policies. **Youth work needs to protect the agency of young people** in the context of the penetration of large tech companies into children's lives. As technology becomes increasingly embedded and invisible in our lives, **new ethical guidelines are needed to develop mindfulness around its impacts and maintain consciousness about the blurring of human and technological realms.** There are concerns about the potential datafication and monetisation of youth work by technology companies offering grants, urging vigilance against the field's co-option by corporate interests that may be in conflict with youth workers' commitment to safe-



guarding the well-being of young people (as one of the core values of youth work). Navigating these complexities while upholding ethical principles will be crucial as youth work shapes its role amidst rapid societal transformations.



### **Reflection questions and considerations related to the cross-cutting theme of values and ethics:**

- ★ How can youth work promote values and ethical principles around emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence to ensure their development and deployment align with the best interests of young people and society?
- ★ As societies undergo substantial changes, how can youth work position itself as an advocate and voice for rethinking and evolving social contracts, governance models and democratic processes? What is the role of youth workers in fostering critical civic engagement among young people?
- ★ How could youth work strive to integrate human rights principles and ethical frameworks to nurture moral reasoning and empower young people to shape ethical futures?
- ★ How can youth work build awareness around secure data practices and informed consent to empower young people to be mindful and aware digital citizens with a sense of agency?
- ★ What role can youth work play in countering the risks of radicalisation? How can critical thinking and resilience to divisive propaganda be built, whilst fostering understanding across divides and tolerance of diverse views and perspectives?
- ★ Can youth work initiatives focused on meaning-making, existential exploration and long-term thinking help counterbalance pragmatism and short-term thinking?

As you continue reading the further sections of this report, keep in mind the cross-cutting themes and the above questions to inspire reflections on the role of youth work when navigating the future scenarios, which will be further explored in the next chapter.



## Possible trends and scenarios for the Futures of Youth Work

When exploring the potential trends and scenarios for the future of youth work, it is crucial to acknowledge the complex interconnections between them. Trends do not exist in isolation but rather influence and shape one another in intricate ways, as underlined several times and as you may notice while reading this report.

As we embark on this exploration, it is important to recognise that **the patterns we observe are not separate domains. Instead, they form a continuum, with each thread affecting the others, often in unexpected ways.** To understand the potential outcomes of these complex interactions, it is crucial to **consider the critical dimensions of time and space that define their relevance** and emergence. It is important to note that a scenario that may be considered a distant possibility in Horizon 3 for one community may already be a pressing reality in Horizon 2 for another. Therefore, **contextual sensitivity is paramount in our approach.** The Resonance Workshop highlighted a nuanced understanding and participants from diverse backgrounds shared insights that demonstrated how different temporal and spatial factors can speed up or slow down the manifestation of certain futures.

Karl Polanyi's insights into the dynamic interplay between societal change and economic systems offer a profound understanding of why some future scenarios, especially in the context of youth work, might appear contradictory. Polanyi recognised that **societies tend to oscillate between moments of pushing for greater freedom and periods of resistance against the disruptions** this freedom can cause – a process he famously termed the 'double movement'.<sup>14</sup>

Applying Polanyi's philosophy to the development of future scenarios suggests that as we project forward, **we must anticipate a push-pull effect.** For instance, on the one hand, there may be scenarios

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

that lean toward increased technological integration and market-driven education, fostering innovation and growth. On the other, however, there could be scenarios advocating for the preservation of social welfare, community cohesion and protection against the risks of unrestrained technological expansion. These contradictory futures embody the tension between the drive for progress and the imperative to preserve human values and social stability, reflecting Polanyi's understanding of **societal transformation as a non-linear and contentious process**.

This report acknowledges the plurality of futures that exist across different settings and realities, rather than speaking of a single, monolithic future. The diversity of perspectives enriches our discourse, enabling us to consider a range of possibilities and prepare for a future where multiple scenarios unfold simultaneously. **Our task is not merely to predict but to prepare – to equip the youth work sector with the agility to respond to the now while shaping what comes next.**

## Demographic change



**Demographic changes, such as ageing populations, migration flows and evolving family structures, are profoundly reshaping the social fabric.** The fact that there will be far fewer young people in the future than there are today will influence expenditure plans and governmental priorities. Moreover, there is a **noticeable increase in youths taking on caregiving responsibilities for elderly family members and siblings**. Significant intergenerational divides – in spheres such as political influence, value systems and analogue skill levels – are intensifying, underscoring the importance of efforts to bridge these gaps.



### Intergenerational transformations

#### SCENARIO:

##### Segregation and political polarisation by age

As residential areas become more age-specific, the divide between young and older generations deepens. Housing developments continue to separate demographics, leading to 'youth villages' and 'senior towns'. Younger people are increasingly drawn to urban settings for opportunities, while older populations dominate rural areas, enhancing the urban-rural divide. Intergenerational understanding and cooperation fade as each group becomes an echo chamber of their age-specific concerns and values. As the electoral influence of youths decreases, political parties may begin to cater exclusively to age-specific demographics, with policies that solely benefit one generation over another. Consequently, the generation gap could become institutionalised in the political system, causing a lack of coherent policy that considers the full span of generational needs. Younger generations may face economic disadvantages due to policies and systems designed by and for the older majority. This could result in diminished prospects for youths, widening the wealth and opportunity gap.

*In 100 years, there will be 94% fewer young people. If a society will progress to become dominant with older people, not only will young people carry the (financial) burden, but they also could be less likely to be taken into consideration when it comes to politics.*

(SSP027<sup>15</sup>)

15 Quotes from submitted scans attribute the author with their Signal Spotter ID, which is a unique ID that was assigned to every registered signal spotter.

**SCENARIO:****Intergenerational bonds**

Economic trends and housing crises will continue to make it harder for young people to leave their parental homes. This may force a rethinking of the current goals for adulthood and independence and lead to intergenerational living becoming the norm for large proportions of the population. Relatedly, limited access to elderly care could result in more young people taking on caregiving responsibilities for their parents, with consequences for family planning reinforcing the ageing society. At the same time, effective collaboration across generations is seen as mutually beneficial, highlighting how younger people can help older adults adapt to new ideas and approaches, while elders provide vital wisdom and context from their experiences. Youth work could play a crucial role in facilitating these cross-generational knowledge exchanges.

*Because of a shortage of affordable housing, Dutch youth live at home longer into their adult life. This must have some effect on forming their own identities.*

(SSP022)

**Shifting perspectives****SCENARIO:****Youth work, elderly work or community work?**

These societal shifts could fundamentally reshape the identity and purpose of youth work itself, envisioning it evolving into a more intergenerational 'community work' model that blends with adult education approaches, as shrinking youth populations make justifying youth-exclusive programming difficult. This transition could spark an 'identity crisis' for youth workers who must redefine themselves and their target demographics. Yet it also presents an opportunity to engage holistically with communities across age groups under a broadened mandate.

*Part of the youth work sector will sail away to cater for the needs of the elderly, especially within the non-formal education.*

(SSP077)

**SCENARIO:****Solidarity for the Anthropocene**

Climate-induced migration is already becoming a pressing issue that may result in an increasing population influx into Europe, to which youth work must be prepared to respond through integration efforts, advocacy for human rights and expressing solidarity with climate refugees. However, this raises deeper existential questions about humanity's place among other species and moving beyond human-centric worldviews. Facing these challenges will require the public to take on an ethical commitment to global, intergenerational and interspecies solidarity.

*Climate emergency is a reality as a result of the unsustainable development model of the enriched nations of the global north. In a less distant future than we think, migration due to climate change will affect the young population with whom we work. We will have to take these new social realities into account when designing our youth policies.*

(SSP079)



### » The role of youth work

The role of youth work is multifaceted and crucial in shaping a harmonious society. It involves **facilitating knowledge transfer programmes** that capture the wisdom of older generations, thereby preserving valuable traditions and insights. This role also includes **fostering intergenerational bonding** through cultural sharing, oral histories and creative pursuits, which are vital for strengthening community ties.

Additionally, youth work involves **developing culturally sensitive programmes** specifically tailored to meet the needs of migrant groups. This is complemented by **training youth workers** in conflict resolution and anti-bias competencies, equipping them to effectively handle social tensions. Another key aspect is **creating youth networks** that celebrate diversity and actively campaign against xenophobia, promoting a more inclusive society.

Further extending its scope, youth work facilitates **intercultural learning**, enhancing the understanding and appreciation of different cultures within the community. In terms of **community integration initiatives**, organisations could develop programmes that bring various age groups together, promoting shared spaces and intergenerational learning. This not only bridges the gap between different generations but also fosters a shared sense of community.

**Political education programmes** also play a crucial role, as there is a growing need to focus on political education that includes a broad range of generational perspectives. This fosters a more comprehensive understanding of societal issues, preparing young individuals to participate more actively in political processes.

In the realm of housing, youth workers might become advocates for **inclusive housing policies** that encourage diverse age groups to live in integrated communities. This advocacy is essential in promoting diverse and inclusive living environments.

**Social cohesion projects** are pivotal as they address the intergenerational divide and promote unity. These projects can become a cornerstone of youth work, combating the isolation that arises from age segregation and fostering a more connected community.

Lastly, creating **economic opportunities** that are accessible to young people is another critical area. This ensures that they are not left behind in an age-segregated economy. Additionally, youth workers may serve as **mediators**, facilitating dialogues across generations to address misconceptions and build empathy, which is essential for societal harmony and mutual understanding.

## Culture, social behaviour and lifestyle

The signals paint a pretty clear picture of **youth culture in a state of constant change**. Today's youths are navigating a rapidly shifting landscape defined by a confluence of factors. Demographic shifts are putting the young and the old together, global connectivity is drawing disparate cultures into close contact, economic pressures are reshaping aspirations, and technological access is expanding the bounds of what is possible. At the same time, young people are embracing a broader value shift. They are prioritising inclusion, relentlessly pursuing experiences and striving to live more consciously and sustainably.

The travel and tourism industry is also going through a big change. **As people start to worry more about the environment, travel is changing too**. Localised circuits are becoming the new norm, turning attention to the treasures within one's backyard, and in turn, sparking a renaissance in place-based skills and opportunities. At the same time, AR and VR are helping to fill the gap left by physical travel. It offers a way to satisfy our insatiable wanderlust without damaging the planet but with the potential to lose authenticity.

**Youth work** is at the forefront of these changes, guiding young people through the digital landscape and its alternatives. It **encourages a healthy relationship with technology, ensuring that young people stay grounded while exploring digital realms**. It prompts critical reflection on the societal impacts of these innovations and nurtures creative self-expression. Youth workers are becoming the go-to experts in this field.



### Transforming entertainment landscapes

#### SCENARIO:

##### Immersive entertainment

In the realm of entertainment, **the introduction of immersive platforms, such as the metaverse and creative toolkits powered by AI and AR, are reshaping the landscape**. These technologies blend the lines between the virtual and the physical, providing new avenues for creative expression and personal engagement. The increase in AI art generators and AR experiences suggests a future where entertainment is not just consumed but also co-created and lived in. This evolution paves the way for youths to not only be spectators but also active participants in the design of their entertainment universes.

*I hope that young people will become more active in the co-creation of digital spaces, being conscious of how they affect them and maintaining the agency of their data.*

(Alicja Pawluczuk)

#### SCENARIO:

##### Radically personalised worlds

There is a growing trend of radical personalisation within online platforms. Young people are likely to find themselves inhabiting hyper-realistic simulated realities that cater to their tastes and interests for leisure, creative outlet and social connections. These personalised virtual spaces promise leisure and social connections but pose unique challenges for mental well-being and the development of social skills. They will likely prompt a shift in how leisure time is perceived and spent, raising questions about the sustainability of such immersive lifestyles.





### SCENARIO:

#### Sustainable journey mapping

Young travellers are embracing sustainable journey mapping to balance their desire to travel with world welfare. This eco-conscious movement focuses on the carbon footprint of each travel experience, leading to a generation of young people who plan their journeys meticulously to minimise the environmental impact. Tourism education is evolving to prioritise sustainability, with travellers earning 'green passports' based on their low-impact travel histories. Young people are signing up for courses that teach them how to plan and execute eco-friendly trips. This is creating a generation of responsible tourists and industry professionals.

*We have lived through a few years in which almost all the countries on the planet have been connected by fairly affordable flights, allowing young people to get to know other cultures, as enhanced by the Erasmus + programme itself. But the climate crisis is reversing this situation, so we assume that travelling will become increasingly more complicated.*  
(SSP079)

### SCENARIO:

#### Digital nomadism 2.0

As remote work becomes normalised, young people and young adults adopt digital nomadism, leading to the rise of co-working and co-living spaces that cater to transient lifestyles. These spaces become places where they can exchange ideas, share skills and learn about sustainable living. Those spaces also help feel part of a global community in which youth work organisations help young people make the most of these nomadic experiences. Those organisations give advice and resources to help young people live this lifestyle responsibly and balance their digital and physical lives and their global and local experiences.

*In the last year, I realised how much youth (aged 23–28) with high education have decided to live a nomadic style of life. They are demotivated to life in their hometown, or the city where they study as opportunities are not coming up for them, which brings them to look for “light jobs” that assure their subsistence and let them live in a nice place where they feel comfortable, like on an island, or in a natural place.*  
(SSP004)



» The role of youth work

The role of youth work in today’s digital and globally interconnected age is critical, focusing on various innovative aspects. One key area is **guiding the safe, ethical and balanced usage of technologies**. This ensures that young individuals can navigate the complex digital landscape responsibly and effectively. Furthermore, youth work is about **fostering critical reflection** on the impacts of technology, encouraging young people to think deeply about how technology affects society and their personal lives.

An essential component of youth work involves **creative self-expression through technology**. This allows young people to explore and express their identities and ideas in new and dynamic ways. Moreover, youth work focuses on **upskilling young people** to take advantage of green tourism opportunities in their local communities. This not only enhances their skills but also promotes sustainable practices within tourism.

**Fostering a spirit of exploration** through virtual cultural exchanges and immersive experiences is another important aspect. These activities help broaden horizons and deepen understanding of different cultures without the need for physical travel. Finally, youth work enables **youth-led educational tourism initiatives**, which bring economic benefits to local areas. By leading these initiatives, young people can contribute positively to their communities while gaining valuable experience and skills.

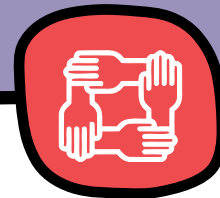


# Democracy, civic participation and rights

In the civic sphere, growing polarisation in political discourse, democratic backsliding in certain regions, and an overall lack of public trust in institutions reveal concerning trajectories. However, the increase in youth activism relating to climate change, equality and rights also points towards new forms of civic participation centred on social justice movements. These trends highlight the pivotal role of youth work in reinvigorating democracy, civic engagement and channelling the energy of social movements while simultaneously re-imagining its purpose, approaches and relationship to power structures. Navigating technological impacts, societal polarisation and centralisation/decentralisation dynamics emerges as a key challenge.

*Young people's opportunities to influence decisions about their future in elections will be limited. This could further exacerbate the alienation from politics that is already taking place among younger generations. The population is getting older and older and the old bring decisions about the destiny and future of the young.*

(SSP010)



## >> Struggles for representation

### SCENARIO:

#### Youth representation

As societies age and younger generations shrink in proportion, there are concerns about the diminishing political influence of youth voices in traditional electoral processes. Since voting patterns are increasingly swayed by older demographics, this could drive younger cohorts to seek alternative avenues for shaping society beyond just voting. This raises sensitive questions about whether adjusting voting age limits may become necessary to rebalance generational representation in decision-making. Young people in countries with open political systems are expected to be more actively involved and participate directly in decision-making processes, struggling for their voices to be heard. However, this also opens risks of manipulation and tokenism. Young people need tools and information to protect themselves and to understand their rights and the authorities' obligations.

*Young people will be more directly involved in decision making. They will grow confidence and struggle for their voice to be heard. Which is very positive, especially in youth work, as it should be based on the young people's needs. At the same time, it is very dangerous, as youth is easily manipulated and tokenized. Therefore, the responsibility of those working with youth will grow as curators/interpreters between youth and wider society.*

(SSP077)

**SCENARIO:****Grassroots initiatives and decentralisation**

Young people desire a future society that is safe, affordable, eco-friendly and fair, but are anxious about economic, social and environmental threats. There is a need to bridge the gap between their desire for change and lack of collective civic action. Signals point to young people increasingly participating in demonstrations, with some youth workers supporting this form of activism as a natural extension. Social movements relating to identity, justice and climate advocacy are anticipated to continue to grow, with more young female leaders emerging. However, it can also be questioned whether youth work itself is truly contributing substantially to the climate movement beyond surface-level initiatives, calling for a more demanding, activist stance and influencing policymakers. Capacity-building, enhancing youth competencies and marginalised youth leadership may become areas of increased investment.

**Times of upheaval****SCENARIO:****Questioning of legacy institutions and power structures**

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine (and in the meantime, the invasion of the Gaza Strip by Israel) have been widely recognised as critical events symbolic of the emergent new era. Some point to an age of revolt emerging globally against the triumph of capitalism, utopian failures and loss of faith in progress. Signals point to diminishing belief in democracy, polarisation as well as fragility and trauma among young participants, posing difficulties in upholding inclusion and fundamental values in youth work contexts. This underlines how distancing from democracy is connected to young people feeling isolated and lacking sufficient services and employment opportunities. However, this disillusionment is not limited to young cohorts – the complexities and messiness of democracy can make simplistic ideologies appear more appealing across generations. Signals highlight a link between loneliness and susceptibility to anti-democratic attitudes, such as authoritarianism, among young people, underscoring the need for social connectivity. Critical thinking is also an increasingly crucial skill for young people to discern the truth from misinformation, suggesting that youth work might empower and develop this capability.

*Today, young people face a world in which there is information everywhere, they can find everything on the internet. So, it is more important than ever to know how to discern between truthful information and fake news. As youth workers, we have to empower youngsters and give them the skills they need for their lives. Critical thinking is one of the most important skills nowadays, so we should be able to develop this skill among young people.*

(SSP079)

**SCENARIO:****Rethinking governance models**

Expected budget cuts for democracy projects due to governments' debt from the pandemic could lead to (re)distribution battles and an uncertain future for youth work organisations. Shrinking democracy and civic participation could severely diminish the quality and scope of youth work. At the same time, youth work faces the challenge of operating effectively during crises, such as wars and natural disasters, requiring adapted skills and responses to unprecedented situations. However, signals also point to innovative approaches, redefining ethical commitments to inclusion and critical analysis of existing power structures, while creative engagement programmes involve young people in imagining and planning future cities, for instance.

There is a need to redefine citizenship itself – moving away from 'moulding citizens' towards nurturing critical awareness and alternative forms of civic engagement pioneered by young people themselves.

Looking ahead, technologies and data-driven governance could reshape how public policies are formulated, potentially toning down human biases whilst also raising concerns about the centralisation of power. A shift toward decentralisation and grassroots organising may be anticipated, as centralised systems have trouble adjusting to challenges.

### The role of youth work

Youth work plays a key role in shaping the future of civic engagement and participation of young people, notably through **boosting political literacy and fostering a foresight and 'futures mindset'**, which prepares young people to understand and navigate the political landscape effectively. Additionally, youth work **facilitates connections between young people and policymakers**, ensuring that young voices are heard and considered in policy-making processes.

Youth work organisations are expected to **become specialists** in their fields, providing a platform for young people to express themselves freely and authentically. This is essential in **safeguarding civic spaces led by young people**, where they can discuss ideologies within **supportive communities**. These environments are vital for nurturing informed and engaged citizens.

Furthermore, youth work encourages active involvement in governance through innovative approaches such as **participatory budgeting**, which invites young people to have a say in how public funds are spent. This process not only increases engagement but also promotes **equitable participation**, ensuring that all voices are valued equally.

Youth work also emphasises the importance of **enabling marginalised voices**, ensuring that those who are often neglected have opportunities to participate in dialogues and decision-making processes. This includes **facilitating participatory action research**, where young people actively contribute to research that informs their communities and policy changes.

Moreover, youth work should offer programmes that reflect the interests of young people, acknowledging that **learning happens through their active engagement**. It is also **about advocating for reforms** in critical areas, which directly support the well-being and stability of young people.



# Education

The **future of education emerges as a domain requiring reimagination**, as current schooling systems appear increasingly misaligned with the rapidly changing landscape of competencies and learning needs. At the same time, digitalisation is transforming the way education is being imagined. **Innovative concepts such as open pedagogy, decentralised knowledge repositories and project-based experiential learning** seem poised to gain more relevance. Signals also indicate that young people today lack competencies in fundamental applied life skills areas, such as basic household management tasks, sexual health and financial literacy.



## Rethinking knowledge creation

### SCENARIO: Self-driven passion learning

Signals point to the growth of collaborative digital platforms democratising the creation and dissemination of educational content. The self-driven ‘passion learning scenario’ anticipates a future where learning is highly personalised and aligned with individual interests and societal needs. This approach could democratise education, allowing young people to tailor their learning experiences to their passions and career aspirations. The open education movement emphasises expanding access, affordability and success through open resources, online courses and open data/science, enabling democratised and collaborative learning. Platforms providing opportunities for self-directed, technology-driven learning tailored to young people’s interests are already gaining momentum. Youth work could enhance this scenario by advocating for systems that recognise and credit various forms of learning and learning outcomes and by providing resources that help young people navigate and access diverse educational content. Widespread access to information, however, requires media literacy and critical thinking skills to critically evaluate sources to reduce vulnerability to misinformation.

*The future education is personalised, technology-driven and highly engaging, empowering young people to unlock their full potential. It also indicates a shift towards more modern and flexible learning environments that can adapt to the interests and learning styles of individual students, which could be a significant trend in the evolution of youth education and development programmes globally.*

(SSP067)



## Scenario:

### Personalised AI tutors

AI and digital assistants emerge as components of the 'school of the future'. Personal AI tutors and mentors complement or even replace human teachers in certain areas. Signals point to robots being used to facilitate school interactions and reduce absenteeism. AI also has the potential to revolutionise and increase access to sexual education, as digital knowledge platforms with tailored chatbots can provide a safe space for young people's sexual queries. However, there are also concerns over the lack of regulation and transparency around AI. Moreover, signals also point to digital addiction among youths, leading to issues including poor academic performance, lack of focus, developmental delays and the need for self-regulation competencies. AI literacy for youth workers, integrating human rights in technology, awareness of algorithmic impacts and professional development are needed for the digital future.

*Young people use information on the internet, information on social media and utilise artificial intelligence. They do not filter the gathered information but believe in it 100%. Young people will need to be equipped with knowledge and tools and, above all, be motivated to make a greater effort to be critical of all information and to gather more information about a particular subject, making it easier for them to distinguish between what is important and what is not.*

(SSP052)



## Developing future-ready competencies

### SCENARIO:

#### Novel educational models

Educational models and methods are shifting to include multifaceted real-life projects that assess creativity and problem-solving abilities. Student-centred informal education methods guiding self-directed learning could be a solution to the outdated formal system. A blurring of the lines between formal education and youth work may be seen. Signals highlight the need to develop real-world, practical skills, with examples ranging from financial literacy, manual skills and household management, as well as communication skills and emotional intelligence. This will provide a pathway for greater self-understanding and resilience. Despite growing up with technology, young people must also develop an understanding of emerging technologies and must master the digital skills that will be necessary for AI-powered future workplaces.

*In this context emotional intelligence becomes a key element for resilience in youth, but it's still a missing subject in the education curricula.*

(SSP004)

### SCENARIO:

#### Learning in simulation

Immersive simulation-based environments enable safe skill experimentation aligned with young people's interests and talents. Platforms such as the metaverse could have a significant impact on the future of youth education, providing new virtual learning environments. Virtual classrooms can also facilitate global engagement. VR can inspire positive visions of the future, active participation in planning and make sustainability concepts engaging. However, at the same time, digital exclusion could widen divides and reinforce socio-economic exclusion.

*Future youth work may involve a significant component of digital literacy and understanding of emerging technologies. Youth workers may need to be prepared to help young people navigate and leverage these technologies for their personal and professional development.*

(SSP067)

### » The role of youth work

The role of youth work is becoming increasingly important in today's fast-evolving digital landscape. A key aspect of its role is **boosting data/media literacy and technological capabilities** among young people to prepare them for increasingly digital societies and economies. This involves teaching and learning competencies and **safeguarding ethics in AI content creation**, ensuring that new technologies are used responsibly and ethically.

Additionally, youth work focuses on **capacity building of youth workers on emerging technologies and learning approaches**. This empowers them to stay present and effective in their roles as educators and mentors. Another critical area is **advocating for learning models that align with young people's interests and talents** to ensure that learning is relevant and engaging for young people, thus increasing their motivation and potential for success.

Youth work **promotes interdisciplinary problem-solving**, which combines different areas of knowledge to tackle complex issues. This is crucial for developing flexible competencies that are applicable in various real-world situations. Moreover, it involves **facilitating knowledge exchange between formal and non-formal educators**, which enriches the educational landscape by blending diverse teaching methodologies and perspectives.



# Work and economy



The **future of work and the economy seem unstable and uncertain, with precarity, numerous professional changes and the need for new competencies, calling for large-scale reorientation efforts.** There are also emerging concerns relating to the environmental sustainability of current production systems, pointing to a need for paradigmatic economic shifts. The future is expected to bring continuities, particularly concerning inequalities, which may become even more polarised, especially in terms of access to technology. This underscores the **need for a strong social sector, including youth work, to address these persistent inequalities faced by young people.**

## >> Youth futures and livelihoods

### SCENARIO:

#### Gig economies and portfolio careers vs. traditional employment

The scenario of volatile job markets leading to a rise in gig economies and portfolio careers is already unfolding. At the same time, with the traditional social contract already broken, young people are questioning the need to devote themselves entirely to formal employment and careers, especially if it means sacrificing income. This shift requires continuous adaptation and upskilling, navigating a labour market that awards flexibility over stability. For young people, this means a greater focus on acquiring a diverse set of competencies that can be adapted to various short-term roles rather than investing in long-term career paths. This shift will require a rethink of existing systems, such as unemployment benefits, sick leave, labour unions and credit lines, which are designed around traditional career pathways. Youth work is at a critical juncture – whether to align with these emerging trends and advocate for a change in the social contract to benefit younger generations or reinforce traditional systems that may no longer serve their interests. This context will also call for support structures for continuous learning and competencies development, ensuring that young people are resilient in the face of economic fluctuations.

*When seeing more and more young people being disappointed by work conditions and lacking meaning in work for corporations or public sector, they will be seeking ways to contribute and have income to live. What meaning of work do we promote and want to promote to create better futures for all?*

(SSP057)

### SCENARIO:

#### Entrepreneurship ecosystems and circular economy models

The entrepreneurship ecosystems scenario envisions a future where young people's creativity is central to solving problems through circular economy models. This implies a significant shift in how business and sustainability are taught and integrated into young people's lives. Youth work could facilitate this shift by fostering environments that encourage entrepreneurial thinking and sustainability, providing platforms for innovation and connecting young people with mentors and resources to bring their ideas to realisation.

**SCENARIO:****Degrowth agendas and rethinking of economic models**

Signals also point to calls for a fundamental reorganisation of the global political economy and power structures, challenging the primacy of growth while centring ecological justice, reparations, localisation and democratic resource governance. The potential increase in a four-day workweek or similar arrangements could lead to increased unstructured time, presenting both challenges and opportunities for youth work in terms of engaging young people during their free time and competing with other leisure activities.

*Our economy operates based on growth measurement and GDP, a model which has been responsible for environmental degradation, an increase in global temperatures and global inequality. To counter this, we need an internationalist degrowth agenda.*  
(SSP029)

**Alignment of learning and skills****SCENARIO:****Specialised credentialing systems**

As corporations begin to value specialised credentials over traditional higher education degrees, youth work needs to guide young people on the paths to obtaining these credentials. This shift will likely increase the accessibility of career opportunities for those who may not pursue traditional university education paths but can demonstrate expertise through alternative credentialing platforms. Youth work can assist by informing young people of these new credentials and supporting them in acquiring certifications that are recognised and valued by other sectors and industries.

**SCENARIO:****Rise of micro-credentialing in workplace learning**

As the demand for specific skills increases rapidly, micro-credentialing becomes a dominant form of professional education. Young people can earn badges and certificates for specific competencies that are directly linked to job requirements, making education more practical and directly applicable to work. This scenario would require youth work to integrate these micro-credentialing opportunities into their programmes, ensuring that young people have the competencies that are in high demand. Additionally, it would be essential to advocate for the recognition of these credentials in various professional fields to ensure they carry weight and value in the job market.

*There are increasing signs of large shifts in how we are recognising learning, skills and achievements in a wider range of learning contexts. Digital credentials may offer many solutions already today to what youth work aims at, especially for youth (un)employment.*  
(SSP057)

**SCENARIO:****Decentralised global work opportunities**

Technology advancements lead to a significant rise in decentralised work opportunities, allowing young people to work for global organisations from their local environments without the need to relocate. This not only reduces barriers to entry into global job markets but also helps preserve cultural identities and local communities. Youth work could leverage this scenario by providing digital literacy training and access to global work platforms. Programmes could also focus on equipping young people with the cultural competencies and communication skills necessary to engage effectively in a global workforce while contributing locally.

## » The role of youth work

The role of youth work is manifold and crucial in addressing the challenges young people face in today's job market and beyond. **Guiding young people through career transitions and anticipating mid-life shifts** are essential tasks, as they help prepare them for the evolving demands of the workplace. Additionally, youth work plays a critical role in **fostering resilience and adaptation skills** to navigate the instability often found in modern job markets.

An important aspect of youth work is **mobilising and equipping young people as activists and policymakers**. This empowers them to actively shape the policies that will define their future. Moreover, it involves **enabling youth entrepreneurship that is aligned with the needs of their communities**, promoting not only individual success but also communal well-being.

**Policy advocacy** is another significant function, focusing on securing **fair rights and reforms for gig workers and safeguarding against coercive future labour systems**. This advocacy is critical in ensuring that young workers are protected and fairly treated in a gig economy.

Youth work also includes **advocating for evolving credential systems that capture diverse learning experiences** and recognise the diverse competencies young people acquire outside traditional educational pathways. Another key component is **boosting competencies in data management, digital literacy and critical thinking** – skills that are indispensable in the digital age.

**Creating project incubation spaces led by youth interests** provides a platform for young people to innovate and experiment with new ideas in a supportive environment. This fosters creativity and initiative and aligns with the developmental goals of youth work, which aims to foster proactive, competent and flexible young people.



# Mental health and well-being

In today's world, mental health is more important than ever, and this is reflected in these future scenarios. **Youth mental health and well-being surfaces as a prevalent risk area**, given signals around issues such as technology overuse, climate anxiety, general emotional resilience and lack of social connectivity resulting from experiences of displacement. Young people need support in understanding their emotions, feeling connected to others and using new technology in their daily lives. **Well-being and mental health challenges already underpin much of youth work, although we are only beginning to understand the depth of this challenge.** Each scenario imagines a future where mental health support is more accessible and accepted. It also looks at how mental health can be integrated into daily life and education, showing how preventative measures, educational reforms and technology can **support creating a mentally aware society.**

*The issue of anxiety and lack of self-confidence is rising in young people. It can lead to early school leaving or lack of participation in civil life. It is a new challenge the youth work sector has to consider.*  
(SSP039)



## » Fostering emotional awareness

### SCENARIO:

#### Building collective capabilities

Preventative mindset shifts build collective capability to express struggles and seek support. Cultivating an environment where mental health is openly discussed can empower young people to seek help early, potentially reducing long-term mental health issues. This proactive approach in educational systems and community programmes focuses on resilience and coping strategies, enabling young people to better manage stressors such as technology overuse and climate anxiety. It shifts the cultural perspective towards seeing mental health care as a normal and essential part of overall health.

### SCENARIO:

#### Mental health in mainstream education

By making mental health education mandatory in schools, future societies could drastically diminish the stigma surrounding mental health issues. This educational approach would equip young people with the knowledge and tools necessary to understand and manage their mental health, fostering a generation more competent at handling psychological challenges. Integrating arts and mindfulness into young people's daily routines can enhance their emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Programmes that incorporate these elements help young people process emotions constructively and foster a sense of calm in the wake of digital overstimulation and social pressures. This can lead to healthier social interactions and enhanced personal well-being.



## >> Belonging, relationships and identity

### SCENARIO:

#### Mental health tech, virtual communities and AI companions

Everyday devices and applications incorporate mental health tech tools that monitor and manage the psychological well-being of individuals, easily integrating mental health support into devices commonly used by young people, such as smartphones and wearables. These tools might track mood fluctuations, suggest activities to manage stress or anxiety, and offer virtual counselling sessions and AI companions. This constant personalised mental health support could revolutionise prevention and early intervention strategies. However, while virtual platforms and AI can provide immediate and constant companionship that may alleviate feelings of loneliness, they often fail to reproduce the deep emotional connections formed through in-person interactions. These tools can serve as a bridge to more meaningful relationships but should not replace human connections. Balancing digital interactions with real-world experiences is crucial for healthy social development.

*As we continue to witness the proliferation of AI tools and technologies, it becomes increasingly evident that there is a growing void in our lives that can only be filled by genuine human interactions and approaches.*  
(SSP012)

### SCENARIO:

#### Inclusive community spaces

While digital technologies facilitate instant connection, the need to foster genuine in-person human interaction is widely recognised. Creating inclusive community spaces that encourage interactions across diverse groups and celebrate the uniqueness of individual identities can significantly enhance the sense of belonging and identity among young people. These spaces provide a platform for sharing experiences and cultures, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting a more integrated community fabric.

*Young people are more lonely than ever. The way we live is profoundly atomised, missing the casual and deeper human connections. A solution – creating clubs for young people where they can connect having common age and interests.*  
(SSP002)



» The role of youth work

The role of youth work is integral to supporting the holistic development of young people, encompassing both their mental and emotional well-being. A critical aspect of this role is **incorporating emotional intelligence content into youth programmes**, which equips young people with the competencies to understand and manage their emotions effectively.

Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on advocating for **mental health policies and funding for support systems**. This ensures that young people have access to the necessary resources to maintain their mental health. Youth work also focuses on **fostering avenues for creative self-expression**, which can be therapeutic and help young individuals explore and articulate their thoughts and feelings.

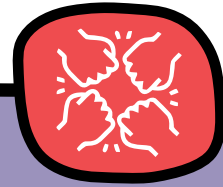
Guiding the **healthy usage of technology** is essential in today's digital age, as it helps to prevent the negative impacts of excessive screen time and cyberbullying. This links closely with the development of **anti-bullying and inclusion capacities among youth workers**, who are trained to create environments that are safe and welcoming for all participants.

Youth work also involves **creating safe spaces for challenging dialogues**, allowing young people to discuss sensitive issues in a supportive setting. Using **art, drama and culture to boost self-esteem** is another effective strategy employed in youth programmes, as these activities encourage personal growth and confidence.

Empowering young people to **lead mental health campaigns and local community-building initiatives** fosters a sense of agency and responsibility. By enabling youth-led projects, youth work not only promotes mental well-being but also enhances community cohesion and support.



# War and conflict



Escalation of conflicts is already impacting youth work in tangible ways, requiring estimation and mitigation of risk during activity planning, and leading to cancellations of activities in some areas. Even after wars are 'over', lasting effects continue to impact communities. The **far-reaching psycho-social impacts of violent conflicts, spanning across generations, require trauma-informed policy measures and youth work approaches focused on reconciliation** through avenues such as open dialogue and cultural sharing.

*I observe that the future of youth work in conflict-affected regions will continue to be heavily influenced by ongoing and past conflicts, even after they have officially ended. Youth work in such regions will need to focus on safety, mental health support and resilience-building to address the lasting consequences of conflict and to create an environment where young people can flourish despite these challenges.*  
(SSP012)



## Healing and reconciliation

### SCENARIO:

#### Grassroots storytelling and peer support provide outlets amidst divisions

Grassroots initiatives leveraging storytelling and peer support act as powerful tools for healing and reconciliation in post-conflict settings. By sharing personal stories of struggle and survival, individuals can find common ground, thus fostering empathy and understanding across previously hostile divides. Peer support groups provide emotional comfort and help repair social connections that have been damaged by conflict, encouraging communities to move towards collective healing. Emerging technologies could offer virtual platforms where young people from conflicting communities can engage in monitored dialogue sessions, role-playing and collaborative projects. These platforms would use VR to simulate real-life interactions and conflict scenarios, providing a safe space for understanding and learning.

*The future of youth work will increasingly involve immersive and participatory methods to educate and involve young people in problem-solving around significant challenges such as the climate crisis and social division.*  
(SSP067)

### SCENARIO:

#### Mainstream intercultural dialogues and exchange programmes normalise connectedness by celebrating common human experiences

As part of scenario building, it is also important to try to foresee what will remain. There are very strong signals that learning mobility is one element that will remain in Europe (and beyond). However, in the future, Europe will transform its approach to cultural integration and conflict resolution through widespread intercultural dialogues and exchange programmes. Initiatives such as the Global Youth Peace Corps transition towards new international initiatives that could see young people from around the world trained and involved in peace-building missions. This new 'global corps' would not only aid in immediate conflict resolution efforts but also work on long-term educational and community-building projects to foster a culture of peace and understanding across borders.

All these initiatives will become a mainstream part of youth education, deeply embedded in the curriculum across European nations and beyond. Young people regularly participate in exchanges that expose them to diverse cultures and emphasise the universal aspects of the human experience. This normalisation of intercultural connectedness results in the emergence of a generation of young people who are competent at transcending cultural boundaries and are equipped with the empathy and understanding necessary to address and prevent conflicts. These programmes are celebrated for their role in cultivating an identity that values diversity as a strength and leverage to maintain peace and unity across Europe and beyond.

*Youngsters that went to Gaza in 2022 are now informing other youngsters and people about their journey due to the current conflict. By organising this group travelling to destinations that maybe have another culture, politics, way of living – they want to inform youngsters but also let them experience that in the core – we are so much more similar than we think.*  
(SSP066)

**>> Widening divisions**

**SCENARIO:  
Divisive mis/disinformation channels widen prejudice between communities**

In an era where information spreads faster than ever, mis/disinformation has become a formidable weapon in exacerbating tensions. These channels not only distort perceptions but also entrench prejudices, making reconciliation more challenging. Addressing this requires robust media literacy programmes and regulatory frameworks to tone down the spread of harmful content and foster well-informed communities.

**SCENARIO:  
Real-world segregation normalises parallel polarised realities where a persistent deficit of trust and sense of displacement in post-conflict youths hamper mobility and the exchange of ideas**

Segregation, whether enforced or self-imposed, entrenches divisions and prevents the exchange of ideas necessary for mutual understanding. This scenario sees a generation of young people growing up in isolated bubbles, leading to a deepened deficit in trust and reduced opportunities for intercultural interaction, thus perpetuating cycles of misunderstanding and conflict.

*Youth work in the future may need to create more inclusive and supportive communities that engage young people in meaningful ways. This could involve developing programs that promote social skills, empathy, and civic engagement, as well as providing spaces where young people can connect with others, share experiences, and participate in collective activities that reinforce democratic principles.*  
(SSP067)



## The role of youth work

The role of youth work is essential in fostering a harmonious and inclusive society, particularly in areas enriched by diverse cultures and histories. A foundational aspect of this role is capacity building of cultural intelligence and nonviolent communication. By developing these skills, young people learn to navigate and appreciate differences in backgrounds and perspectives, which is crucial for peaceful interactions.

Youth work also focuses on enabling constructive intercultural community exchanges. These exchanges are vital for building mutual respect and understanding among different cultural groups. Additionally, participatory methodologies for trauma relief and trust-building are implemented to heal communities affected by conflict and to lay the groundwork for lasting peace.

Promoting inclusive symbols and heritage preservation in public spaces plays a significant role in maintaining a community's cultural identity while also embracing diversity. This includes integrating symbols that represent all community members in public venues to foster a sense of belonging and pride among varied groups.

Moreover, youth work includes myth-busting workshops designed to identify and counteract the harm caused by divisive propaganda. These workshops help young people critically analyse and question misinformation, thus reducing its divisive impact.

Youth workers facilitate difficult dialogues on controversial issues, bridging divides by bringing together individuals from different backgrounds to discuss and understand contentious topics in a constructive environment.

The fostering of global citizenship values through exchange programmes connects young people from different countries, enhancing their understanding of global interconnectedness and interdependencies and encouraging a sense of global community and responsibility. This helps young people develop the competencies and attitudes necessary to navigate and contribute positively to the world.





## Youth work practice<sup>16</sup>

Finally, overarching signals are pointing to the **need to reimagine youth work practices themselves considering the rapidly shifting realities around youth interests, unique needs and preferred modes of engagement**. A blended model combining virtual and in-person elements could characterise the future of the delivery of youth work. Exploring decentralised organisational structures, peer-to-peer approaches and leveraging influencer networks are some of the emerging concepts worth examining. Furthermore, intentionally addressing barriers to access and inclusion will play a crucial role in ensuring youth work remains responsive and equitable.

The **common perception that youth work is only necessary for disadvantaged communities and solely focuses on ‘saving’ young people is a misconception**. The notions of a strict impact regime, self-improvement mandates and the narrative of empowerment, often framed as ‘saviourism’, can be limiting and even problematic. These ideas suggest that youth work is about rescuing individuals rather than empowering them holistically. Moving forward, it is important to shift away from these narratives and recognise that youth work can benefit all communities by fostering broad-based empowerment and support, not just offering help in moments of crisis.

Therefore, the nature of youth work and its role will continue to evolve significantly by 2050 due to several major factors and shifts. One is that **the very definition and concept of ‘youth’ itself will keep changing, requiring an awareness that the language and framing around youth is fluid**. Broader societal forces such as rising housing and living costs may increase dependency among young people, meaning youth workers must attend to ‘basic hygiene factors’, such as housing, food and jobs, beyond just youth-specific issues.

However, at its core, **youth work will still fundamentally be about providing supportive human relationships and connections that both nurture and challenge young people to understand themselves and the world**. The role of youth workers in 2050 may look different, but facilitating these meaningful developmental relationships will remain crucial.



### Reimagining structures and engagement models

#### SCENARIO:

##### Global connections and in-person relations

Digital technologies are already massively disrupting and shaping the practice of youth work itself. A likely whole domain of ‘digital youth work’ will emerge. Youth workers will need multidisciplinary training and support, especially in terms of digital literacies, to effectively work with young people in these virtual realms. While tech enables connection across networks, there is tension with the long-term relationship-building and commitment that youth work fundamentally requires. In-person gatherings and training opportunities will still be crucial, even as digital interactions increase. In-person youth centres and training programmes run by institutions and organisations can act as ‘accelerators’ for de-

<sup>16</sup> This section and its scenarios are not concluded by ‘the role of youth work’ as in the previous sections, as it addresses youth work practice.



velopment. While virtual spaces enable certain types of engagement, the unique benefits of physical co-presence cannot be fully replicated online. Another challenge is that youth work must compete for young people's free time and engagement against highly entertaining digital media, such as films, games and virtual worlds. Youth work may need to wrestle with whether to try to match entertainment value or differentiate itself by offering deeper substance and meaning.

#### **SCENARIO:**

##### **Decentralised local organising**

Signals point to a likely increase in decentralisation and grassroots organising, with less reliance on centralised top-down systems. Funding structures are also predicted to transform with demographic shifts including ageing populations and depopulations of rural areas. These factors may potentially lead to more localised grassroots youth services driven by community needs rather than centralised government programmes. Issues of access will need to be considered, with creative solutions such as services for youths in depopulating areas delivered by travelling organisations. There is a shift from institutional top-down approaches and a real focus on the grassroots levels, with anything beyond that being about how to support it. Decentralised local organising supported by regional/global platforms for connection and training emerges as one potential path forward.



#### **Youth work identity and recognition**

#### **SCENARIO:**

##### **Formalised credentials, shifting identity**

Credentialing frameworks and online academies have the potential to formalise capabilities and unify fragmented efforts. Youth work will become significantly more professionalised and embedded within formal institutions across Europe by 2050. This increased professionalisation brings some benefits, including more widespread adoption and integration into existing systems. However, it also risks youth work losing some of its original grassroots and informal character as it blends into institutional frameworks. This will raise concerns about an identity crisis youth work may face. As it becomes more professionalised and funded through formal institutions, will it maintain its historically progressive stance authentically representing the voices of young people calling for social change? Or will it be pressured to align more with the perspectives of traditional systems focused on employment and the status quo? Navigating this tension will be critical.

#### **SCENARIO:**

##### **Critical youth work approaches**

Looking ahead, youth work may need to shift away from simplistic rhetoric about empowerment and achieving one's potential. Instead, there should be more emphasis on critical systemic analysis – helping young people understand institutional constraints while avoiding unrealistic narratives that ignore limitations. One avenue is the development of much closer ties of youth work with academic science and empirical knowledge. This could strengthen its approach to addressing major issues such as climate change. However, it requires evolution as most youth workers currently come from self-taught experiential backgrounds rather than formal scientific training. Additionally, there will be a much larger body of digitised data, research and documented knowledge about effective youth work practices in the future. Currently, much knowledge gets passed down experientially from person to person rather than being systematically captured. Having more hard data could allow youth workers to combine their passion and beliefs with empirical evidence to make more informed decisions about impacts. However, an overreliance on quantifying and evaluating 'success' through metrics and assessments that focus on perceived notions of 'empowerment' could be counterproductive.

# 05

## **Sense-making: Systemic Reflections on the Signals**



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Technology noise creates blind spots in  
future-oriented thinking

Too painful to look at

Chasing our own tail – mental health  
issues as wake-up calls

The place and size of youth work

The mother of all crises is the crisis of  
perception

It's all connected; we are all connected

Learning and unlearning

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*Thinking about the nonlinear structure around all these issues and how things emerge isn't just about getting one young person from point A to point B; there will be so many things happening around [...]. This is not to be achieved by youth worker X, Y, Z, or youth worker organisations, but there should be new ways, new structures where we think critically and collectively, a space free of shame.*

(Alicja Pawluczuk)

#### » Technology noise creates blind spots in future-oriented thinking

When looking ahead, technological advancements often take centre stage. This focus on technology blinds us and can obscure other important but less visible trends that also demand our attention. To fully understand the future, we must separate our exploration of technological developments from our broader consideration of what lies ahead. It is crucial to broaden our perspective and sharpen our awareness to detect both the loud and the subtle signals that shape our future.

##### Question for reflection

What are we excluding (from our awareness) when focusing too much on technology?



#### » Too painful to look at

Building on the previous point; while technology poses its challenges, there are other, even more overwhelming issues at hand. We may find ourselves asking what problems we are reluctant to confront, hoping they might simply vanish. Yet, we somehow know and recognise that these issues will not only persist but also become increasingly prominent in the future, calling on us to consider pressing matters such as the failure of democracy, ongoing global conflicts, the climate crisis and demographic changes.

##### Question for reflection

What is too painful to look at in the present (that will significantly shape our futures)?



» Chasing our own tail – mental health issues as wake-up calls

When reflecting on the increased emphasis on mental health issues in youth work, it is pertinent to ask whether we are being used by the larger system as ‘firefighters, with the task of managing the symptoms rather than addressing the underlying causes. Should we view these mental health challenges as wake-up calls indicating deeper systemic problems that require change? Are we focusing our efforts on reforming the larger system or on internal changes within the field of youth work itself? It is crucial to place guilt and responsibility where they truly belong. To what extent are the predominant mental health issues merely survival tactics in a world obsessed with doing everything more, faster and better?



**Question for reflection**

- If we zoom out, where do mental health issues direct our attention?
- What patterns within the larger societal system should we challenge and outgrow?
- Within the field of youth work, which approaches are no longer effective?
- What roles have we assumed that do not belong to us, and how can we return these responsibilities to their rightful owners?

» The place and size of youth work

In terms of broader societal issues and challenges, what is the role of youth work within the entire system of societal and institutional players? What is the appropriate place and scale for youth work within this system? Are we making ourselves too small to avoid confronting painful issues, or too big and taking on the responsibilities of others?



**Question for reflection**

- What would be the ‘right’ place and size of youth work?
- What would be the societal role of youth work that is aware of its limits and own agency?

» The mother of all crises is the crisis of perception

Underlying all the crises we are facing today is a single crisis, called ‘the crisis of perception’<sup>17</sup>. To move forward as humanity, we need to overcome two ‘illusions’ or misperceptions: the illusion of separateness, and the illusion of infinite growth.



**Question for reflection**

- How do the illusions of separateness and infinite growth impact the approach of youth work to global crises, and what changes can the field make to address these effectively?

17 Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, The systems view of life: A unifying vision (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

### » It's all connected; we are all connected

A characteristic of systemic problems is their inability to be resolved in isolation; they are deeply interconnected and interdependent. Such issues require a systemic awareness. Therefore, when considering future scenarios, addressing these problems is not simply a matter of choosing the easiest tasks – an 'à la carte approach'. Instead, systemic problems teach us about the interconnectedness of the world.

#### Question for reflection

Can youth work become a place where we can re-learn the sense of interconnectedness?



### » Learning and unlearning

When considering future readiness, there is often too much focus on what new competencies we need to learn to be ready. However, it is equally important to consider what we need to unlearn at the same time.

#### Question for reflection

How can youth work support both processes – learning and unlearning – when considering its future readiness?



# The Role of Youth Work and Strategies for Adapting to the Future Challenges



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## The Role of Youth Work – a Comprehensive Summary

- Adapting to demographic changes
- Navigating cultural and social behaviour and lifestyle shifts
- Enhancing civic participation and rights
- Transforming education
- Preparing for future work and economy
- Promoting mental health and well-being
- Addressing wars and conflicts
- Reimagining youth work practice

## Strategies for Adapting to Future Challenges

- Strategy #1 – Adopt a reflected sense of agency
  - Strategy #2 – A future-ready mindset
  - Strategy #3 – Provide more structured conversation spaces about futures
  - Strategy #4 – Future literacy
  - Strategy #5 – Embrace the whole-system change approach
  - Strategy #6 – Readiness to rethink the societal role of youth workchange approach
  - Strategy #7 – Stay alert for ‘transformation calls’
-



*The purpose of thinking about the future is to disturb the present*<sup>18</sup>

## THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK – A COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

Each possible future scenario described in this study highlights a corresponding role for youth work in addressing change. Developing strategies to adapt to these future changes and challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of these roles. Indeed, the role of youth work is multifaceted, evolving to meet the dynamic needs of young people in a rapidly changing world. The summary below provides an integrated narrative of the key insights and potential impacts of youth work as explored in the possible future scenarios described in the study.

### » Adapting to demographic changes

Youth work is important in addressing and, to a certain extent, responding to demographic changes such as ageing populations, migration flows and evolving family structures. With fewer young people in the future, youth work will be impacted and pushed to facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer and connection. This involves developing culturally sensitive programmes for migrants, training youth workers in conflict resolution, and creating youth networks that support and favour diversity. Political education is also essential, ensuring that young people understand societal issues and participate actively in democratic processes. Youth workers might advocate for inclusive housing policies and foster social cohesion to bridge intergenerational divides.

### » Navigating cultural and social behaviour and lifestyle shifts

As youth culture constantly evolves, youth work needs to accompany young people through the digital landscape, promoting a healthy relationship with technology. This includes fostering critical reflection on the societal impacts of innovations and nurturing creative self-expression. Youth work can also support eco-friendly practices in travel and tourism, supporting young people to plan sustainable journeys and embrace digital nomadism possibilities. In the field of entertainment, youth workers should encourage the safe and ethical use of immersive technologies, ensuring young people remain grounded while exploring digital spaces.

### » Enhancing civic participation and rights

Youth work plays a central role in enhancing political literacy and promoting a ‘foresight mindset’, preparing young people to navigate and influence the(ir) political landscape. By facilitating connections between young people and policymakers, youth work ensures that youth voices are heard in policymaking. This includes supporting marginalised voices, promoting participatory action research and advocating for changes and reforms that directly impact young people’s well-being. Youth work should also focus on fostering critical thinking to help young people identify misinformation, so they can be informed and engaged citizens.

### » Transforming education

The future of education is strongly connected to youth work, which needs to advocate for (new) learning models that are aligned with and respond to young people’s interests and abilities. This involves promoting data/media literacy, technological competencies and interdisciplinary problem-solving approaches. Youth workers should facilitate knowledge exchange between formal and non-formal educators and integrate emerging technologies into learning. By supporting self-driven learning and personalised AI tutors, youth work can support making education more democratic and provide young people with the competencies that will play a role in their future workplaces.

<sup>18</sup> Often attributed to Gaston Berger, futurist and philosopher. His original quote is “Regarder l’avenir, c’est déjà le changer.”

### » Preparing for future work and economy

Youth work is strongly impacted by the instability and uncertainty of future job markets and can play a role in guiding young people through career transitions and fostering resilience. This includes supporting youth entrepreneurship, advocating for fair rights and promoting a wide range of learning experiences through evolving credential systems. Youth work should also support project incubation spaces and improve digital literacy, ensuring that young people are equipped to navigate a rapidly changing economy.

### » Promoting mental health and well-being

The role of youth work in supporting young people's mental and emotional well-being is undoubtable. This involves encompassing emotional intelligence content into youth programmes and projects, advocating for mental health policies and fostering creative self-expression. Youth workers can guide the healthy use of technology and create safe spaces for sometimes challenging dialogues. Empowering young people to lead mental health campaigns and community-building initiatives is also essential for promoting overall well-being and community cohesion.

### » Addressing wars and conflicts

In conflict-affected areas, youth work plays a crucial role in areas such as healing and reconciliation. This includes giving more space to storytelling and peer support for trauma relief (to a certain extent), promoting intercultural dialogues and applying participatory methodologies. Youth workers should focus on building cultural intelligence, facilitating community exchanges and countering disruptive propaganda through deconstructing myths and misbeliefs. Promoting global citizenship values through youth work can support young people in understanding global interconnectedness and contribute positively to peacebuilding efforts.

### » Reimagining youth work practice

Youth work practices must adjust to shifting realities, embracing a model where virtual and in-person engagement can happen. Decentralised organisational structures and grassroots approaches can support the necessity to address the needs of the communities. Youth work must move beyond the perception of 'saving' disadvantaged or less-privileged youths, recognising its value in supporting grassroots empowerment. While attending to basic needs such as housing and employment goes beyond youth work, it can nevertheless support, encourage and help create connections, relationships and meaningful developmental interactions.



## STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTING TO FUTURE CHALLENGES

Adapting to change in youth work presents significant challenges, particularly when asking youth workers to adjust their mindsets or enhance certain skills. Many feel overwhelmed, lacking support and adequate structures necessary for their development. The research and similar narratives highlight youth workers' struggles, such as feeling insecure or guilty for not keeping up with rapid digital developments. These feelings are exacerbated by narratives that pressure them to continuously self-improve – a neo-liberal perspective that may not be entirely fair or realistic. Instead of perpetuating this demanding approach, we should consider shifting towards a model of collective care. By fostering communities that focus on mutual support and resilience, a more sustainable and supportive environment can be created for youth workers as they navigate the complexities of their roles in changing times.

Therefore, upon reading the insights and scenarios described in the research, a pertinent question arises: 'What now?' To develop a clearer understanding of the possible paths forward, we propose four practical strategies for youth work to effectively address future challenges.



### Strategy #1 – Adopt a reflected sense of agency

Future foresight tends to challenge our sense of agency. It poses a critical question: to what extent can we influence the future of youth work? Reading between the lines, it becomes apparent that we must abandon the notion of **being the sole creators** of our future and accept that we are **not merely passive observers** of global changes that affect young people and, by extension, the field of youth work. There are numerous external factors beyond our control, yet the field possesses considerable internal resources that it can draw upon in response to the need for change. These resources, which form the essence of youth work, include qualities such as flexibility, creativity, self-reflection, learning and a sense of driving purpose. These qualities are vital when addressing future challenges and redefining youth work to ensure it is equipped for the future.

Therefore, in envisioning the futures of youth work, we must adopt the **position of co-creators**, engaged in a continuous 'dance' between 'what is coming to an end' on the one hand, and 'what is emerging' on the other. This stance fosters a *realistic, reflected, balanced sense of agency* and sets the stage for greater agility, benefiting both individual youth workers and the field of youth work as a whole. *Agility*, in this context, means maintaining a strong connection to our roots – our history, past learning and core values – while being open to the possibilities of what the field might need to evolve into, called for by the world and the needs of young people. The roots alone are not enough, neither is an exclusive focus on the future without building on the resources from the past. In essence, we cannot develop our potential without honouring our heritage.



### Strategy #2 – A future-ready mindset

Preparing future youth workers requires fostering a future-ready mindset, essential for navigating an increasingly uncertain world. Today's and tomorrow's generations of youth workers are evolving in an environment charged with geopolitical tensions, as well as climate, environmental and global health challenges. This differs from previous generations who grew and evolved during periods of more hope and optimism, at least in most parts of Europe. That shift towards a 'culture of hope' from one increasingly led by anxiety and risk is likely to deeply influence youth workers' culture, philosophy, attitudes, beliefs and aspirations.



### Strategy #3 – Provide more structured conversation spaces about futures

One key insight from the ‘Futures of Youth Work’ research is the **need for more focused and structured discussions about the futures of youth work**. Youth workers must move away from the belief in certainties and the idea that inequalities can be completely eradicated. It is crucial for them to continually reassess their objectives and approaches, embracing the complexity of their roles. These discussions began at the European Academy on Youth Work in May 2024 and some of the outcomes may be found in Annex 1 in this report. However, there is a need to broaden them to other European platforms, such as the upcoming European Youth Work Convention in Malta in 2025, as well as within the newly created Alliance of Youth Workers Associations.

Additionally, these conversations should expand to national and local levels where the majority of youth work happens. It is important to explore how the current European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn process can be adapted to better support these initiatives aimed at preparing for the future, and how the European Academy on Youth Work can not only continue to foster innovation but also serve more effectively as a catalyst for change.



### Strategy #4 – Future literacy

The concept of future literacy is vital: it is not about predicting the future but about understanding the types of possible futures and developing capacities to influence them. This requires a future-thinking mindset, which includes a sense of agency and a belief in the ability to influence change. This sense of agency must consider the balance between individual initiatives and collective actions, reflecting a shift from ‘merely’ participating to actively shaping results. In youth work, this could mean moving beyond traditional roles to engage with societal issues more strongly, in a culture of innovation within the field.



### Strategy #5 – Embrace the whole-system change approach

Regarding the possible content of these future-readiness conversations, it can be considered as two interrelated, but distinct levels:

1. What needs to happen at the **individual level** – where is investment needed in youth worker development?
2. What needs to happen at the **level of the field** – what are the collective shifts and structures needed to create conditions for change?

It must be clear that for a long-lasting and systemic change, **these two processes need to go hand in hand since they are both necessary in order for change to happen.**



As shown in the graph below, these two processes include two dimensions – the ‘inner work’ and ‘external developments’ – thus creating the **four quadrants of future-readiness**<sup>19</sup>:

	INNER WORK	EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS
INDIVIDUAL Youth worker	Future-ready mindset Youth workers’ awareness Youth worker identity	Youth work practices Methods and methodologies Youth worker skills
COLLECTIVE Youth work as a field	Inner resources Collective patterns Systemic role of youth work	Frameworks Support structures Youth work policy

These quadrants bring about a set of **powerful questions for reflection**:

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- What kind of mindset does a youth worker need to develop to be future-ready?
- How much are youth workers aware of the ‘big picture’ trends and how they impact their role?
- What aspects of youth workers’ identities are most likely to change in the future?
- What youth work practices are future-proof and what practices need to be re-thought in the context of larger societal trends?
- What youth work methodologies and methods will remain relevant in the next 5, 10 or 20 years?
- What are the skills needed for youth workers to become more future literate? And what competencies do youth workers need to adopt for the emerging roles of youth work?



### COLLECTIVE LEVEL

- What inner resources (values, principles, qualities) should be nurtured for the field to become more agile and future-ready? And which ones stand in the way?
- What are the blocking patterns and narratives in youth work that need to be overcome to become more future-ready? What are the new patterns and narratives that need to be cultivated and supported?
- What are the new systemic roles (purpose) that youth work is invited to play by the emerging societal trends and needs of young people?
- What are the formal frameworks that need to be created and adopted to support the change in the field?
- What structures are needed to facilitate the process of change, where the necessary co-creation processes can happen?
- What youth work policies are needed and how can European programmes support the evolution of youth work?

<sup>19</sup> Inspired by Ken Wilber’s Integral theory; Ken Wilber, A brief history of everything (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2017).

The four quadrants highlight that for effective change to occur, attention must be paid to both internal and external conditions. Focusing solely on external changes without the necessary internal reflection and deeper work tends to be short-sighted and can sometimes even be counterproductive. At the same time, focusing only on inner reflection without the external conditions and resources needed for action can lead to frustration and disillusionment in the field. Therefore, the message is clear: **systemic change requires a holistic approach that fosters individual development and creates supportive systemic conditions at the policy level.**

This model serves as a valuable tool for assessing where additional efforts are necessary for youth work to become future-ready. It can be used as a framework for guiding discussions on future-readiness at local, national or European levels, as was the case at the European Academy on Youth Work in May 2024 (see Annexe 1 for more information).



### Strategy #6 – Readiness to rethink the societal role of youth work

When considering the ‘Futures of Youth Work’, it is important to recall that its core purpose of the empowerment and engagement of young people will remain. However, priorities may change in response to emerging challenges. The need for human connection persists, reminding us that while we must adapt to change, the foundational goals of youth work – supporting the holistic growth of young people – will continue to guide this field.



### Strategy #7 – Stay alert for ‘transformation calls’

Lastly, being future-ready means being able to hear and recognise ‘calls for transformation’ in a timely manner. By staying attuned to the ‘signals’ in society, we must remain vigilant to pinpoint the exact moment when mere innovation will no longer be sufficient for youth work to survive and remain future proof. Moreover, an ‘agile governance’ approach focused on taking one step at a time and adapting based on the ‘calls’ is recommended instead of trying to predict and control the future. This could occur in Horizon 2 or Horizon 3, as defined by this research, or possibly even sooner, given the rapid changes and complexity of our world which can bring unexpected challenges.



*‘A future mindset will be needed to handle polarities [...], remaining truly open and at the same time keeping some ethical boundaries. Questioning ourselves, reflexive and reflective mindset’.*

(Gary Pollock)





# 07

## Instead of a Conclusion

This foresight research on the 'Futures of Youth Work' should be considered as a catalyst for generative dialogues and exchanges within the field about how the future of youth work aligns with the future of the world. Such exploration requires a broadened awareness and the embracing of a systemic view, encouraging unlearning and a re-learning of the interconnectedness both within youth work and the broader societal framework.

Understanding the interdependencies between different scenarios is also fundamental. What is perceived as the future in one context might already be the present or even the past in another. This fluidity highlights the importance of combining information and insights for the development of agile and adaptive mindsets.

It also requires a significant shift from an individual posture and approach, which often generates pressure and high expectations, towards collective responses. How can we, as a field, approach potential futures that must be rooted in communal care and shared responsibility, if we consider that 'communities of care' offer a sustainable model for addressing the complexities and uncertainties that lie ahead?

To successfully navigate these challenges, it is important to promote actively facilitated co-creation processes, both at the European level and within local and organisational contexts. The outcomes of initiatives such as the European Academy on Youth Work provide an initial reflection that must be further explored, deepened and translated into actionable steps.

In conclusion, this research is an invitation to embrace a collaborative and reflective approach to shaping the futures of youth work. It calls for an ongoing dialogue, encouraging a shared vision that can adapt and thrive in an ever-evolving world.

## Annexes



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### **Annexe 1: Recommendations from the European Academy on Youth Work about the Future-readiness of Youth Work**

- Inner work – Individual level
- External developments – Individual level
- Inner work – Collective level
- External developments – Collective level

### **Annexe 2: Glossary**

### **Annexe 3: Further Reading and Resources**

### **Resources**

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# Annexe 1:

## Recommendations from the European Academy on Youth Work about the Future-readiness of Youth Work

Using the four quadrants for future-readiness described under the 3rd strategy for adapting to future challenges, the third edition of the biennial event of the European Academy on Youth Work (14 – 17 May 2024, Slovenia) provided a fantastic space and ground to collectively explore the emerging trends and signals that will impact the futures of youth work.

Below is a summary of how participants approached the strategies to get ‘future-ready’ and what they entail.

### INNER WORK – INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

**Responding to the question: How can individual youth workers’ mindsets and readiness for exploring and addressing the future challenges be strengthened?**

One of the primary recommendations is to establish **strong support systems for youth workers. Creating collaborative platforms** where youth workers can share experiences, seek advice and offer support to one another can significantly increase their sense of community and belonging. These platforms can be online forums, regular meetups or professional networks that provide a space for mutual support and knowledge exchange.

**Encouraging youth workers to engage in regular self-reflection** is another important strategy. Tools such as journaling and reflection apps can help individuals to take time to think about their experiences, identify stressors and develop personal strategies for coping. Self-reflection promotes greater self-awareness and can lead to more proactive management of mental health.

**Recognition and celebrating achievements** of youth work and youth workers can significantly improve feelings and mental health. Acknowledging those contributions and providing positive feedback helps them to feel valued and appreciated. This recognition can come from peers, managers, supervisors or the broader community and can take various forms, such as awards, public acknowledgements or personal notes of thanks.

**Encouraging youth workers to step out of their comfort zones** and explore different attitudes and points of view can promote personal growth and resilience. Being exposed to diverse perspectives can support them in developing a more adaptable and flexible mindset, which is crucial for managing the dynamic nature of youth work.

**Incorporating sensory stimulants and creative tools** into daily routines can help youth workers manage stress and improve their mental well-being. Activities including art, music and physical exercise can provide much-needed relief from work pressures and offer healthy outlets for stress.

Helping youth workers **develop a long-term perspective on their careers and personal development** can also enhance resilience. Encouraging them to set long-term goals and to see their work as part of a larger, meaningful journey can provide a sense of purpose and motivation, which is important for sustaining mental health over time.



Providing **emotional support** to youth workers is essential for maintaining their mental well-being and a sense of satisfaction in their work. Strategies for offering emotional support include:

- Establishing **peer support groups** where youth workers can share their experiences and offer mutual support can create a safe space for discussing challenges and emotions. These groups can provide empathy, understanding and practical advice, helping youth workers to feel less isolated and more connected.
- Providing **access to professional counselling** services for youth workers can offer them a confidential and supportive channel for discussing personal and work-related stressors. Counselling can help to develop coping strategies and resilience, thus contributing to youth workers' overall well-being.
- Implementing mentorship programmes where experienced youth workers mentor newcomers can provide guidance, support and encouragement. Mentors can offer insights based on their experiences and help mentees to learn how to navigate challenges, in a supportive and nurturing environment.
- Managers, supervisors and team leaders should conduct **regular check-ins** with team members to 'assess' and understand their emotional well-being and address any concerns. These check-ins should be informal and supportive, focusing on listening and providing support rather than evaluating performance.

## EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS – INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

**Responding to the question: What are the ways to enhance youth work practices, methodologies and youth workers' skills so they become more future-ready? What measures are needed?**

**Providing youth workers with access to high-quality information** and resources is important, if not crucial. This includes mental health resources, best practice guides and educational materials that help them navigate the challenges they face in their work. Access to comprehensive information can empower youth workers to make informed decisions and adopt effective strategies for managing stress and promoting mental well-being.

**Ongoing training and professional development** opportunities are essential for building resilience. Workshops, seminars and courses focused on mental health, stress management and resilience-building techniques can equip youth workers with the skills they need to maintain their well-being. Such training should also include practical tools and strategies for self-care and coping with work-related stress.

Youth workers benefit from external support systems and structures. **Access to professional development opportunities** and training enhances their competencies and confidence. It is important to create **pathways for career advancement and recognition** within the youth work sector. Engaging with external mentors and networks can provide new perspectives and resources, facilitating personal and professional growth.

**Access to continuous training and professional development** opportunities is vital. Workshops, seminars and courses on mental health, leadership and project management enhance competencies.

Building **professional networks and mentorship programmes** allows youth workers to connect with peers and experts. These networks provide valuable guidance, support and career advice, fostering personal and professional growth.

**Simplifying access to funding and resources** through less bureaucratic processes facilitates youth workers in focusing on their work, projects and other initiatives. Providing adequate financial support for infrastructure, training, programmes and project development is crucial.

Once again, making **access to external training programmes and workshops easier** can allow youth workers to acquire new competencies from experts outside their immediate environment. Partnerships with educational institutions and professional organisations can provide diverse learning opportunities.

## INNER WORK – COLLECTIVE LEVEL

Responding to the question: What deeper conversations do we need to have in the field of youth work? What do we need to rethink in terms of the societal role, identity and patterns of youth work? What is still standing and what needs to be transformed?

Fostering a **collective mindset** involves promoting a sense of shared purpose and collective identity among youth workers. Related strategies include:

- Developing and communicating a clear **shared vision, a common purpose** and a set of goals for the team can unite team members and support the alignment of their efforts. When everyone understands and is committed to the same goals and objectives, it creates a sense of purpose and direction. Regularly revisiting and reinforcing these goals helps maintain focus and motivation.
- Encouraging **inclusive decision-making processes** in which all team members have a voice guarantees that diverse perspectives are considered. This approach not only raises a sense of ownership and empowerment but also serves the collective intelligence of the team, leading to stronger, sustainable innovative solutions.
- Providing **training on cultural competencies and diversity** can help team members value, understand and respect different backgrounds and perspectives. Embracing diversity within the team enhances creativity and problem-solving abilities, contributing to a more inclusive and effective collective mindset.
- Promoting **collaborative learning opportunities**, such as group training sessions, workshops and professional development courses, encourages ongoing development, continuous improvement and shared growth. When team members learn together, it nurtures a sense of community and mutual support.
- As for the inner-individual level, **highlighting and celebrating collective achievements** rather than individual accomplishments reinforces the importance of teamwork and collaboration. Recognising the team's success as a whole contributes to a collective identity and reinforces the value of working together towards common goals.

**Rethinking community engagement** in a systemic way includes:

- **Building strong community relationships** with community members, organisations and local authorities helps create a supportive network for youth work initiatives. Regular communication, collaborative projects and community events can strengthen these bonds and increase a sense of collective responsibility.
- **Involving the community** in the planning and implementation of youth work programmes and projects ensures that initiatives are relevant and respond to local needs. **Participatory approaches** that include feedback from young people, parents and other stakeholders can improve the effectiveness and impact of these programmes and projects.
- **Promoting public awareness and recognition** of the importance and impact of youth work is crucial to gaining broader support for the field. Public campaigns, media coverage and community presentations can highlight the achievements and contributions of youth work(ers), supporting a positive perception and greater community involvement.

- Creating **flexible and accessible spaces for young people** within the community provides safe and supportive environments for them to engage, learn and grow. Hybrid spaces that combine physical and virtual elements can cater to diverse needs and preferences, ensuring that all young people have access to the resources and support they need.
- Implementing **collaborative community projects** that address community issues and involve multiple stakeholders can enhance community engagement. Projects that focus on social issues, environmental sustainability and cultural activities can bring together youth workers, young people and community members in meaningful ways.

**Team building** is crucial to creating a cohesive and collaborative environment among youth workers. Useful team-building strategies include:

- Organising **regular team meetings and workshops** can support open communication, trust and collaboration. These gatherings provide a platform for team members to share their experiences and challenges and explore solutions collectively. Workshops focusing on team dynamics, problem-solving and project planning can enhance teamwork and cooperation.
- Engaging in **team-building activities** such as outdoor activities, sports and interactive games can reinforce relationships among team members. Activities that require teamwork and collective problem-solving can build trust and improve the cohesion of the team. Retreats or team-building days can provide a break from routine work and help renew or revive the team spirit.
- Encouraging **collaborative projects** in which team members work together towards a common goal can improve unity and collective effort. Assigning roles based on individual strengths and promoting joint responsibility ensures that everyone contributes and feels valued. Collaborative projects can also help in sharing competencies within the team.
- **Recognising and celebrating** team achievements nurtures a sense of accomplishment and belonging. Celebrations can be formal, such as awards and ‘certificates’, or informal, such as team lunches or small celebrations for what has been achieved. Recognising collective efforts rather than individual contributions can strengthen the team’s unity and spirit.

## EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS – COLLECTIVE LEVEL

**Responding to the question: What are the structures, spaces and policy measures needed to create conditions for the future-readiness of youth work? What do European Youth Programmes need to become to support the evolution of youth work?**

On a broader scale, there is a call for **policy changes and increased recognition of youth work** at national and European levels. This includes the development of flexible and accessible spaces for young people that are inclusive and empowering.

Establishing a **collective body of ethics and standards for youth work**, in addition to the newly established European body in 2024, can guarantee consistency and high-quality practices. This body would develop and enforce ethical guidelines, enhancing the professionalism and integrity of youth work. Supporting **alliances among youth work(ers) associations**, such as the newly created Alliance of Youth Workers Associations (AYWA), can increase their voice and influence in policymaking. Collaborative efforts can lead to more coordinated and cohesive strategies for addressing the challenges faced by youth workers. Increasing **funding for youth work at national and European levels** is essential for sustaining and expanding its impact. Policies should support the collection of data and research on youth work practices, thus providing insights for informed decision-making and effective resource allocation. **Developing and implementing flexible and innovative programmes** that align with the needs of young people is crucial. Policies should support room for experiments alongside EU priorities, ensuring that youth work remains relevant and adaptive to changing needs. The European youth programmes should become more flexible and less bureaucratic, allowing for innovative and experimental approaches.

# Annexe 2:

## Glossary<sup>20</sup>

**Foresight** is the capacity to think strategically about the future.

**Futures studies**, also known as futures research, is an academic discipline about alternative futures which seeks to understand the underlying structures that give rise to future events, trends or behaviour.

**Future literacy** is the capability to understand and utilise various tools for engaging with potential futures, enabling individuals to innovate in the present and better navigate unforeseen challenges. It was developed within UNESCO.

**Actors** are individuals and organisations – for example, government, businesses and citizens – that are active in the policy or strategy area.

**Intuition** is the belief that something will be strategically important in the future, even when there is insufficient evidence to prove that this will be the case.

**Weak signals** are indicators of a potentially emerging issue that may become significant in the future.

A **trend** is an emerging pattern of events that suggest change.

A **driver** is a current or emerging trend that may have an impact on development of the policy or strategy area of interest.

**Horizon scanning** is the systematic process of looking for early warning signs of change in the policy and strategy environment by examining potential threats, opportunities and developments.

A **scan** (noun) is an article, usually part of a Horizon Scanning process, that describes an external event or emerging trend that points towards change in the policy and strategy environment.

To **scan** (verb) is to look for articles that describe an external event or emerging trend that points towards change in the policy and strategy environment.

A **signal spotter** or **scanner** is an individual who horizon scans and spots signals, usually as part of a structured process.

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20 Adapted from: Adanna Shallowe, Aleksandra Szymczyk, Ella Firebrace, Ian Burbidge, and James Morrison. A stitch in time: Realising the values of futures and foresight (London: The RSA, 2020), 76, <https://www.thersa.org/reports/futures-thinking-foresight>; and 'The Futures Toolkit', UK Government Office for Science, August 2024 (updated version), last accessed 24 October 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/futures-toolkit-for-policy-makers-and-analysts/the-futures-toolkit-html#glossary>



# Annexe 3:

## Further Reading and Resources

All resources were last accessed 24 October 2024.

A Field Guide for Ethnographic Experiential Futures by Stuart Candy and Kelly Kornet  
<https://futuryst.blogspot.com/2017/06/ethnographic-experiential-futures.html>

European Commission Competence Centre on Foresight  
[https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight_en)

European Commission: European Political Strategy Centre and Wilkinson, A., *Strategic Foresight Primer*, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2872/71492>

NESTA Futures Explainer  
[https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta\\_FuturesExplainerPDF.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_FuturesExplainerPDF.pdf)

Policy Horizons Canada Foresight Training Modules  
<https://horizons.gc.ca/en/resources/>

Practical Foresight Guide, Chapter 3 – Methods by Dr Michael Jackson, Chairman, Shaping Tomorrow  
<https://www.shapingtomorrow.com/files/media-centre/pf-ch03.pdf>

Save the Children Strategic Foresight toolkit  
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/future-ours-strategic-foresight-toolkit-making-better-decisions/>

Sitra Future Makers Tool-box and Futures Frequency  
<https://www.sitra.fi/en/tools/>

Stanford University Playbook for Strategic Foresight and Innovation  
<https://app.box.com/s/i1q85p829xm1ez0xl0r9mjp2ana2ov9r>

Systems Innovation Network Futures & Foresight for Systems Change Video Course and course transcription, <https://www.systemsinnovation.network/spaces/8415119/page>

UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence Foresight Manual  
[www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/global-centre-for-public-service-excellence/ForesightManual2018.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/global-centre-for-public-service-excellence/ForesightManual2018.html)

UNESCO Futures Literacy <https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-literacy>

# About the Authors



## **Gisèle Evrard**

Gisèle Evrard has extensive experience in the field of youth work, with a career spanning over 30 years, with roles as coordinator, trainer, moderator and facilitator, and has authored and co-authored studies, documentation, and reports on short and long-term events and activities. She has a particular interest in competence development processes, as well as strategic and systemic approaches to transformation and change. From 2017 to 2023, Gisèle worked for the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, where she coordinated the European Training Strategy and the development of training programmes to enhance the competences of youth workers across Europe. She has collaborated with numerous European institutions and international networks, including the Youth Partnership and the Council of Europe. Gisèle is also a qualified Gestalt therapist, offering support for personal and professional development. Her holistic approach integrates elements of emotional intelligence, stress management, transgenerational work and trauma healing.

**Contact:** [gisele@revripple.com](mailto:gisele@revripple.com)



## **Darko Marković**

Darko Marković is an experienced facilitator, trainer and systemic coach from Belgrade, Serbia. He has been involved in the youth work field, locally and internationally, for nearly 30 years. He has been contributing to various strategic processes related to youth work development and its recognition, including the European Academy on Youth Work. He is deeply curious about how systemic and long-lasting change happens and what leaders can do about it. These questions have brought him to different parts of the world. At present, he regularly supports leaders, organisations and larger systems in making the future-ready shifts. Currently, he is busy with writing a book about these experiences.

**Contact:** [darko@ininside.co.rs](mailto:darko@ininside.co.rs)

# About the Authors



## Özgehan Şenyuva

Özgehan Şenyuva has extensive experience in research projects and was the principal investigator for the FREE: Football Research in an Enlarged Europe (free-project.eu), a pioneer FP7 project that was completed in 2015. He was also part of the FP7 SAHWA project (Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract) (sahwa.eu), publishing numerous policy papers, reports and articles on Arab-Mediterranean Youth. He has published several research and opinion articles, book chapters and a book on youth work, research methodology and learning mobility. For more than two decades, Özgehan worked as a youth worker/trainer and he comes from the learning mobility field. He is a full professor of European Studies at Middle East Technical University, Turkey.

**Contact:** [senyuva@gmail.com](mailto:senyuva@gmail.com)



## Aleksandra Szymczyk

Aleksandra Szymczyk is a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, where her ethnographic research examines political engagement in a small town in north-central Poland at a time of heightened political divisions and perceived threats to democracy. In her previous role as a Research Associate at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at the Manchester Metropolitan University, she worked on several projects employing foresight methods to understand future trends and scenarios. This includes leading foresight exercises for the European Cohort Development Project to anticipate dynamics shaping child and youth well-being across Europe and designing the foresight exercise to identify potential future ethical challenges for Growing Up In Digital Europe (GUIDE). She also collaborated with the Royal Society of Arts on the report titled A Stitch in Time? Realising the value of futures and foresight, developing recommendations for organisations, policymakers, and society to think differently about the future.

**Contact:** [aleks.szymczyk@gmail.com](mailto:aleks.szymczyk@gmail.com)

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**Solidarity Corps**  
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1000 Ljubljana  
Phone: +386 (0) 1 430 47 47  
Web: [www.movit.si](http://www.movit.si)  
E-mail: [info@movit.si](mailto:info@movit.si)

## About this publication

The 'Futures of Youth Work' research report explores the evolving landscape of youth work in the context of emerging global challenges, including technological advancements, climate change, shifting demographics and changing societal values. The project aspires to 'envision' the European landscape of youth work in the year 2050 through the Foresight methodology of Horizon Scanning and aims to equip the youth work sector with the insights and strategies needed to navigate an uncertain future while maintaining its core mission of empowering young people.



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