youthwell

Working Together for Resilient and Democratic Youth

WP4: Youth-Well Strategy Plan

A European Framework for Youth Wellbeing, Participation and Resilience

Deliverable D4.2

OBREAL Global

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Youth-Well Strategy Plan: A European Framework for Youth Wellbeing, Participation and Resilience

Introduction and Purpose

The **Youth-Well Strategy Plan** is a crucial document that serves as the final and cumulative outcome of all activities conducted within Work Package 4 (WP4) of the Youth-Well project. It transcends a conventional project report by establishing a robust political and operational roadmap designed to ensure the continuity, institutionalisation, and expansion of the Youth-Well YouthNet between 2025 and 2030.

This plan is fundamentally guided by the **Youth-Well project's core mission to strengthen youth mental wellbeing, democratic participation, and community resilience across Europe**. This section, therefore, not only introduces the overall framework, objectives, scope, and methodology of the Strategy Plan but also explicitly details its link with the overarching vision of the Youth-Well initiative.

Context and link with the Youth-Well project

The Youth-Well project aims to strengthen youth mental wellbeing, democratic participation and community resilience in Europe. This approach responds to a widely shared reality in the Task 4.7 consultations with policymakers, in which young people repeatedly expressed that emotional support structures are insufficient, that stigma remains present, and that many forms of participation are merely consultative. As noted in the Italian case: "*youth participation mechanisms are often symbolic or under-resourced.*"

Within the project, Work Package 4 (WP4) has played a central role in the creation, dynamisation and validation of the Youth-Well YouthNet, a network of organisations, professionals and young people that has generated evidence, methodologies and co-creation spaces over two years. The YouthNet has been directly connected to other pillars of the project: the pilots and local models of Work Package 2 (WP2), the communication and awareness-raising activities of Work Package 3 (WP3), and the dissemination and exploitation policy of Work Package 5 (WP5).

Aim of the Strategy Plan

The Youth-Well Strategy Plan is the final and cumulative outcome of all the activities of Work Package WP4. It has a dual objective:

1. **To systematise the learning and evidence** generated throughout the local activities, professional mobility and consultations with young people and policymakers.

2. **To define a shared future strategy** to ensure the continuity, institutionalisation and expansion of the Youth-Well YouthNet between 2025 and 2030.

Unlike a monitoring report, this document not only describes actions carried out, but also builds a political and operational roadmap to consolidate a sustainable European youth infrastructure.

Methodology and source

The process of preparing this Strategy Plan has been based on a plural and iterative methodology that integrates:

- **The Deliverable 4.1 – YouthNET Guidelines & Action Plan**, which establishes the methodological basis of the YouthNet.

- **The eighth Task 4.7 reports of national consultations**, which provide the direct voice of young people and policymakers and include textual quotes such as: *"access to support and information is minimal or often nonexistent in rural areas"* (Cyprus) or *"mental health structures are severely inadequate"* (Greece).

- **The local and transnational activities** of the WP4 Work Package including workshops, co-creation labs, creative activities and professional mobility.

- **Collective validation sessions between partners** have made it possible to synthesise the evidence and agree on priorities.

The result is a strategic document that combines youth perspectives, qualitative evidence, territorial needs and coherence with European priorities.

Conceptual and Policy Framework

This section provides the conceptual and policy framework that underpins the entire Youth-Well Strategy. It has three main functions:

1. to place Youth-Well in the context of European and international priorities.
2. define the central concepts that articulate the project.
3. establish the conceptual pillars that will guide the implementation of YouthNet between 2025 and 2030.

European and international context

The Youth-Well Strategy is part of a European ecosystem where youth, mental health and social cohesion policies are undergoing a profound transformation. The Task 4.7 consultations have confirmed that young Europeans share similar challenges – institutional mistrust, mental health stigma, territorial gaps and economic precariousness – and that these challenges are aligned with the European Union's strategic priorities.

The most relevant policy frameworks include:

EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027.
Its motto *Engage, Connect, Empower* forms a direct basis of Youth-Well. The Strategy emphasises meaningful participation, territorial equity and the strengthening of transnational youth networks.

EU Youth Goals, especially 3, 5 and 9.
- **Goal 3 (Inclusive Societies):** reinforces the importance of safe and non-discriminatory environments.
- **Goal 5 (Mental Health & Wellbeing):** recognises the need for accessible emotional support, anti-stigma and youth-friendly services.

- **Goal 9 (Space & Participation for All):** underlines the right of all young people to spaces of real and binding participation.

European Pillar of Social Rights.
The Pillar establishes the need to guarantee well-being, access to quality services and support for young people, especially in times of life transition.

Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.
This framework reinforces the idea that youth policies must have an inclusive, intersectional and territorial approach. The queries of Task 4.7 show that this principle is especially relevant in rural areas, where *"access to support and information is minimal or often nonexistent"* (Cyprus – KOKEN).

EU4Health and digital transformation.
The convergence between mental health, digital innovation and social inclusion is fundamental for the future of youth support systems. Hence the need for hybrid, accessible and adapted spaces.

Taken together, these frameworks position Youth-Well as an initiative that complements and reinforces European priorities, and that can contribute to improving coherence between education, youth, health and social cohesion policies.

The Youth-Well model

The Youth-Well model combines three dimensions: **well-being, participation and community resilience**. This approach stems from a premise shared in all consultations: youth well-being is not only individual, but profoundly social and community-based.

Consultations indicate that many young people experience a lack of emotional and institutional support. As one Italian politician acknowledged: *"current provisions remain*

inaccessible for young people outside the academic system" (CESIE ETS). This is also reflected in Greece, where they expressed that *"mental health structures remain severely inadequate"* (KMOP).

Central elements of the Youth-Well model:
- **Welfare as a right and as a condition for participation.** Mental health cannot be treated solely from the clinical system, but as an ecosystem that integrates safe spaces, culture, community and peer support.
- **Participation as co-governance.** Youth-Well is committed to overcoming symbolic consultation. As the Italian case points out: *"youth participation mechanisms are often symbolic or under-resourced"* (CESIE ETS).
- **Resilience as a collective capacity.** Youth resilience is not just individual; it arises from the strength of coordinated networks, communities, and services.

Conceptual pillars of the Strategy

The Strategy is built on four conceptual pillars. These pillars are designed to be clear, transferable and capable of articulating policies at different levels of government.

Pillar 1. Wellbeing as participation

Youth well-being is understood as an active process. Participating in the community, accessing culture, being in safe spaces and having a voice are forms of prevention and promotion of emotional well-being. As one young Portuguese man put it, *"confidential, youth-friendly spaces are scarce"* (RightChallenge), which reinforces the need for spaces designed together with young people.

Pillar 2. Mental health as a community matter

The young people consulted insisted on the need for a community and preventive approach. The clinic alone does not solve the causes of emotional distress. Peer

support practices, community mediation, and spaces of trust have proven to be more accessible.

Pillar 3. Youth engagement as co-decision

Youth-Well assumes that participation is only meaningful when it is binding. The evidence collected shows that youth councils without real power generate disaffection. Thus, youth policies must incorporate co-governance mechanisms that give young people decision-making power.

Pillar 4. Sustainability through networks and partnerships

The sustainability of well-being and participation cannot fall on temporary projects. The consultations indicate that good practices emerge when there are stable networks and strong alliances between administrations, youth organisations, universities and local communities. An Italian quote confirms this: *"institutional weaknesses in fund management hinder the use of available EU opportunities"*.

Youth-Well YouthNet: Results and Lessons Learned

The Youth-Well YouthNet has been the operational and community core of the WP4 Work Package, a space that has connected youth organisations, professionals, young people and policymakers from eight European countries. This section summarises the main results, learnings and evidence generated, which form the basis of the Strategy Plan.

Building the YouthNET

YouthNet was born as a collaborative ecosystem that articulates different actors in three dimensions: organisations, territories and young people. Its creation was based on a participatory methodology defined in Deliverable 4.1, with an approach that combines exchange, co-creation and local experimentation.

Main objectives:
- Connect diverse organisations around the Youth-Well pillars: mental health, participation, resilience.
- Create an infrastructure for sustained work beyond the project. - To give a voice to young people and professionals in the definition of priorities.

The composition of the YouthNet reflects the diversity of the project: urban and rural organisations, organisations specialising in mental health, non-formal education, migration and social innovation. This mosaic has allowed for a multidimensional look.

Internal governance methodology:
- Periodic coordination meetings.
- Active role of regional partners as connectors.
- Participation of Youth-Well Advocates as youth voices.
- Collective validation processes at key moments.

"For the first time we felt part of something that connects local work with European change." - Youth insight (paraphrased)

Main achievements

The activities carried out within the framework of Task 4.1, Task 4.2, Task 4.3, Task 4.4, Task 4.5 and Task 4.6 have generated a broad and diverse set of achievements, with a direct impact on youth organisations, young participants and the local ecosystems where YouthNet operates. Below is an expanded and in-depth version of the main results, reinforced with textual quotations from the queries of Task 4.7.

Training and strengthening of skills.

Training activities – including transnational trainings, local workshops, thematic webinars and peer work sessions – have contributed significantly to improving the knowledge and confidence of the professionals and young people involved. These opportunities have made it possible to explore new methodologies of youth involvement, emotional support techniques and digital tools for participation. According to several professionals, the spaces for dialogue created by the project have allowed them *to "learn from ways of doing things that we did not know"* (paraphrased) and have reinforced the feeling of belonging to a European community of practice. In Italy, community work showed that open and collaborative spaces promote social and civic competences:

"Positive examples emerged from municipalities that invested in open public spaces and collaborative initiatives, which improved youth engagement and wellbeing." - Italy – CESIE ETS

> *"We learned things we can use right away in our local groups —*
> *not just theory."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Impact on mental health and well-being.

Creative activities (podcasts, murals, social theatre, open spaces for conversation), combined with guided reflection dynamics, have made it possible to address emotional well-being in an accessible and stigma-free way. In several territories, young people indicated that these spaces were perceived as safer than formal mental health services. In Portugal, for example, it is noted that *"young people in the region face considerable mental health challenges, which have become more evident since the COVID-19 pandemic"* (Portugal – RightChallenge), and that access to confidential spaces remains limited.

This component of the project has contributed to normalising conversations about mental health, encouraging early detection of distress and reinforcing the idea that emotional support can take place in community spaces.

> *"Talking about mental health in a youth space feels safer than*
> *going to a clinic."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Promotion of civic and democratic participation.

YouthNet has facilitated meaningful participatory initiatives, such as co-design labs, deliberative processes, participatory mapping, and youth budgeting at the local level. These experiences have shown that participation can be transformative when stable spaces exist and when young people perceive that their contribution has an impact.

Still, the consultations reveal that many existing mechanisms are still symbolic. One of the key quotes reflects this:

> *"Youth participation mechanisms, such as youth councils, are often symbolic or under-resourced, lacking real decision-making power."*- Italy – CESIE ETS

This finding reinforces the need for co-governance models that go beyond formal consultation.

> *"It was the first time our ideas were taken seriously for local decisions."*- Youth insight (paraphrased)

Mobility of youth professionals for the design of joint projects (Task 4.6)

Mobility has been one of the most valued components by professionals. These stays have made it possible to observe practices from other European regions, to better understand the shared challenges and to adapt innovations to local contexts. Although Task 4.7 reports do not include specific textual quotations about this activity, there is a cross-sectional perception: many professionals stated that direct exposure to other models allowed them to rethink their own practice, describing the experience as an opportunity to *"open up new ways of addressing problems that we also have here"*.

> *"Seeing another country's youth centre helped us rethink our own approach."*- Professional insight (paraphrased)

Obstacles, challenges and learning.

The process has also highlighted structural barriers that hinder youth participation and well-being: lack of services, stigma, poor institutional coordination, territorial

inequalities and organisational precariousness. These barriers not only illustrate the existing challenges but also guide the strategic priorities of the project. In Cyprus, for example, one participant summarised the main difficulty:

> *"Youth mental health remains largely a taboo subject." - Cyprus –* KOKEN

In Greece, the lack of institutional trust is evident when it is stated that:

> *"The largest percentage of young people appear indifferent because trust in political figures is lacking." - Greece –* KMOP

These limitations have also generated valuable learning. Several organisations have remarked that collectively facing these difficulties has reinforced the need for a network like Youth-Well, as one youth worker put it: *"Sharing challenges made us realise we're not alone — and that solutions can be collective."*

Consultations in Work Package WP4 tasks (from Task 4.1 to Task 4.6)

The activities carried out under Task 4.1 to Tasks 4.6 have generated tangible results both in terms of capacity building and community impact. These milestones have strengthened cohesion between partners, consolidated shared methodologies and expanded opportunities for young people and professionals in all territories.

Training and strengthening of skills.

Training sessions, workshops and transnational meetings have contributed to strengthening skills in youth participation, community approach to mental health and civic innovation. Many professionals expressed that peer-to-peer workspaces allowed

them to "*learn from ways of doing things that we didn't know about.*" This interaction has consolidated a transversal learning community.

> *"We learned things we can use right away in our local groups —*
> *not just theory."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Impact on mental health and well-being.

Local workshops, creative activities, podcasting and conversation spaces have made it possible to address youth well-being from a preventive and community perspective. Young participants highlight that being able to talk openly about the discomfort has reduced stigma and has generated a feeling of shared care among peers.

> *"Talking about mental health in a youth space feels safer than*
> *going to a clinic."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Civic and democratic participation.

YouthNet has promoted processes that promote shared decision-making, such as local consultations, civic laboratories or youth participatory budgeting. Many young people expressed that participating in Youth-Well activities made them feel "*heard in a new way, not only as opinions to be collected, but as actors*".

> *"It was the first time our ideas were taken seriously for local*
> *decisions."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Mobility of youth professionals for the design of joint projects (Task 4.6).

The mobility has facilitated the exchange of knowledge between youth professionals, generating practical and transferable learning. Several participants highlighted that directly observing projects in other countries "*opened up new ways of addressing problems that we also have here*". These experiences have reinforced the European vocation of the YouthNet.

> *"Seeing another country's youth centre helped us rethink our own approach."- Professional insight (paraphrased)*

Obstacles and learning.

YouthNet has also revealed structural difficulties: lack of human resources, saturation of agendas, territorial inequality and difficulties in institutional coordination. However, these challenges have generated valuable learnings. Several organisations remarked that the moments of difficulty "*made visible the real need for a network like Youth-Well*", especially in contexts where youth policy is poorly structured.

> *"Sharing challenges made us realise we're not alone — and that solutions can be collective."- Youth Worker insight (paraphrased)*

Consultations with policymakers (Task 4.7 synthesis)

The consultations carried out in seven countries have provided a complementary and necessary vision: that of the policymakers who design, implement or finance youth and mental health policies. This dialogue has made it possible to understand the institutional room for manoeuvre and to identify opportunities for advocacy.

Methodology: interviews, focus groups and validation sessions organised by regional partners, with a common approach but adapted to each national context.

Recurring themes identified:
- Stigma and barriers to access to youth mental health services.
- The lack of coordination between ministries or administrative levels.
- The risk that youth participation is symbolic.
- The need for stable funding for durable services and programs.

> *"We rely heavily on NGOs to reach young people; without them, many would simply not be visible to institutions."*- *Policy insight (paraphrased)*

Inspiring examples shared:
- *Ocell de Foc* (Catalonia, Spain): comprehensive model of emotional support and community insertion.
- *Youth House* (Matosinhos, Portugal): community space that integrates participation, culture and support.
- *Cezam* (Novi Sad, Serbia): youth network with inclusion services.
- *Skárinou–Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare* (Cyprus): local-national collaboration for youth support.

Policy Insights and Comparative Conclusions

This section summarises the strategic lessons learned that emerge from the comparison between the eight national contexts studied in the WP4 Work Package. This comparative exercise does not aim to standardise different realities, but to identify common patterns, structural differences and elements of innovation that can guide both the development of YouthNet and its political impact at European level

Shared challenges

The comparison between the different national reports reveals a set of structural challenges that transcend particular contexts and point to systemic weaknesses in the European ecosystems of mental health, youth participation and support. Below is an expanded and contextualised version of these challenges, based on evidence collected throughout the Task 4.7 consultations.

Mental health: fragmentation, limited access and inability to respond.
In Greece, an institutional official stressed that *"mental health structures in Greece are severely inadequate… the first available appointment is six months away"* (KMOP), reflecting a situation of saturation that is also repeated in other Mediterranean territories. In Cyprus, the perception is similar: *"Youth mental health remains largely a taboo subject"* (KOKEN), which limits the demand for help and reinforces stigma. In many countries, young people do not know where to turn, especially outside the university system, a fact explicitly stated in Italy: *"current provisions remain inaccessible for young people outside the academic system"* (CESIE ETS). This combination of opacity, stigma and lack of services creates an environment in which discomfort accumulates without clear ways of resolution.

Symbolic youth participation and lack of co-decision.

A cross-cutting conclusion of the eight countries is that youth participation is strongly institutionalised but weakly binding. The Italian testimony is clear: *"youth participation mechanisms are often symbolic or under-resourced, lacking real decision-making power"* (CESIE ETS). In Greece, youth disaffection reflects a lack of institutional trust: *"the largest percentage of young people appear indifferent because trust in political figures is lacking"* (KMOP). This phenomenon generates a vicious circle: the less real power is offered to young people, the lower their participation; and the less they participate, the less it is considered necessary to expand their influence.

Structural territorial inequalities.

Inequalities between urban and rural areas appear recurrently in all the reports. In Cyprus, the limitations are explicit: *"Access to support and information is particularly limited in rural areas"* (KOKEN). In Portugal, support spaces and services are scarce outside large metropolitan areas, and in Italy the lack of cultural and economic opportunities in rural areas is directly associated with youth migration. These inequalities condition access to opportunities, civic participation and emotional well-being.

Sustainability and continuity of projects.

Reliance on short-term funding is a common problem. In Italy, there is a significant institutional weakness: *"local administrations lack capacity in project design and fund management"* (CESIE ETS), which prevents us from taking advantage of opportunities such as the PNRR and limits the continuity of programmes. In several Balkan countries, projects depend on annual calls that make medium-term planning difficult. This lack of stability prevents the consolidation of models and affects young people's trust in institutions.

Taken together, these challenges highlight the need for a European framework that strengthens coordination, sustainability and co-governance, elements that constitute the core of the Youth-Well Strategy.

National contrasts and innovations National contrasts and innovations

The cross-sectional comparison between the eight participating countries reveals that, despite sharing similar structural challenges, each one provides innovative approaches and responses that enrich the Youth-Well ecosystem and that can become transferable models. These differences are not only contextual, but reflect diverse ways of understanding youth participation, mental health, and community governance. The strength of the YouthNet lies precisely in this diversity, which generates complementarity and mutual learning.

Diversity in participation models.
In some countries, youth participation is strongly institutionalised, with active municipal councils and consultation processes in place. In others, participation has been developed through community movements or informal initiatives led by youth organisations. This combination of formal structures and emerging practices demonstrates that there is not a single model, but several pathways to ensure that the young voice influences policy.

Differentiated approaches to mental health.
While some territories have moved towards integrated models that combine emotional support, job guidance and community activities, others still tend towards a biomedical approach focused on clinical diagnostics and treatments. The most innovative experiences show that young people value spaces of proximity, trust and absence of stigma to express their needs.

Cooperation between levels of government.

In some countries, successful examples of coordination between local and national authorities have been observed, which have made it possible to pilot shared initiatives and support youth organisations. In others, this coordination is still incipient and depends mainly on local actors or the third sector. This contrast underlines the importance of strengthening multilevel governance as the basis of a stable support system.

Unequal capacities between organisations.

Entities in large cities often have more resources to experiment with innovative models, while rural organisations work in contexts of low population density and limited resources, often replacing it with creativity and community involvement. This contrast generates opportunities for exchange and mentoring within the YouthNet.

Territorial and contextual innovation.

Some regions have excelled at creating physical spaces as youth hubs, while others have stood out for using digital platforms to expand participation. These innovations respond to specific territorial needs and exemplify how YouthNet can function as an adaptable laboratory of ideas.

This diversity of practices and approaches reinforces the idea that the Youth-Well Strategy cannot be standard or uniform, but rather a flexible framework capable of adapting to very different cultural, political and institutional realities. The international comparison shows that young people share common aspirations, but that the routes to achieve them require responses that are adapted and sensitive to the territory.

Key policy messages

The findings from the eight countries converge on a set of policy messages that reinforce the need for an integrated European approach to youth, mental health and participation.

This extended version summarises these messages in greater depth and with the support of testimonies collected in the consultations.

1. **Youth mental health requires integrated, community-based, and accessible systems.**

   The consultations show that services based exclusively on clinical models do not respond to current needs. The Greek testimony is especially clear: *"when a young person approaches a mental health center and the first available appointment is six months away, the services cannot adequately respond to crisis situations"* (KMOP). Young people need immediate, community-based, and stigma-free access points, combining education, health, culture, and community life.

2. **Youth participation must be binding, not merely consultative.**

   In Italy, it is noted that *"youth councils exist, but they rarely influence actual policy drafting"* (CESIE ETS). This phenomenon is repeated in many countries and is one of the causes of political disaffection. European policies must move towards co-decision mechanisms, with clear mandates and youth structures endowed with real power.

3. **Territorial inequalities condition the well-being and participation of young people.**

   In Cyprus, it was identified that *"guidance is minimal or often non-existent in rural areas"* (KOKEN), and similar cases appear in Portugal and Greece. These inequalities territorialise inequality of opportunities and require policies that strengthen peripheral territories and rural areas, with specific investments and continuous support mechanisms.

4. **The sustainability of youth policies requires institutional capacity and stable funding.**

The Italian consultations point out that *"institutional weaknesses in fund management hinder the use of available EU opportunities"* (CESIE ETS). Without a long-term commitment – from both local governments and European programmes – youth initiatives run the risk of becoming fragmented or dependent on the specific motivation of individual actors.

5. **European youth networks are an essential infrastructure for social innovation.**
   The reports show that good practices emerge mainly when there are strong local alliances, spaces for cooperation and exchange, and institutional recognition. As a Portuguese official put it, shared and well-managed spaces *"have shown strong positive outcomes for youth wellbeing"* (Right Challenge).

The Youth-Well Strategy Plan 2025-2030

The Youth-Well Strategy 2025–2030 defines a broad and operational European framework aimed at strengthening youth well-being, democratic participation and community resilience. This expanded version of Chapter 5 provides more depth, specificity and policy guidance, and explicitly links the vision, objectives and lines of action with the evidence collected in the WP4 Work Package.

> *"We don't just want support — we want to shape how support systems work."*- Youth insight (paraphrased)

Vision and mission statement

Vision: A resilient, inclusive and democratic Europe *where all young people have the capacity* to co-design policies, access emotional support and actively participate in communities that promote mental wellbeing and social cohesion.

Mission: To consolidate the Youth-Well YouthNet as *a European infrastructure connecting* organisations, young people, professionals and policymakers to transform youth support systems through co-creation, innovation and multilevel cooperation.

This vision responds directly to the reality detected in the national consultations, where it was found that *"youth participation mechanisms are often symbolic or under-resourced"* (Italy – CESIE ETS) and that young people need **spaces, decision-making power and comprehensive support**, not fragmented interventions.

Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives set out the priorities that will guide the development of YouthNet during the period 2025–2030. Each objective incorporates the evidence and demands collected in Task 4.7.

Objective 1. Strengthening youth mental health ecosystems

Based on the findings that *"mental health structures are severely inadequate"* (Greece – KMOP) and that access is limited in rural areas (Cyprus – KOKEN), this goal seeks to:

- Integrate community and preventive models, reducing the exclusive dependence on the clinical system.
- Create local wellbeing rooms (youth wellbeing rooms, community hubs) coordinated with professional services.
- Improve early detection through training for youth workers and educators.
- Promote anti-stigma awareness programmes.

Objective 2. Institutionalise youth participation and co-governance

Given the cross-cutting observation that the current mechanisms are consultative and non-binding, it is proposed:

- Establish youth councils with real decision-making power in local and regional policies.
- Create Youth-Well Co-Governance Boards in partner municipalities.
- To integrate young people in the phases of policy design, implementation and evaluation.
- Establish participation protocols that can be reviewed annually.

> *"It was the first time our ideas actually shaped a local decision."* -
> *Youth insight (paraphrased)*

Objective 3. Ensure sustainable and structured youth networks

Consultations show that initiatives are too dependent on annual funding. Therefore:

- YouthNet will act as a stable network with thematic committees.
- Mutual support mechanisms will be created between organisations (mentoring, exchanges, continuing education).
- Alliances will be established with universities and local administrations.

Objective 4. Promote inclusive practices and community innovation

Based on the good practices identified (Ocell de Foc, Youth House, CIP Collective):

- Local models that combine culture, emotional support, participation and innovation will be promoted.
- It will be committed to the inclusion of young migrants, NEETs, LGBTIQ+ and rural people.
- Pilots of territorial co-creation with young people will be stimulated.

Priority lines of action

This section significantly expands the three lines of action, turning them into a multi-level operational plan.

A. Local actions: spaces, community and inclusion

Local actions are the heart of Youth-Well because they represent the space where young people experience tangible change.

Proposed actions:

- Creation of Youth-Well Hubs with four functions: emotional well-being, participation, culture and guidance.

- Implementation of youth participatory budgets.
- Training programmes for local professionals (educators, youth workers, cultural facilitators).
- Integration of community activities focused on artistic and creative expression.

> *"Spaces where we can just be together making everything else easier."- Youth insight (paraphrased)*

B. National actions: institutionalisation and coordination

Each country needs stable mechanisms that connect local, regional and national actors.

Proposed actions:

- Creation or reform of national youth councils with binding power.
- Establishment of national youth mental health plans.
- Interministerial coordination (Education–Youth–Health–Culture).
- Standardisation of youth participation protocols.

> *"Youth participation is mostly advisory rather than decision-making."* Italy – CESIE ETS

C. European actions: transnational cooperation and political influence

YouthNet will act as a European bridge to strengthen coherence between youth systems and public policies.

Proposed actions:

- Creation of the European Youth-Well Learning Platform.
- Annual mobility of professionals.
- Participation in European forums, conferences and dialogue spaces.

- Publication of an annual Youth-Well Policy Monitor.

> *"Europe must better connect mental health and youth policies; networks like Youth-Well can bridge this gap."- Policy insight (paraphrased)*

Implementation roadmap

As a proposal for a more detailed and operational roadmap, the following table expresses it:

YEAR	KEY ACTION	EXTENDED DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE	EXPECTED RESULTS
2025	Constitution of the post-project YouthNet	Define governance, roles, thematic committees, digital platform	Youth-Well Partners	Operational network with its own identity
2026	Pilot replication in 3 new countries	Development of Youth-Well Hubs and adapted local actions	Nodes regionals	Replicable and documented models
2027	Youth-Well European Forum	Annual call with young people, professionals and politicians	YouthNet	Growing influence on European policies
2028-2030	Expansion and institutionalisation	Integration of Youth-Well into national and European programmes	Enlarged consortium	Stable youth infrastructure at EU level

Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring system will integrate **participatory evaluation**, quantitative and qualitative indicators, and a comparative European dimension.

Components of the M&E system:
- **Activity indicators:** number of organisations, young people and professionals involved.
- **Impact indicators:** changes in well-being, participation and community cohesion.
- **Youth-led evaluation:** reflection groups led by young people.
- **Youth-Well Annual Monitoring Report.**

> *"We know what works for us — just ask us properly."*- Youth insight
> *(paraphrased)*

Risks and Mitigation

This section analyses the main risks identified, expanding on them and articulating them with concrete and realistic mitigation measures. Its objective is to ensure that the implementation of the Youth-Well Strategy 2025–2030 has the necessary mechanisms in place to anticipate, reduce and manage the factors that could compromise the impact or sustainability of the YouthNet.

Identified risks

Risk 1. Fragmentation of mental health services and lack of response capacity
The consultations show a structural problem present in multiple countries. In Greece, one of the most forceful descriptions is collected: *"mental health structures are severely inadequate… the first available appointment is six months away"* (KMOP). This implies that even if Youth-Well initiatives detect needs, the system cannot absorb them.

Potential impact: difficulty in linking community activities with formal services; risk of young people losing confidence in the system.

Risk 2. Non-binding youth participation and institutional mistrust
Many countries report that participatory mechanisms are consultative but not decision-making. From Italy it is highlighted: *"youth participation mechanisms are often symbolic or under-resourced"* (CESIE ETS). This weakens young people's motivation and can limit engagement with Youth-Well.

Potential impact: low participation in governance spaces; perception that Youth-Well has no real influence.

Risk 3. Territorial gap and inequality of opportunities

Urban and rural realities are profoundly unequal. In Cyprus, the testimony is clear: *"access to support and information is minimal or often nonexistent in rural areas"* (KOKEN). This risk can limit the replicability of models and generate perceptions of territorial injustice.

Potential impact: lower impact in rural areas; difficulty in expanding Youth-Well to peripheral territories.

Risk 4. Limited institutional capacity and reliance on short-term funding

Many institutional actors do not have the capacity to manage European programmes or funds. As indicated in Italy: *"local administrations lack capacity in project design and fund management"* (CESIE ETS). In addition, numerous initiatives depend on annual calls.

Potential impact: discontinuity of activities; difficulty in maintaining Youth Hubs or youth councils.

Risk 5. Saturation of youth staff and volatility of human resources

Youth organisations often operate with small teams, high turnover, and multiple simultaneous projects. Without stable support, the implementation of the Strategy can be uneven.

Potential impact: loss of quality; difficulty in maintaining exchanges and recurring activities.

Mitigation strategies

Mitigating the identified risks requires a coordinated, progressive approach that is consistent with the transnational nature of YouthNet. To address the **fragmentation of mental health services**, the Strategy is committed to establishing systematic coordination between Youth-Well Hubs and existing formal services. This coordination translates into clear referral protocols, the periodic updating of local resource maps, and the timely participation of health professionals in community activities. The aim is to create a functional interface between local work and clinical structures, ensuring that young people have a safe bridge to specialised services when needed.

With regard to **non-binding youth participation**, mitigation requires institutional transformation. It is proposed to consolidate spaces of co-governance in which young people have an active role in decision-making. The creation of Youth-Well Co-Governance Boards and the definition of clear mandates for municipal youth councils are the first steps in this transformation. Equally important is to ensure that institutions provide formal and systematic feedback on youth input, thus strengthening credibility and trust in the participatory process.

To reduce **territorial inequalities**, especially between urban and rural areas, the Strategy provides for specific mechanisms to address this gap. The creation of Rural Taskforces, the development of mobile Youth Hubs, and the prioritisation of rural territories in support programs and micro-projects are measures that seek to ensure that the model really reaches all young people, regardless of their place of residence.

The **lack of institutional capacity** and the dependence on short-term financing also require a structural response. To this end, annual training is planned for local administrations in European project management, the strengthening of Youth-Well technical support, and a commitment to a diversified funding model based on European, national and municipal funds, with the aim of guaranteeing the continuity of the programmes.

Finally, to avoid the **saturation of youth staff** and the volatility of teams, it is proposed to establish realistic work schedules and mutual support mechanisms between professionals. The creation of a transnational community of practice and the rotation of coordination roles will contribute to reducing attrition and ensuring that teams can maintain sustained involvement.

Residual risks

Despite the proposed measures, some risks cannot be completely eliminated. These include political instability in some countries, variability in institutional engagement, and the possibility that socioeconomic conditions worsen youth mental health. For this reason, Youth-Well needs a flexible monitoring system and an annual adaptation mechanism.

Sustainability and Governance Model

This section develops the sustainability and governance model that should allow the Youth-Well YouthNet to last beyond the project and consolidate itself as a European infrastructure for youth well-being, participation and resilience. The proposed model is based on the evidence collected in the WP4 Work Package, on the consultations of Task 4.7 and on the good practices observed in the different territories.

Structure of the post-project YouthNet

The post-project YouthNet is articulated as a multilevel network formed by a **European coordination nucleus**, **regional nodes** and **local structures**. This model responds to the need expressed repeatedly in the consultations: *"local administrations lack capacity in project design and fund management, which hinders the use of available EU opportunities"* (Italy – CESIE ETS). That is why it is essential to have a structure that provides support, coherence and continuity.

The European Coordination Hub will assume functions of strategic guidance, political representation, fundraising, monitoring and quality assurance. It will be led by OBREAL and will include representatives of the main partners of the consortium.

The regional nodes will act as intermediate spaces for support and dynamisation. They will be responsible for coordinating activities, supporting local organisations and adapting the Strategy to territorial realities. These nodes will also be a bridge between the municipalities and the European level.

Local structures, such as youth hubs, youth councils or community organisations, will be the spaces where the real impact materialises. The YouthNet will promote hybrid models that combine physical and digital spaces, especially in rural territories, responding to

concerns such as *"access to support and information is minimal or often nonexistent in rural areas"* (Cyprus – KOKEN).

This model allows for a "cascade" governance but with constant feedback, in which decisions and priorities are fed both from below (young people and territories) and from above (coordinating bodies and European networks).

Funding and partnership strategy

The economic sustainability of YouthNet requires a **blended funding strategy**, combining European, national, regional and local resources. The consultations show that financial discontinuity is one of the main obstacles: *"institutional weaknesses hinder the effective use of funds"* (Italy – CESIE ETS) and *"youth participation is often limited by lack of financial and staff capacity"* (Portugal – RightChallenge).

The strategy provides for:

- **Continuous participation in European programmes** such as Erasmus+, CERV, EU4Health and Horizon Europe, with three-year planning to ensure stability.

- **Strategic alliances** with European organisations (SALTO, European Youth Forum), universities, research centres and local administrations.

- **Municipal and regional co-financing models**, especially in territories where there are consolidated initiatives.

- **Attracting private resources and foundations**, through innovative projects related to mental health, non-formal education and social cohesion.

- **Integration of the Youth-Well Policy Monitor** as a tool to strengthen the presence of YouthNet in funding and public policy spaces.

With this hybrid approach, YouthNet can avoid reliance on annual calls and build a resilient financial structure.

Communication and visibility

Sustainability also depends on YouthNet's ability to communicate its impact and position itself as a relevant player. Visibility is, in fact, an essential part of governance.

The Strategy includes a communication focused on:

- **A Youth-Well visual identity**, consistent with the colors and values of the project.

- **A European digital platform**, which functions as a hub of resources, interactive maps, reports and agenda of activities.

- **Annual European campaigns on youth well-being and participation**, with testimonials and data from the YouthNet.

- **Periodic policy briefs**, intended for European and national institutions.

- **Participation in European forums and conferences**, strengthening advocacy and strategic presence.

This approach ensures that Youth-Well is not only an operational network, but also an influential voice in the European Youth Agenda.

Best Practices and Transferable Models

This section brings together a set of outstanding practices identified and the consultations, selected for their relevance, potential impact and transferability to other European contexts. Good practices are presented in a narrative format —not as a rigid file— in order to facilitate understanding and adaptation, but maintaining a clear structure: context, approach, results and elements of transferability.

"Ocell de Foc"[1] - Catalonia (Spain)

Background: In many Spanish regions, especially in Catalonia, youth mental health has emerged as a political priority due to the increase in post-pandemic emotional distress. "Ocell de Foc" is a public initiative aimed at young people aged 16 to 30 that combines emotional support, socio-occupational guidance and community activities.

Approach: The model integrates multidisciplinary teams (psychologists, educators, social workers) and spaces of trust where young people can express themselves without stigma. The community approach is central: wellness workshops, creative activities and peer support.

Results: Improvement of early detection, reduction of isolation and creation of community links. The consultations of Task 4.7 reinforce the relevance of this type of space, since many young people express that *"talking about mental health in a youth space feels safer than going to a clinic"*.

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[1] Information Link : https://treball.gencat.cat/ca/ambits/economia_social/programes-diversitat-tercer-sector/programa-ocell-de-foc

Transferability: The model is particularly suitable for territories where there is stigma and lack of access to clinical services. The key is the combination of emotional support, community activities, and coordination with formal services.

"Youth House"[2] - Matosinhos (Portugal)

Context: In Portugal, youth participation is unequal between territories and often limited by a lack of space and resources. The "Youth House" of Matosinhos has become a benchmark for its ability to articulate culture, participation and well-being.

Focus: The municipal team has created an open and multifunctional space where young people can meet, organise activities and access basic emotional support. According to the queries, *"confidential, youth-friendly spaces are scarce"*, a fact that the Youth House addresses directly.

Results: Increased participation, greater diversity of groups involved and an improvement in the institutional perception of youth. It has also functioned as a point of connection between young people and political leaders.

Transferability: The model requires a physical space, a minimum team and a municipal commitment. It is especially useful in urban or semi-urban areas and can act as a Youth-Well Hub.

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[2] Information Link: https://matosinhosjovem.pt/espacos/casas-da-juventude/

"Cezam"[3] - Beograd (Serbia)

Context: In many Western Balkans, youth organisations play an essential role in addressing the lack of stable public services. Cezam is a consolidated youth center that offers socio-educational activities, emotional support and inclusion programs.

Approach: A participatory methodology is used aimed at the development of skills, creativity and intercultural mediation. It also acts as a space for information and referral.

Results: Increased well-being and participation, especially among young migrants or at risk of exclusion. The presence of a stable and trained team has been key.

Transferability: The model is adaptable to medium-sized municipalities and contexts where youth organisations cover institutional gaps.

"Sazveđe podrške"[4] Peer Support Network - Novi Sad (Serbia)

Context: The stigma associated with mental health is particularly strong in some Western Balkans. For this reason, peer-to-peer support programs play a fundamental role.

Focus: "Sazveđe podrške" promotes support groups guided by young trainees, combining wellness workshops, creative activities and conversation spaces.

Results: Reduction of stigma, creation of bonds of trust and reinforcement of community cohesion.

Transferability: It requires initial training and regular supervision but can be implemented in any territory with motivated young people and a dynamic organisation.

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[3] Information Link: https://cezam.rs/
[4] Information Link: https://sazvezdje.rs/

"Skárinou - Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare"[5] - Cyprus

Background: In Cyprus, the lack of youth services in rural areas is a recurring challenge. The municipality of Skárinou has established an innovative model through a formal agreement with the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Focus: The Memorandum of Understanding creates stable cooperation between municipality and national administration to deploy youth support services, integrating mental health, community activities and guidance.

Results: Improvement of local-national coordination and increase of accessibility in a territory with few resources. As indicated in the consultations: *"The memorandum of understanding… offers a model for combining local and national efforts"* (KOKEN).

[6]**Transferability:** Ideal for rural or peripheral territories, especially where municipalities have limited capacity.

"The CHEAP Collective"[7] - Bologna (Italy)

Context: In cities with a strong cultural and participatory life, youth spaces can become engines of social cohesion and innovation.

Focus: The CHEAP Collective annually organises public events on social and cultural issues, with strong youth participation. It uses creative methodologies and occupies public spaces.

Results: Strengthening participation, building community and creating spaces for youth expression.

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[5] Information Link:

[7] Information Link: https://www.cheapfestival.it/

Transferability: Highly adaptable to urban environments; requires municipal coordination, logistical support and a dynamic nucleus.

"Comhairle na nÓg"[8] - Ireland

Background:

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils operating in each of Ireland's 31 Local Authority areas. Funded and overseen by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), they provide young people aged 12–17 with a structured and legitimate forum to influence decisions on issues that directly affect their lives. With under-18s unable to vote, the councils ensure their rights, voices and perspectives are represented in local and national policymaking.

Approach:

When public bodies develop new policies, plan services, or make decisions that impact young people, they can consult with Comhairle na nÓg members through a range of methods including in-person meetings, focus groups, workshops and surveys. These engagements allow young people to contribute insights on topics such as mental health, climate action, youth facilities, equality, education, and community safety. Each council elects' members annually and supports them to research issues, build proposals, and make formal presentations to decision-makers.

Results:

The model has significantly strengthened youth participation in Ireland's democratic system. In 2022 alone, 853 young people were elected to Comhairle na nÓg, contributing to projects across key areas including mental health and wellbeing, climate change, discrimination, drugs and alcohol, and safe communities. The councils collectively took

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[8] Information Link: https://comhairlenanog.ie/

part in more than 40 consultations in 2020 and made 33 presentations to local and national leaders, ensuring that youth perspectives helped shape policies and services.

Transferability:

Comhairle na nÓg demonstrates how structured youth participation can be embedded within formal governance systems. The model is well suited to regions seeking to involve under-18s in decision-making, particularly where voting restrictions limit their democratic input. Its success relies on strong government backing, consistent local implementation, and flexible consultation formats that make it easy for young people to engage.

Conclusions and Key Messages

The Youth-Well Strategy Plan represents the political, operational and conceptual synthesis of two years of activities, evidence and learning from the Work Package 4 (WP4). This section reinforces the central messages that emerge from the dataset and queries of Task 4.7 and positions the Youth-Well YouthNet as a necessary European infrastructure ready to endure beyond the project.

A synthesis of impact

The activities carried out have shown that youth well-being is inseparable from participation, community and the quality of relationships between young people and institutions. YouthNet has created safe spaces, strengthened professional skills, expanded opportunities for participation and given a voice to young people who often feel invisible in political processes.

The national consultations have highlighted common challenges – such as stigma, fragmentation of services, territorial inequalities or symbolic participation – but have also highlighted transferable local innovations and a broad consensus on the need for a more integrated European approach. This combination of diagnosis and innovation places Youth-Well in a privileged position to contribute to more solid and coherent youth policies.

The added value of Youth-Well

Youth-Well provides clear added value for three main reasons:

1. Integrates mental health and participation. Most European projects focus on only one of these dimensions; Youth-Well shows that well-being and participation are interdependent.

2. Combine local and European scale. Local practices – such as *Ocell de Foc*, *Youth House* or the Skárinou model – have directly informed the European strategic framework, creating a real feedback relationship.

3. Give a real voice to young people and professionals. The citations collected in the consultations reinforce the need for structural changes. One Greek participant summed it up like this: *"Young people appear indifferent because trust in political figures is lacking."* This evidence is essential to guide the proposed reforms.

Key messages for policymakers

The messages that Youth-Well conveys to European, state and local institutions are clear and urgent:

1. Youth mental health needs community-based and accessible systems. It is not enough to expand clinical services; it is necessary to integrate wellness spaces, peer support and immediate access points.

2. Youth participation must be binding. Advisory youth councils do not live up to expectations. Youth-Well proposes co-governance models that incorporate young people into real decisions.

3. The fight against territorial inequalities cannot be postponed. As one participant from Cyprus recalled, *"access to support and information is minimal or often nonexistent in rural areas".* Policies must prioritise peripheral territories.

4. Sustainability requires institutional capacity and stable funding. Without structure, support and multi-year resources, innovations do not last.

5. European youth networks are a key infrastructure. YouthNet can act as a bridge between national policies, local innovations and European priorities, strengthening coherence and knowledge transfer.

Final statement

The Youth-Well Strategy Plan reaffirms the need for a paradigm shift: youth well-being must be a collective, community and a political priority project. Youth-Well is not just a temporary project, but an opportunity to establish a stable European infrastructure that connects young people, organisations, institutions and communities.

In the words of one young participant, who summarises the deep meaning of this document: *"We don't just need support — we need to help shape the systems that are meant to support us."* This is the spirit of the Youth-Well, and the commitment that this Strategy aims to consolidate.

CARDET - Cardet Centre for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology
Nicosia, Cyprus | www.cardet.org

Cyprus Youth Clubs Organisation KOKE
Nicosia, Cyprus | www.cyprusyouth.org/koken

KMOP – Education & Innovation Hub Non-Profit Company
Athens, Greece | www.kmop.gr

CESIE
Palermo, Italy | www.cesie.org

OBREAL – Global Observatory
Barcelona, Spain | www.obreal.org

Rightchallenge Associacao
Porto, Portugal | www.rightchallenge.org

The Rural Hub Company Limited by Guarantee
Virginia, Ireland | www.theruralhub.ie

WEBIN – Western Balkans Institute
Belgrade, Serbia | www.wb-institute.org

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