

## **National research about Youth Work System and Youth Workers' Education: Estonia 2021**

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### **Introduction**

The aim of this research is to map out youth work system and the framework of youth work education in Estonia in order to compare the state of youth work with the partner countries participating in the Erasmus+ KA2 project "Eastern Partnership Youth Workers Academy (EaP YWA)", and to have it as the basis for developing the youth workers' training programme within the project.

This report covers the short description of the current state of youth work in Estonia, including the legal framework, occupational standard and general recognition of youth work(ers). The authors have chosen to give only rather short descriptions as plenty of materials are already available in English regarding Estonian youth work - some reading suggestions are given in the end additionally to the references, if the reader wants to know more. This report also explains the history and current state of youth work education in

Estonia, gives a glimpse of youth workers' training programs and how they are related to ETS Competence Model for Youth Workers and their learning needs, etc. Some discussion about the development of youth work as a profession in Estonia, is also presented. According to Kiilakoski (2018) Estonia belongs to the countries with strong practice architecture of youth work, which includes: legislation, competency description and quality assurance, formal educational and non-formal training possibilities for youth workers, identified and sustainable career paths of youth workers and established association of youth workers. Most of these aspects are touched upon in this report.

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Special thanks to **Maris Uusküla** (board member of the Association of Estonian Youth Workers), who conducted a survey among the members of the Association of Estonian Youth Workers in 2020 and which results have been used in this paper in the section of learning needs of youth workers.

Special thanks to **Kristi Jüristo** who helped to carry out the focus groups interviews and **Salome Šakarašvili** who made the transcripts of the interviews within the Erasmus+ KA2 project "Strengthening the Professionalisation of Youth Work through the Codes of Ethical Practice" (CODE) - the data of which is also used for this report.

## **Research questions, methods and ethical considerations**

Question/Topic	Research methods
Legal framework & Recognition of Youth Work in the country.	Desk-research, Comparative document analysis
Mapping the Youth Worker Education	Desk-research
ETS Competencies: how does it match with the national competency framework and local reality & needs.	Comparative document analysis
Learning needs and professional development of youth workers	Desk-research, Survey, Focus-groups interviews
Tendencies in youth work development in the country	Desk-research, comparative document analysis

This research has been conducted using mixed methods approach, which is a type of research design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined to answer complex social research questions, especially applicable in applied research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). In this research complex questions are manifested in the topics chosen by the project partners to find out more about rather different situations of youth work in partner countries, needs of youth workers and (new) possibilities for youth work training. Therefore mixed methods are justified also in data collection and analysis:

- desk-research for the general context and background information;
- comparative content analysis of the documents 1) Estonian youth workers' professional standard, ETS Competence model for youth workers and 2) Estonian youth field/youth work development plans to see the goals and changing trends of youth work in Estonia;
- semi-structured focus group interviews (3) were used for secondary thematic analysis to elaborate on the needs and choices of professional development of youth workers (data collected by Estonian Association of Youth Workers within the project "Strengthening the Professionalisation of Youth Work through the Codes of Ethical Practice (CODE) in autumn 2020);
- survey (N=37), carried out by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers at the end of 2020 to find out the needs of training and opinions on the role of professional organisation.

Ethical considerations: Code of Ethics of Estonian Scientists (2002) and Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) were strictly followed by researchers at all stages.

### **1. Historical context, legal framework and status of youth work in Estonia**

Estonia, a country with the population of 1,3 million people, has a similar history with the other Baltic States: occupation by the Soviet Union and rapid changes after regaining independence in 1991. During the occupation, youth work was influenced ideologically and at a standstill for several decades. Many of the specific types of youth work practised before Soviet occupation, such as youth organisations and camps, were carried on, but moulded to suit the communist ideology and message. As a further alternative, hobby schools for youngsters emerged which added some value to youth work during the Soviet era. Hobby schools, which still exist today alongside schools and youth centres, are places for pursuing specific interests and have curriculums for different hobbies together with a rather structured learning process. However, attending hobby schools was and is voluntary, which is why today they are categorised as educational establishments in the field of youth work. Different hobby activities at youth centres usually last for a shorter period, have no curriculum and are easily changed if youth expresses other interests. (Rannala, Allekand, 2018)

Youth centres are the most known youth work institutions in Estonia: in 2021 total of 231 youth centres who are part of the Association of Open Youth Centres which is 75% of all the youth centres in Estonia (Association of Open Youth Centres, 2021), but youth work is also carried out in other environments such as schools, museums and other cultural establishments, public spaces, digital environments etc. Main organiser of the youth work by the law (Local Government Organization Act, 1993; Youth Work Act, 2010) is municipality – this way youth work is close to the local community. Most of the financing of the youth work comes also from the budget and own income of the local municipalities (YouthWiki Estonia a).

It has to be mentioned that the first Youth Work Act was passed already in 1999. Soon in 2002, a working group was formed at the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education to draft the description on the ethics and professional standards. The draft was made available for public e-consultation and discussions during regional Youth Work Forums and 2nd Estonian Youth Work Forum which was held at the end of 2002. The professional standard for youth workers was finally officially approved by the Estonian Qualifications Authority in

2006, defining the requirements for knowledge, skills, experience, values and personal qualities required for working with young people. (Dibou et al, 2019)

According to the Register of Occupational Qualifications there have been more than 3000 certificates (in June 2021) issued to youth workers – getting a professional certificate is voluntary and closely connected with the requirements the employers (mainly municipalities) have or do not have for youth workers. The number over 3000 includes mostly partial occupational qualification certificates which are easier to be achieved and obligatory by the Youth Work Act if youth workers work at (summer) camps. The existence of a professional qualification certificate usually does not give either better working conditions or salary, although in some municipalities it may, but it ensures the employer and the wider community that the youth worker is competent and quality of work is provided.

In 2010 the quality assessment model for municipal youth work, also voluntary, was developed and has been implemented since. By the end of 2019, 62 local municipalities out of 79 had gone through the assessment process, some of them repeatedly. The model has four main areas, assessing possibilities of youth work accessible at the local level for: non-formal learning, youth participation, information and counselling for youth and quality environment for youth work (YouthWiki Estonia b).

On the national level a lot of effort has been put into promoting professional standard of youth workers, recognition of youth workers, quality development of youth work, youth research etc by Estonian Youth Work Centre (since August 2020 part of The Education and Youth Board) together with the partners such as the Estonian Association of Youth Workers and the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres. Estonian Youth Work Centre was also the recognized Awarding Body of occupational certificates for youth workers. From January 2022 Estonian Association of Youth Workers is the Awarding Body of occupational certificates.

Some examples of promoting youth work and youth workers career: every year since 2010 the youth work week has been celebrated in Estonia. Youth work week is led by the Education and Youth Board, but many partners from the field are involved. Similarly, led by the Education and Youth Board there is an annual event for acknowledging youth workers, best youth work institutions, local governments developing youth work, youth projects and initiatives and also supporters of youth work.

There have been four strategies or development plans for youth work in Estonia and their aims are illustrated in the following table.

**Table 1.** The comparison of the Estonian Youth Work Development Plan 2001-2004, Estonian Youth Work Strategy 2006-2013, Youth Field Development Plans 2014-2020 and Youth Sector Development Plan 2021-2035.

<p><b>Estonian Youth Work Development Plan 2001-2004</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Special youth work - to plan and carry out programs and projects with a crime prevention content; Develop a network of cooperation between the various institutions surrounding young people; Organise laws on minors</li> <li>2. Hobby education - Integrate youth work and hobby education structures; Develop curricula for hobby education</li> <li>3. Information about and for youth; counselling and research</li> <li>4. Youth work training, in-service training and retraining</li> <li>5. Youth employment</li> <li>6. International collaboration</li> <li>7. Youth work structures and youth participation</li> <li>8. Recreational holidays and leisure activities</li> </ol>
<p><b>Estonian Youth Work Strategy 2006 - 2013</b></p>	<p>The general goal of youth work is to assure possibilities for versatile development of the personalities of youth through diversity of youth work, its accessibility and improvement of its quality.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To raise the quality of youth work and the qualification of youth workers;</li> <li>2. To increase youth involvement in youth work and availability of youth work services;</li> <li>3. To develop the structure of youth work into an integral network;</li> <li>4. To use the potential of youth work in the development of different spheres of life.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020</b></p>	<p>The overall goal of the development plan - the young person has ample opportunities for self-development and self-realisation, which supports the formation of a cohesive and creative society.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Young people have more choices in terms of discovering their own creative and developmental potential.</li> <li>2. Increase the inclusion of young people and improve their employability</li> <li>3. Greater support for the participation of young people in decision-making</li> <li>4. The youth field operates more efficiently</li> </ol>
<p><b>Youth Sector Development Plan 2021–2035</b></p>	<p>MOMENTUM – Young people are the creative momentum driving the society onwards – the drivers and leaders in the fields of education, culture, economy, the environment and so on.</p> <p>PARTICIPATION – the protection of youth rights in the state is consistent and active youth participation is supported.</p> <p>INDEPENDENCE – quality youth work (including hobby education for young people) is available across Estonia and provides all young people with opportunities for versatile self-development, experiencing success, acquiring experience and gaining independence.</p> <p>SECURITY – The exclusion and detachment of young people is noticed and prevented through a safety network that increases a sense of security.</p>

There have been four strategies/development plans for youth work in Estonia: Estonian Youth Work Development plan 2001-2004, Estonian Youth Work Strategy 2006-2013, Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020 and Youth Sector Development Plan 2021-2035.

With the first Youth Work Development Plan 2001-2004 priorities and principles were set to create common understanding and assure balanced further development of youth work in eight selected areas. Application of the plan was first and most of all the duty of the public sector although non-governmental organisations were also mentioned. In the first plan the term “youth worker” as well as working fields and job tasks of the youth worker were not yet defined. First development plan was focused on creating the structure and main content of youth work in Estonia.

The Youth Work Strategy was more detailed compared to the Estonian Youth Work Development Plan 2001-2004. The aim of the Strategy was to ensure diverse development of the young person's personality through different opportunities and by increasing the diversity, availability and quality of youth work. The aims connected with young people were meant to be achieved by non-formal learning and the role of the youth workers was to guide their learning.

The general goal of the Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020 was for young people to have ample opportunities for development and self-fulfilment. The goal was connected to the broader vision of the development of a cohesive and creative society. The young person was considered as a whole, who himself or herself is an active participant in the development of the society and would take part in joint activities and initiate activities. Looking at the progress of the goals in the development plans, it can be said that the plan for 2014-2020 is more specific and also allows a clearer definition albeit describing at the same time somewhat doubling role of the youth worker: supporter of every young person in becoming active citizen and supporter of those young people who are facing problems in overcoming the problems defined by the society (employability). The dilemma of the “youth as the resource” and “youth as a problem” is more evident.

Looking at the Youth Sector Development Plan 2021-2035, it can be stated that the goals of youth work, youth centeredness and thus the description of the roles of youth workers have become even more clearer, although the doubling role of youth workers remains - the wishes to shape active and change-driven citizens come together with the wish to guide youth to the “right” paths of the society.

Looking back on the development of Estonian youth work we can state, that the theoretical or conceptual frame for the Estonian youth work could possibly be found in the concept of

positive youth development, as youth work is defined as a creation of conditions for promoting the diverse development of young people, which enables them to be active outside their families, formal education and work on the basis of their free will (Estonian Youth Work Act, 2010). It is at the same time clear that concepts of active citizenship and youth participation, but also the frame of lifelong and non-formal learning are important.

## **2. Mapping the youth worker's education and training in Estonia**

The following chapter covers the topics of formal youth work education and training in Estonia. Currently youth workers are trained in three universities — Tallinn University, Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy and Tartu University Narva College. Additionally there have been funds available from the European Social Funds to the field of youth work in the periods of 2008-2013 and 2015-2019 to improve the quality of youth work and the training of youth workers.

### **2.1 The importance of formal Youth Work education in Estonia**

Youth work curriculum should definitely pay attention to global trends taking place in the educational landscape: these days we are influenced by the pandemic; growth in the use of technology and digitalization, media and information; but also serious environmental crises, economic inequality, and therefore uncertainty and search for identity (Kiilakoski, Kinnunen, Djupsund, 2018; Pantea, 2021). The higher education curriculums of youth work in Estonia are no exception in the search of their own identity and specifics in the tertiary education field and in adapting to frequent changes and contemporary needs of society (Dibou et al, 2019).

Estonia's first official curriculum for youth work vocational training was drawn up in 1992 at Tallinn Pedagogical College, changed into vocational higher education program in 1999 and further developed into a professional higher education program in 2002 (Mere, Maasikmäe 2015). There are currently altogether four youth work curriculums at two universities - Tallinn University (successor and further developer of Tallinn Pedagogical College programs since 2015) and Tartu University (Dibou et al, 2019). Youth work curriculums in Estonia are: two professional higher education curriculums at Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy and Tallinn University, one BA curriculum at Tartu University Narva College and one MA curriculum at Tallinn University. Both universities issue diplomas together with the



professional standard certificate (accordingly level 6 for BA and professional higher education diploma and level 7 for MA). There are some differences between curricula as well, which are worth mentioning, for example BA curricula at Narva College is focused on technologies and digital youth work, professional higher education curriculum at Viljandi Culture Academy is stronger connected with youth work at school and community work and MA curriculum at Tallinn University is focused on youth work management. The research on the Master level, but also research and other activities of academics of youth work are important input into the development and recognition of Estonian youth work, upholding among other topics discussions about the impact and value of youth work.

Youth work curriculums at Tallinn University and Tartu University have been developed as a result of wide consultations with youth field stakeholders, including municipalities and umbrella organisations. Curriculums are influenced by the ongoing trends and changes in the society - for example OSKA Future Trends of Work research (2016) and OSKA study of labour force and skills anticipation in the field of education and research (2018) have been taken into consideration. It has been anticipated that the need for the youth workers is growing, as learning changes and soft skills become more and more important in the labour market and youth work is seen as a possibility to answer to those needs.

Curriculums are also in accordance with the professional standard of youth work, interdisciplinary and include possibilities for international cooperation and learning (Rannala, Griffith, 2020). Some of the recent projects carried out by the universities and having wider impact, therefore worth mentioning to the reader, are for example Erasmus+ project which was lead by Tartu University [“Youth workers' training in HEIs: approaching the study process”](#) and resulted in the book “Teaching youth work in higher education: tensions, connections and contradictions” (2019). Chapter 3 of this book gives a more detailed overview of the youth work education history in Estonia, which might be of interest to the reader here. Another project with the participation of Tallinn University [“Youth Work e-Learning Partnership”](#) resulted in freely accessible e-learning materials (2019) for the universities and trainers teaching youth work available at <https://www.youthworkandyou.org>.

There are no exact numbers of the graduates in youth work for both universities, but it has been estimated that approximately 1000 youth workers have graduated from Tallinn

University and its predecessor Tallinn Pedagogical College since 1992 up to 2020 (Rannala & Griffith, 2020).

## **2.2 The boost of European structural funds in the field of youth work**

There have been funds from the European structural funds (European Social Funds, ESF) funneled to the field of youth work during the periods of 2008-2013 and 2015-2019 in order to boost programs that focus on the improvement of the quality of youth work and the training of youth workers.

During the first period of 2008-2013 a program “Developing the quality of youth work” was launched, under which had two measures. The first measure was “the training of youth workers and recognition of youth worker occupation” by providing youth work specialists and youth leaders various training opportunities as well as by developing the youth work training field as a whole. For example by developing training and learning materials, publishing the youth work magazine “[Mihus](#)”, creating the database for youth field trainers, online training calendar etc. It also involved setting up the annual youth work recognition event (established in 2006) with the purpose of promoting the occupation of youth workers as well as to highlight and award people and the most significant projects that have impacted the field of youth work the most (Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus a, b).

The second measure was “The quality of youth work” which had three main activities. As mentioned in chapter 1 the quality assessment model for municipal youth work was developed in 2010 within this programme as the first activity.

Secondly, [youth monitoring system](#) was set up within this period which means any existing and missing data related to young people and the services provided to young people is monitored and compiled in order to make informed decisions on youth policy. Youth monitoring system provides up-to-date information on different areas related to young people which helps to assess the situation of young people and youth work. Additionally since 2009 nine youth monitoring yearbooks have been published which provide analytical overviews of the changes in the lives of Estonian youth as well as in-depth analysis of youth-related topics, such as youth participation, special needs youth and most recently a book on various topics like mental health, environment and employment. (Noorteseire)

The third activity under the second measure was “Increasing the young people’s competitiveness in the labour market and decreasing social exclusion”. It meant that various activities to decrease social exclusion and to develop young people’s social skills, including employability were developed for the open youth centres. Open youth centres were granted to organise and develop workshops, camps as well as mobile youth work all of which were coordinated in collaboration with the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres. (Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus a)

One of the main focuses for the period of 2015-2019 was “Developing youth work training”. Between 2015-2019 Archimedes Foundation Youth Agency ran an extensive training programme “Development of youth workers training”, which main objectives were to develop youth workers’ professional competencies in order for youth workers to apply what they have learned in their every day work and to improve collaboration within the field of youth work as well as other youth related fields.

During this period 5157 youth workers participated in 249 trainings. During that time there were around 9400 youth workers in Estonia, which means about 55% of all of the youth workers participated in these training sessions. According to the participants feedback they acquired all of the level 4 professional competencies listed in Youth Worker Occupational standard. Youth workers highlighted that after participating in the programme the main areas of development were still communication, collaboration and networking with different parties as well as the skills of self-analysis and reflection. (ESF koolitusprogrammi... )

Youth workers also mentioned in their feedback that since in youth work the employees move on fast to other fields of work there is always a need for a training programme for beginner youth workers. Youth workers also expressed the need for more systemic and more long term training courses instead of many different one-off trainings. One of the main outcomes of the programme was that there is a wider circle of youth workers who understand that they are part of a wider network which has the young person in the centre of it. This means youth work becomes more youth centred. (ESF koolitusprogrammi....)

The second focus for the period of 2015-2019 was “Improving the employability of young people and reducing the impact of poverty by improving the accessibility of youth work services”. The aim of this programme was to reduce the impact of poverty on education and career choices, preventing the occurrence of social exclusion and the employability problems

of young people, and supporting the development of an active attitude to life among young people.

Within this programme The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of the Interior implemented four activities within the framework of the measure in compliance with the actions and objectives of their respective area of government:

1. Reduction of the effect of unequal conditions, prevention of exclusion and supporting the employability of young people, including the provision of additional support to NEET young people, the objective of which is to include young people and improve their employability, which comprises young people exposed to an exclusion risk;
2. Inclusion of young people who have committed an offence in the labour market, the objective of which is to increase the employment rate of young people who have committed an offence and support their decision to start working or studying or to remain employed or studying.
3. Providing developing opportunities for at-risk youth through the SPIN programme, the objective of which is to create additional opportunities for young people to spend free time, participate in sports and develop life skills through a community prevention programme based on sports.
4. Prevention of risk behaviour and identification and resolution of problems of families at risk by using agency work methods, and development of secure living environment, the goal of which is to introduce the principles of agency work and facilitate the exchange of information with the aim of improving the shaping of a safe living environment at local level, identifying and resolving the problems of young people and families at risk, and enabling the county and local level managers and specialists to acquire better skills, working tools and methods so that they can affect a decrease in the number of accidents and offences and prevent children's behavioural issues. (Euroopa sotsiaalfondist rahastatava..., pg 96)

In summary Estonian youth work has benefitted from the European structural funds in various ways. Estonian youth workers have been able to participate in different trainings free of charge and many different initiatives have been launched or adopted in Estonia during these periods. The challenge of continuity and sustainability with many of these kinds of temporary fundings remains as often good initiatives come to an end when the funding ends. However,

there is no doubt that these funds have contributed in an enormous way to the development of youth workers as well as the field of youth work in general.

### **2.3 The role of the Estonian Association of Youth Workers in supporting the professionalisation of youth workers**

The Estonian Association of Youth Workers was established in 1999. Over the years the organisation has changed its name and in 2016 Estonian Youth Workers Union joined with the school youth workers union. Despite the name changes and two organisations joining together the main purpose and goals have remained the same - to support and develop youth work as a field and to support and develop youth workers' professional development, but also to represent youth workers on the national and international level. (Teder, 2017; Eesti Noorsootöötajate Kogu 2021. aasta... )

Today the Estonian Association of Youth Workers is a growing professional learning community (nearly 300 members), which unites youth workers, school youth workers and other professionals who are involved in the youthfield like university lecturers, hobby school teachers, camp counsellors and camp directors, leaders of the youth organisations, local government youth work officials etc. providing various opportunities for self-development and learning while also providing ample of opportunities for learning from each other through webinars, theme specific workshops, training courses, working groups and by providing free mentoring, coaching and covision sessions to its members. Youth workers can also participate in international youth work by initiating international projects and youth workers study visits. The organisation is a platform for collaboration and networking between different youth work professionals across Estonia and enables youth workers to discuss relevant youth work related topics. It's where theoretical knowledge and everyday practice get to be combined in order to formulate mutual agreements and standpoints which develops the field and enables youth workers to become a stronger force in the youth field.

According to the members survey (2020) the members of the Association of Estonian Youth workers value being part of the association because of the nation wide network of youth workers which enables collaboration as well as provides the sense of belonging and support from other youth workers. The members also value the youth field related information that gets shared with them (training courses, international exchanges, opportunities to give

feedback to draft laws etc) which also enables them to be well informed - all of which develops the youth work professionals as a whole.

One of the main aspects of why youth workers value being members of the association is training opportunities for its members. In the Association of the Estonian Youth Workers the needs for training in the past year during the Covid-19 pandemic have been definitely youth workers' as well as young people's mental health. In Estonia mental health has been getting more attention because of the higher suicide rates during the pandemic both among adults and children. Youth workers have felt the acute need to learn more about strengthening their own mental health and mental wellbeing as well as to learn how to support young people (both supporting young people by themselves as well as referring them on to other professionals) during the time of uncertainty. (Harno blogi)

### **3. ETS Competencies and Estonian competency framework (professional standard of youth workers)**

In this chapter the authors compare the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard to the European Training Strategy Competence Model. Both documents have similarities as well as differences which will be discussed further.

The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard is a document that describes the set of skills, knowledge and dispositions, i.e. competence requirements, needed for youth workers to successfully accomplish job tasks. Occupational standards are used for compiling curricula and awarding qualifications. (Youth worker occupational standard, pg 4). There are three levels of youth workers occupational qualifications - 4th, 6th and 7th levels - as well as partial professional qualifications, like camp counsellors. The main differences between the levels are that level 4 youth workers organise youth work, sometimes under the supervision of a higher-level youth worker. Level 6 youth workers organise youth work and manage youth work organisations and/or establishments. In addition to that level 7 youth workers develop the field of youth work at the local and national level, manage youth work establishments, organisations and professional networks and supervise other youth workers. A level 7 youth worker coordinates and develops the youth field at the local, national and, if possible, international level. They instruct other youth workers, create forms of cooperation both within the field and in related areas and promote networking. A level 7 youth worker's job requires communicating with the general public.

As mentioned earlier, occupational qualifications are awarded by the commission of the Estonian Qualifications Authority as well as universities that all award occupational qualifications upon students graduation.

Part of the Occupational Standard is the Occupational ethics of youth work (appendix 4) which consists of seven ethical theses concerning young people and the youth work environment. This document states the key values of youth work and are the basis for youth work practice and conversations between youth workers about how youth work should be done ethically. To help youth workers to have these kinds of conversations about ethical dilemmas in their everyday work The Association of Estonian Youth Workers produced a material for youth workers with various questions and discussion points. (The Estonian Association of Youth Workers)

In this paper the European Training Strategy Competence model for youth workers has been compared to the competencies of level 6 youth workers as level 6 youth workers work directly with young people and can also work in a leading role (for example as a manager of the youth centre) and supervise other (level 4) youth workers at the same time. Level 6 is also the most common qualification that youth workers acquire. Level 7 youth workers usually work on municipal or national level, and have little contact with young people, which makes level 6 competencies more comparable to the ETS Competence model.

**Table 2.** The comparison of the purpose and area of use of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

	<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>The purpose and area of use</b>	<p>For youth workers' capacity building and to develop specific key competences to work internationally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To aspire towards</li> <li>- The ETS Competence model is used as a source of inspiration for organisers of youth work training</li> <li>- it supports youth workers themselves in assessing their own competencies</li> </ul> <p>The competence model focuses on competences that are needed to prepare, implement and evaluate learning mobility projects.</p>	<p>An occupational standard is a document that describes the set of skills, knowledge and dispositions, i.e. competence requirements, needed for successfully accomplishing job tasks both locally and internationally. Occupational standards are used for compiling curricula and awarding qualifications.</p> <p>Occupational standard is compulsory if a youth worker wants to acquire official professional qualification.</p> <p>The Occupational standard focuses on competences that are compulsory for level 6 for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organising youth work</li> <li>- Management</li> <li>- Interacting with the public and cooperation</li> <li>- Providing a safe environment</li> <li>- Youth field development</li> <li>- Professional personal development</li> </ul>

When comparing the ETS Competence model to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard level 6, it can be said that both documents can be used by youth workers as the self-assessment tools. The ETS Competence model has been developed as a tool for the youth workers to be used across Europe and is more of a document to inspire youth workers to aspire towards a higher quality of their work by assessing their competences in the international youth work settings by becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses. At the same time most parts of the ETS model can be easily applied to the national youth work settings as well.

The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard states the compulsory competencies in a sense that if a youth worker wants to acquire official professional youth worker qualification they need to prove by compiling a portfolio that they have the competencies listed in the

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<sup>1</sup> European Training Strategy. A Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally

<sup>2</sup> Youth Worker Occupational Standard



Occupational Standard. Similarly to the ETS Competence model it can be also used as the self-assessment tool or a guide for self-reflection and agent for learning. The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard mostly focuses on and applies to the local level youth work, but states specifically in the list of competencies in task 1 “Organising Youth work” that “11. (Youth worker) introduces the principles of intercultural communication, systematically supports the development of intercultural competences by giving youngsters the opportunity to participate in intercultural/international activities and designing youth work programmes that support intercultural learning;”. Similarly to the ETS Model most competencies listed in the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard can be applied to international youth work as well.

Another similarity is that both models can and are used in designing youth work(er) training. For example, as mentioned earlier, in Estonia youth work students acquire the qualification upon graduating from university, which means the curriculums are designed in a way that students, who might not have had any previous work experience in youth work, still acquire the competencies needed for doing either level 6 (BA level) or level 7 (MA level) youth work during their studies. Also, as mentioned before, most of the ESF funded training courses were designed in a way that the trainees would develop competencies listed in the Occupational Standard.

**Table 3.** The comparison of the target group of ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

	<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
<b>Target group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- youth workers, who are involved in international learning mobility projects;</li> <li>- National Agencies;</li> <li>- Educational staff and youth work trainers, who organise international mobility projects; and</li> <li>- other organisations and institutions that develop youth work and training strategies for youth workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- youth workers, who want to acquire a professional qualification</li> <li>- National Agencies;</li> <li>- Educational staff (universities) and youth work trainers, who organise international mobility projects; and</li> <li>- other organisations and institutions that develop youth work and training strategies for youth workers.</li> <li>- Youth work employers</li> </ul>

In this table above the authors compare the target groups for each of the models. The main target group for both models are youth workers who are self-motivated to professionally

develop and who are willing to take the time for self-assessment. Since currently the qualifications of the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard aren't compulsory and most employers don't require it nor does it influence the youth workers' salary, the youth workers mostly acquire the qualification for their own personal development.

Both models are also used by the educational staff (i.e universities), trainers, organisations and institutions that develop training strategies for youth workers as they are the agreed and accepted quality basis for the professional youth work.

The main difference between the two documents would be that in Estonia youth work employers would potentially be the target group as well, especially even more so in the future when the Estonian Youth Work Occupational Standard and the youth worker qualifications become compulsory in Estonia to those youth workers, who don't have a youth work specific qualification or degree.

**Table 4.** The comparison of the structure of the documents of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

	<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
The structure of the documents of the competence models	<p>The ETS competence model document provides a wider context at the start.</p> <p>The ETS competence model focuses on the following four dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours and looks at each of the competences in separate chapters through the lens of those four dimensions.</p> <p>The 4 dimensions are:  <b>Attitudes</b> - it's the youth worker's willingness to develop their competences. It leads to  <b>Knowledge</b> - it's gained through experience, reading materials, training etc.  <b>Skills</b> - ability to perform a task, to apply knowledge and to turn attitudes into actions which leads to  <b>Behaviour</b> - behaviour that is appropriate and contextual.</p> <p>The document also provides the Glossary of terms at the end of it,</p>	<p>The document refers to the Youth Work Act and Child Protection Act which provides the wider context.</p> <p>The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard lines out three levels of youth worker qualifications and partial qualifications stating in <b>Part A</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the general description of work for each of the levels;</li> <li>- the more detailed description of tasks each level youth worker will have to be able to perform in order to qualify for the specific level;</li> <li>- work environment and characteristics;</li> <li>- work equipment</li> <li>- the required personality traits;</li> <li>- professional preparation</li> <li>- the most common occupational titles;</li> <li>- regulations governing the profession</li> </ul> <p><b>The Part B</b> of the Occupational Standard focuses on the compulsory competences which are organised by the 6 main tasks level 6 youth worker has to be able to perform.</p>

	<p>stating for instance what competences and formal education mean or what is youth work and who is a youth worker.</p>	<p>There is also the recurring competences part in Part B which states competences that are common across all of the youth worker occupational standard qualification levels.</p> <p>The document has 4 appendixes:  Appendix 1: Terms used in the occupational standard  Appendix 2: Language skills level descriptions  Appendix 3: Computer skills  Appendix 4: Occupational ethics in youth work</p>
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In this table the authors mostly focus on comparing the structured setting of the documents to see which parts have been included in the documents and which aren't. Below in Table 5 and onwards the authors will compare and discuss further the content of these two documents.

The two models have been structured differently with the ETS Competence model providing wider context by containing short chapters about the background and the purpose of the model, the four dimensions of the competences and the discussion about what youth work is and what a youth worker does, for example. The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard is structured more formally and has less wider context provided. However, there are references, for example, to the Youth Work Act and Child Protection Act which also provide the wider framework.

**The main differences in how the competences are structured and presented are that in the ETS Competence model the competencies are described as 8 main tasks divided in 8 separate and they are looked at through the lens of 4 dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviour. Though the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard is not as explicit in looking at the competences through the lens mentioned before, it is possible for further analysis to look at the competences of the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard through the lens of attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours, too.**

For example, in order for the youth worker to “carry out and coordinate non-formal learning activities in accordance with the study objectives and action plan and to instruct other youth workers on implementing non-formal learning” (Occupational Standard) a youth worker has to have “the knowledge of the values & key principles of non-formal learning”, “willingness

to research & stay up to date with the newest developments in non-formal learning-related practises”, “skills of adjusting the educational approach to the needs of the young people” and they have to “involve the young people in designing the programme/activity where possible” (ETS model). The competences in both models will be compared some more below in Table 5 and onwards.

Similarly to the ETS Competence model the Estonian model lists the main six tasks that the qualified youth workers are expected to perform and lists of performance indicators under each task. Additionally the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard has four specific appendices included - 1. terms used in the Occupational Standard (glossary also added to the ETS model), 2. Language skills level description (not included in the ETS model), 3. Computer skills (not included in the ETS model) and The occupational ethics in youth work which in some parts match with the competencies’ attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviors of the 8 competencies of the ETS model. This will also be discussed further below in the following tables.

In the following table the authors are comparing and discussing the key principles and competences listed in both the ETS Competence model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard.

**Table 5.** The comparison of the key principles of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

	<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
The key principles	<p>The competence model is adapted to European Youth work and the principles of non-formal learning. These principles are applicable to every competence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young person centredness (a focus on young person and their development)</li> <li>- Agreed on learning objectives between youth workers and young persons</li> <li>- Transparency</li> <li>- confidentiality</li> <li>- Attention to content and methodology</li> <li>- Voluntariness</li> <li>- Participation</li> </ul>	<p>Appendix 4: Occupational ethics in youth work.</p> <p>The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard refers to the Youth Work Act, which also states the key principles of youth work.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ownership of the development process</li> <li>- Empowerment</li> <li>- Democratic values and practises</li> </ul>	
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The ETS Competence model states explicitly the key principles of non-formal learning that are applicable to every competence. Similarly to the ETS model, the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard refers to the Estonian Youth Work Act which also states the key principles of youth work. For example:

**Young person centredness** (ETS model) - youth work is performed for the benefit of and together with young people by involving them in the decision making process (Youth Work Act)

**Participation and voluntariness** (ETS model) - youth work is based on the participation and free will of young people (Youth Work Act)

**Empowerment** (ETS model) - youth work supports the initiative of young people (Youth Work Act)

Some other principles can be found in the Occupational ethics in youth work, that is part of the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard (Appendix 4). For example:

**Confidentiality** (ETS model) - (youth worker) treats the youngsters' opinions and positions according to confidentiality principles, only using the information entrusted to them for the purpose of initial exchange of information. Ignoring the confidentiality principle is necessary if the youth worker assesses there to be a clear danger to the young person, other people or society in general. (Code of ethics)

**Transparency** (ETS model) - (youth worker) conducts activities transparently and reasonably, understanding the need and duty to report their actions to young people as well as to their parents or guardians, employers, donors and the general public (Code of ethics).

Some principles mentioned in the ETS model can be found in the Occupational standard competencies itself which means sometimes the competences required already reflect the values and principles of youth work and non-formal learning. For example:

Attention to content and methodology; ownership of the development process; agreed learning objectives between youth workers and young persons (ETS model) - upon creating the conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and skills the needs and interests of young people shall be proceeded from (Youth Work Act). (Also see the performance indicators 1-6

from the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard, level 6 competencies under “Organising youth work” task).

**Democratic values and practises** (ETS model) - Performance indicator 7: supports becoming an educated citizen; motivates young people to participate in society; introduces different ways of engagement and various representative bodies and helps youngsters create these opportunities and develop sustainability (The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard, level 6 competencies under “Organising youth work” task).

Additionally the Estonian Youth Work Act states that youth work proceeds from the principle of equal treatment, tolerance and partnership, which is not as explicitly stated in the ETS model, but the same principles apply throughout the whole document.

In the following tables (Tables 6-13) the authors are comparing the tasks youth workers are expected to perform according to the ETS Competencies model and according to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6. The authors have compared the most similar tasks, yet it becomes evident that the matching competences aren’t always listed under the similar tasks.

**Table 6.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
<p><b>1. Facilitating individual and group learning in an enriching environment</b>            ...means establishing dialogue and ensuring cooperation mechanisms with individuals, groups and communities. This means that the youth worker has the attitudes, knowledge and skills to support young people in identifying and pursuing their learning needs and to then choose, adapt or create methods and methodologies accordingly. Ideally, the youth worker and the young person trust each other. The youth worker actively supports and enhances young people’s learning processes, self responsibility, and motivation, and the youth worker empowers young people to improve their personal situation.</p> <p><b>2. Designing programmes</b>            ...involves a good understanding of the different groups and environments that a youth worker works with. This precondition is essential to being</p>	<p><b>1. Organising youth work</b>  <b>Performance indicators:</b>            1. based on the youngsters' needs and the objectives of the organisation, regularly maps young people's interests, developmental needs and study objectives or instructs other youth workers to carry out this task; takes the results of regional mapping into account when planning activities;            2. plans different non-formal learning (see Appendix 1 Terms used in the occupational standard) activities according to the interests and needs of the target group and the objectives of the organisation by involving youngsters in fixing study objectives and considering the influence group relationships have on development; 3. carries out and coordinates non-formal learning activities in accordance with the study objectives and action plan; instructs other youth workers on implementing non-formal learning;            4. helps youngsters reflect on the accomplishment of study objectives within the framework of non formal</p>

able to develop and design programmes – be it with an explicit educational purpose or not. The youth worker applies non-formal learning values and principles in the programmes and responds to the needs and realities of young people, which are more complex in an international context. This competence area includes, implicitly, how designing programmes can involve addressing political, societal and cultural issues in youth work.

### **3. Organising and managing resources**

...means understanding the values and working culture of youth projects and youth organisations. The youth worker understands the factors that influence such projects and organisations and that these are even more varied in the context of international collaboration. The youth worker identifies leadership styles and assesses the impact he/she has on the target groups during an activity. He/she understands what motivates young people to take part in projects, how to nurture this motivation and manage risks accordingly. This competence also includes knowledge of national legislation and financial resources management..

learning by introducing self-analysis methods; gives constructive feedback and acknowledges achievements; instructs other youth workers on analysing the results of non-formal learning;

5. uses and develops diverse methods and environments for accomplishing the objectives of youth work;
6. involves young people in planning and executing activities, taking their interests and needs into consideration and paying attention to disabled youth and making conditions meet their needs using existing instructions or study materials; involves young people in youth work and instructs other youth workers on youth involvement;
7. supports becoming an educated citizen; motivates young people to participate in society; introduces different ways of engagement and various representative bodies and helps youngsters create these opportunities and develop sustainability;
8. introduces entrepreneurship and self-initiative principles and opportunities, taking young people's interests into account and motivating them; systematically supports youngsters' entrepreneurship and self-initiative at the local level by offering them the chance to organise youth work activities and supporting/supervising them in these projects;
9. introduces healthy and sustainable lifestyle principles and opportunities using existing instructions and/or study materials; systematically promotes the development of healthy and sustainable lifestyles via different activities and initiates activities; notices (risk) behaviour that influences health and acts accordingly, getting other professionals involved if needed;
10. systematically advocates law-abiding attitudes using existing instructions and/or study materials and initiates activities; notices risk behaviour and acts accordingly, getting other professionals involved if needed;
11. introduces the principles of intercultural communication, systematically supports the development of intercultural competences by giving youngsters the opportunity to participate in intercultural/international activities and designing youth work programmes that support intercultural learning;
12. researches young people's information needs by gathering feedback from the youngsters and using different methods; critically analyzes information and its sources, regularly systematises the data;
13. organises youth information services on the basis of the youngsters' needs and opportunities, the youth information service standard and the principles of sharing youth information established by ERYICA (the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency);
14. provides reliable and systematised information;
15. supports the development of digital literacy using digital technology and equipment; informs young people of online dangers;

	16. provides primary counselling and directs young people to professionals if needed; cooperates with different parties on cases and follows confidentiality requirements.
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In this table the authors have compared the first three tasks of the ETS Competence model to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard level 6 task number 1. In both of the models, the youth worker’s starting points are the principles and values of non-formal learning and the values of youth work. For example, it says in the first task of the ETS model that “The youth worker applies non-formal learning values and principles in the programmes and responds to the needs and realities of young people”. Similarly to the ETS model the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard “(youth worker) plans different non-formal learning activities according to the interests and needs of the target group and the objectives of the organisation by involving youngsters in fixing study objectives”. These tasks and related competences are mainly about the empowerment of young people by supporting young people in every way and following their interests. In both of the models, a youth worker supports young people’s learning process, by helping young people reflect and understand the meaning and value of different activities they have been participating in.

The competences (7-10 and 12-16 in Table 6) from the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard are quite specific - for example, youth workers introduce healthy and sustainable lifestyles, introduce entrepreneurship and self-initiative principles and opportunities or provide primary counselling and direct young people to professionals if needed etc. Whilst these competences are not listed under any of the ETS competences, it can be assumed that behaviours, attitudes and skills listed under the ETS model also cover some of these, as the principles stated in the ETS model means that youth workers centre their activities around young people’s needs, interests and general wellbeing. It can be assumed that some of the specific competencies stated in the Estonian model (young people’s entrepreneurship and self-initiative, for example) have come directly from the previous youth work development plan as one of the measures stated was to increase opportunities for young people to develop their creativity, show initiative and act together. (Youth Field Development...)

**Table 7.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational</b>
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work internationally	standard level 6
<p><b>4. Collaborating successfully in teams</b> ...means that the youth worker contributes to team work and maintains good working relations with everyone involved with the project. The youth worker motivates and supports colleagues in achieving given objectives. This competence area also includes systemic cooperation and responsibility in an international context.</p> <p><b>5. Communicating meaningfully with others</b> ...means building positive relationships with individuals and groups. The youth worker is a master in interacting well with young people as well as with international partners and contributes to smooth communication regarding programmes and projects. Communication is one of the key aspects of youth work. This competence area goes beyond simple communication models and tools. The youth worker also constructively handles emotions, inspiration, intuition, empathy and personalities.</p>	<p><b>2. Management</b> Performance indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. initiates and launches activities, manages and monitors their progress and goal-oriented development; makes relevant decisions;</li> <li>2. gives clear instructions for action, takes responsibility for their own and their team's activities; motivates and encourages others; involves others, delegates job tasks; gives relevant and timely feedback;</li> <li>3. plans activities and organises the corresponding resources according to the set objectives; monitors processes, analyzes the situation and its results, intervenes if needed and makes timely changes; advocates applying new knowledge-based methods;</li> <li>4. plans and designs the instruction process; creates opportunities for developing work-efficient attitudes and helping others grow professionally;</li> <li>5. plans and organises administrative matters according to the organisation's directives and other regulations.</li> </ol> <p><b>Recurring competences</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. fosters good relationships with young people and co-workers; chooses appropriate conduct and forms of expression; successfully communicates with people with different social positions, cultural backgrounds and world views; adequately evaluates their own needs and the needs of others; reacts adequately to unexpected situations;</li> </ol>

In this table it is evident that the ETS model focuses more on the team work and the horizontal/egalitarian leadership approach and skills and is targeted to any youth worker. For example, in the ETS Competence model the youth worker “is expected to take on tasks that perhaps aren’t always part of their role” or have the “readiness to be challenged with regard to the leadership styles”. The Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard level 6 seems to be targeted more to a youth worker who also carries a manager role in the organisation and the relationship to other colleagues seem to be vertical and top down. For example: “youth worker takes responsibility for their own and their team’s activities”, “gives relevant and timely feedback” and “plans and organises administrative matters according to the organisation’s directives and other regulations.”

The authors have also added task number 5. “Communicating meaningfully with others” from the ETS model as good communication and people skills are the integral part of good leadership. Communication is also mentioned in the Estonian model: “gives clear instructions for actions.” Also as part of the recurring competences the Estonian model states that level 6 youth workers “fosters good relationships with young people and colleagues and uses

appropriate conduct and forms of expression” with them as well as partners and other people.

**Table 8.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
<p><b>7. Networking and advocating</b>            ...involves developing and managing partnerships with other relevant actors. Youth work does not happen isolated from the rest of the world. Youth workers facilitate networking with others and advocate for the value of youth work. They are conscious about (political) values and beliefs at play in youth work and support young people in developing independent ‘political thought’.</p>	<p><b>3. Interacting with the public and cooperation</b>            Performance indicators:            1. introduces the content of youth work and the opportunities of the organisation based on the underlying values of youth work and using contemporary digital environments and equipment;            2. acknowledges the parties involved in youth work, cooperates with them and creates new forms of collaboration according to the objective of the activity in question;            3. cooperates with the stakeholders in the field of youth work and creates new forms of collaboration according to the objective of the activity in question and the underlying values of youth work, promoting integration with other fields.</p>

In both models it is important for youth workers to network, advocate for young people as well as for youth work and interact with the public. This table is a little bit similar and connected to Table 11 where the focus is on developing youth work and bringing about change. In order to do this, youth workers need to network and understand the content of youth work (“knowledge about youth policy and youth work in one’s context”, “knowledge about youth rights”, and “knowledge of the socio-economic background of the young people”, ETS model, task 7. Networking and advocating) in order to communicate to the wider public what youth work is, what a youth worker does and what the main challenges of the lives of young people are and in youth work.

**Table 9.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
	<p><b>6. Professional personal development</b>            Performance indicators            1. They analyse themselves and their work using different methods; give and receive feedback; set goals for self-development and engage in targeted development in accordance with professional and occupational requirements; look up and use study opportunities; acquire new work tactics and methods;</p>

	apply the gained knowledge and skills accordingly; 2. They monitor, assess and value their own physical, mental and emotional health and work towards maintaining balance by optimising their use of time and energy; look for help in the event of problems.
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Even though in this table there isn't a matching task under the ETS Competence model, it can be said that the professional development competencies as listed in the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard are present in the ETS Competence model and in all of the tasks listed under it. For example, in the ETS model under the task of "Facilitating individual and group learning in an enriching environment" it is expected of the youth worker to be open to learning, to upskilling and to be challenged and take risks.

The tasks of "Organising and managing resources" and "Collaborating successfully in teams" also state similarly to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard that the youth worker knows by self-assessing what their "competences and resources" are and have the "readiness to reflect upon and to rethink one's role" and the "readiness to ask for support and to admit personal limitations in the context of an activity/group" which means the youth workers have to similarly to the Estonian model know their boundaries and know what their capacities are.

**Table 10.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
	<p><b>4. Providing a safe environment</b>  <b>Performance indicators:</b>            1. provides a safe physical and psychosocial environment based on the underlying values of youth work; creates conditions for young people to develop and maintain trusting relationships; supports other youth workers' in creating a safe environment;            2. participates in drawing up risk analyses based on the valid regulation; acts according to the action plan set forth by the risk analysis;            3. organises youth work in a safe environment by following legally established safety requirements; reacts appropriately in unsafe situations; introduces safety measures to colleagues and/or youngsters and monitors performance.</p>

Even though again in this table there isn't anything under the ETS Competence model particularly to compare to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard task 4 "Providing a safe environment" it is equally important in the ETS model. For example:

1. Under the ETS model task number 1 “Facilitating individual and group learning in an enriching environment” youth workers are expected to be “ honest, respectful and transparent”. Youth workers have “the skill of addressing crisis situations”. Youth workers have the “willingness to address ethical issues as a source of learning about and from others” etc.
2. 5. “Communicating meaningfully with others” - youth workers are “able to deal with tension and conflict.” Youth workers are “able to recognise discrimination” and are “ready to support and empower individuals and groups”. Similarly to the Estonian model youth workers are expected to create safe spaces for young people by modeling behavior that creates safe environments.
3. 7 “Networking and advocating” - youth workers are expected to “be careful regarding young people’s safety and wellbeing”.

What is missing from the ETS model is the youth worker’s role and skills in drafting and creating risk assessments and other similar documents for the organisation they work for.

**Table 11.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
<p><b>8. Developing evaluative practises to assess and implement appropriate change</b>            Youth workers work on helping and empowering young people, the environment, and society to change for the better – supporting the development of collective actions that stimulate change and transformation. Youth workers support actions that change policy and practice.</p>	<p><b>5. Youth field development</b>  <b>Performance indicators:</b>            1. they keep themselves informed about developments in youth policies and make connections between this progress and growth in their own field of work by planning and executing activities that echo the objectives of youth policies; cooperate with partners in the field of integrated youth work;            2. they keep themselves up to date with research results and indicators in youth monitoring and take these results into consideration when planning and implementing youth work, participate in drawing up the strategic documents regulating youth work under their responsibility;            3. they participate in the working groups developing the youth field; initiate working groups within their own organisations and coordinate their work.</p> <p><b>Recurring competences</b>            6. is informed about the underlying principles of youth work, the strategic documents in the youth field and the legal documents connected to the occupation and takes these into consideration when</p>

	planning and performing tasks;
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In both models youth workers are expected to be the agents of change. Youth workers are the ones who bring about change and who develop the field of youth work. In international youth work it is expected that youth workers are good collaborators and initiators of new collaboration projects. It is also expected according to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard that a level 6 youth worker develops the field, which means they should be up to date with the developments in the youth policies and are up to date with research results taking it all into account when planning their work. They are also expected to be actively taking part in the working groups that help develop youth work.

**Table 12.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
<p><b>6. Displaying intercultural competence</b>  ...is the ability to support successful communication and collaboration among people from different cultural contexts and backgrounds. The youth worker has to address and deal with attitudes and behaviours behind this intercultural competence in [international] training and youth work. He/she approaches ‘culture’ from an identity perspective and understands ambiguity, human rights, self-confidence, acceptance versus own limits, and how geopolitical conflicts influence one’s understanding of these aspects. The youth worker takes these intercultural dimensions into account in their work.</p>	<p><b>Task 1: Organising youth work</b>  <b>Performance indicators:</b>  11. introduces the principles of intercultural communication, systematically supports the development of intercultural competences by giving youngsters the opportunity to participate in intercultural/international activities and designing youth work programmes that support intercultural learning;</p> <p><b>Recurring competences</b>  7. bases their work on human rights and the principles governing the organisation of youth work; introduces them to youngsters and co-workers.</p> <p><b>Appendix 4:</b>  youth worker appreciates all opinions and does not undermine any viewpoints, regardless of the young person's age, gender, nationality, religion, abilities, personal traits or any other circumstances;</p> <p><b>Youth Work Act</b>  Youth work proceeds from the principle of equal treatment, tolerance and partnership.</p>

One task of the ETS model focuses on intercultural competencies stating that the youth workers should have the adequate knowledge about stereotypical constructions, discrimination and theories of power relations, for example. Youth workers should also have the attitudes of being open and willing to learn, being supportive and also being sensitive to not use methods that can reinforce stereotypes etc. Again, in the Estonian model it is not as specific and not one task is focussing just on intercultural competences, but the framework for

intercultural work has been set by the code of ethics and referencing to the Youth Work Act which state what attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours youth workers are expected to have.

**Table 13.** The comparison of the competencies of the ETS Competencies model and the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6.

<b>Competence model for youth workers to work internationally</b>	<b>Estonian Youth Worker Occupational standard level 6</b>
	<p><b>Recurring competencies</b>  <b>Performance indicators:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. uses C1-level Estonian and one B1-level foreign language in their work (see Appendix 2 Language skills level descriptions);</li> <li>2. uses computers according to the base module of computer use skills Computer basics, Internet basics, Word processing and Table processing, and standard modules Presentation, Web processing, IT safety and Cooperation online (see Appendix 3 Computer skills); uses digital media and technology proceeding from the specific job task;</li> <li>3. follows the professional ethics of youth workers (see Appendix 4 Professional ethics in youth work) in their activities; promotes more widespread acknowledgement of professional ethics among youth workers and other colleagues;</li> <li>4. fosters good relationships with young people and co-workers; chooses appropriate conduct and forms of expression; successfully communicates with people with different social positions, cultural backgrounds and world views; adequately evaluates their own needs and the needs of others; reacts adequately to unexpected situations;</li> <li>5. sets clear objectives; carefully initiates and designs activities and takes possible changes into consideration; manages time efficiently; meets deadlines and schedules; relates their work to colleagues' and partners' tasks and coordinates work;</li> <li>6. is informed about the underlying principles of youth work, the strategic documents in the youth field and the legal documents connected to the occupation and takes these into consideration when planning and performing tasks;</li> <li>7. bases their work on human rights and the principles governing the organisation of youth work; introduces them to youngsters and co-workers.</li> </ol>

The Estonian Occupational Standard states under the section of Recurring competencies among others that level 6 youth workers are required to have C1 level Estonian and B1 level English skills. Additionally the Occupational standard states the computer skills relevant to the work of level 6 youth workers. The ETS model has no such requirements.

Additionally youth workers are expected to follow the Occupational ethics in youth work and base their work on human rights. The ETS model also references human rights and ethics in youth work and it is evident that there are many similarities between the two documents regarding human rights values.

In the list of recurring competence there is number 5. “sets clear objectives; carefully initiates and designs activities and takes possible changes into consideration; manages time efficiently; meets deadlines and schedules; relates their work to colleagues' and partners' tasks and coordinates work”. In the ETS model throughout the model youth worker’s integrity is described through youth worker’s behaviour and attitudes which result in a trustworthy and reliable youth worker.

In summary both models can be used as self-assessment tools for youth workers. Even though the ETS model is focussing more on the international youth work it can be used in the local setting as well - especially since the international dimension is a great part of youth work in Europe - many youth centres have international volunteers and participate in international projects, for example. The Estonian model can be used for self-assessment as well as part of the regular professional reflection but has even more value, when youth workers have compiled a portfolio and acquired the either level 4, 6 or 7 youth worker qualification.

Overall it can be said that looking at the competences through the lens of four dimensions can be helpful for youth workers to self-assess the required competences. This is something that could perhaps be developed further in the Estonian model, too.

#### **4. Learning needs and professional development of youth workers**

There have been two studies on youth workers training needs (2010 and 2017), both initiated by Erasmus+ National Agency in Estonia, who has been one of the organisations responsible for the training of youth workers (through ESF funding periods described earlier). The latest study showed that nearly a quarter of youth workers are themselves classified as youth - being younger than 26 years old, 86% of youth workers are female and 11% of youth workers use Russian language in their everyday work. About 20% of youth workers have been working in the field for up to one year and 50% have been doing so for over six years. So, there could be

the capacity to train and support one another and mentoring, supervision and coaching are seen as some of the most effective forms of personal development, whilst youth workers are presently able to access coaching through, for example, the Estonian Association of Youth Workers or Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (Käger et al, 2017). The need for peer-learning, meaningful discussions about their practice and value-based choices was also confirmed in focus-group interviews with youth workers and youth work students in 2020.

The study (2017) on the training needs of youth workers showed that Estonian youth workers are relatively well-educated, but at the same time, only about 40% of youth workers had a youth work specific education or professional qualification certificate in youth work. The study showed that to become a youth worker by occupation is not widespread, the profession itself is not valued highly, supporting materials related to the profession are not widely used for self-evaluation and the practice of competence assessment, including self-reflection, is not something that is practised systematically, or is carried out in a rather superficial and subjective manner (Käger et al, 2017). The problem of youth work being undervalued was also one of the themes in focus-group interviews, but the topic has been raised also by other researchers and not only in Estonia (Rasmussen, 2017; Spence, 2007). The issues on professional conduct and trustworthiness of youth workers being able to explain their practice based on the theories and research to the wider community, but also the inability to have reflective discussion within the organisation youth worker works, were raised during focus group discussions. It appears, that youth workers in Estonia are either afraid or they lack skills and knowledge to become reflective practitioners or the working culture doesn't support it (Jüristo, 2021), which of course is strongly affecting reaching the overall goals described in the Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention (2020): promotion and recognition of youth work, and communicating the value of youth work to different sectors.

Sadly it appears from the training needs study (2017) that many youth workers do not understand the significance of the competencies that are expected from all youth workers. A lack of background in youth work can be one of the biggest obstacles to the valuing of the profession. The results showed that self-evaluation and personal development areas were more systematically addressed by those with specialised education in youth work, those who are youth workers by vocation and those with higher levels of awareness about youth work (Käger et al, 2017). This was also confirmed by the focus-group interviews held in 2020 by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers. There were three focus groups held: with youth



work students, with youth workers who had youth work education and with youth workers without youth work qualification. Youth workers with youth work specific education and youth work students demonstrated interest in reflective practice and understanding the importance of the professional conduct and value-based choices, but also understanding the importance of basing the practice in certain theoretical frameworks and necessity of being able to explain the practice to the community. So, it can be concluded, as it was concluded in the previous study: “This shows that theoretical background knowledge and/or more systematic self-assessment positively affects the competencies of the youth worker and simultaneously extends the understanding of the youth worker to the broader range of competency components, leading to more critical self-assessment. The latter has a positive impact towards a more self-aware personal development” (Käger et al, 2017).

The training needs study (2017) also showed that half of the youth workers participate in various training courses more than three times a year and the organisational culture has a significant impact on the types of personal development methods used and how effective these activities are considered to be. For example, youth workers who have a possibility to take part in the career development interviews at their working place more frequently are more active in participating in training courses. The main reasons for attending further training and, also, for applying for a professional standard certificate are related to internal motivation rather than external motivation: the main drivers are the desire to keep up with the latest developments in the field and the need to improve one’s knowledge and skills. The study also showed that although various methods are used for personal development, however, less time-consuming, more affordable and less self reflective methods are often considered to be the most effective. Although the majority of the youth workers find learning from their own experiences to be the most useful, the results of the study give reason to believe that learning from experience is rather superficial due to the understanding of the impact of their activities on young people and their low capacity for self-evaluation. (Käger et al, 2017) This, again, confirms what has been said in the previous section - there is a need for systematic reflection that would support practitioners in formulating professional knowledge and understanding their personal role. There should be support for youth workers as interpreters and formulators of the field paying attention to the fact that youth workers also have many different job tasks and that they play significant but multiple roles in the lives of young people as well as in the communities - this complexity might make reflective practice even more challenging. work (Griffith, 2019; Jüristo, 2021). It is also seen important to

involve parents, partners and youth themselves into promoting youth work within the community, but the precondition for that are youth workers who are knowledgeable and able to communicate what they do, so reflective practice might be a step towards the recognition as well (Spence, 2007; Väljaots et al, 2021).

Non-formal learning and its key competences are an important concept used to explain and even justify youth work (Kiilakoski, 2015). The same is true for Estonia where youth work has historically leaned more towards an educational role (Rannala, Allekand, 2018). Therefore competencies needed to support young people's learning in non-formal ways are essential and also strongly highlighted in the professional standard of Estonian youth workers, but according to the studies youth workers seem to perform poorly in setting goals and learning outcomes for non-formal learning or in analysing the results of learning together with youth (Enson, 2020; Rannala, Allekand, 2018; Väljaots et al, 2021)

Although there are many training needs among youth workers there are also some obstacles on the self-development path of youth workers. According to the training needs study (Käger et al, 2017) and results of the members survey conducted by the Estonian Association of Youth Workers in 2020 there are obstacles to both participation in the training courses (due to the lack of personnel for example) and to the use of acquired knowledge. Therefore it is important to emphasise the quality of training (i.e. compliance with the pre planned curriculum; trainer competence), its practicality (i.e. taking into consideration the level and background of the trainees) and its accessibility around Estonia. As organisational culture plays a crucial role in the implementation of the acquired knowledge, it is essential to raise the awareness of leaders and managers of youth work about the importance of professional development in youth work and possibilities available for that.

## **5. Tendencies in youth work development in Estonia**

In this part we introduce some tendencies and challenges in the development of Estonian youth work:

- structural changes
- tendencies described in Estonian new Youth Sector Development Plan 2021-2035 and the connection between European tendencies of youth work
- tendencies and challenges connected with pandemic situation

- some conceptual challenges of youth work

In the last few years especially, there have been several impactful changes taking place in the field of youth work. As mentioned in chapter 1 a new joint government agency called the Education and Youth Board (Harno) was formed by the Ministry of Education and Research in August 2020. The joint institution was established on the basis of the services of Foundation Innove, Foundation Archimedes, Information Technology Foundation for Education and Estonian Youth Work Centre and deals with the implementation of Estonian education and youth policy. (Education and Youth Board...) On the ministry level there have also been structural changes. Under the Ministry of Education and Research there is now a department called Youth and Talent Policy Department (previously Youth Policy Department) under which there are three main areas: hobby education, youth work and talent policy. Considering the fact that Estonia earned an important [Future Policy Award in 2019](#) for systematically and efficiently developing its' youth policy then these structural changes have brought along some unsecurity and questioning about the future of the youth field (the cuts of youth work specific units within institutions and some changes in official discourse in strong favour of formal education) - concerns have been expressed in everyday media by umbrella organisations (Mikkus, 2021; Rannala, 2021).

Since the start of 2021 there is a new negotiated and co-created youth field development plan called "The youth sector development plan 2021-2035" which was formally approved by the Government of Estonia on the 18th August 2021. The main aim of the new development plan is that the young people's wide range of opportunities for self-development, a sense of security and support will create the country, which young people want to develop further and to invest in. There are four strategic goals in order to achieve the main aim, which were already mentioned in Table 1 and which are focusing on young people as creative and leading citizens who drive the society onwards, on youth rights and participation, on the quality of youth work and on prevention and sense of security.

The new development plan outlines the main challenges for the period 2021-2035. One of the challenges, stated not only in the national development plan but also in the main European guiding youth work documents (Rannala, Stojanovic, Kovacic, 2021), is the sustainability, flexibility and visibility of youth work. The new Estonian youth field development plan also highlights the issue of recognition of youth work as a profession, but together with it youth

worker's lower salary and social guarantees compared to professionals working in formal education. One of the goals is to increase the number of youth workers with youth worker qualification and to work on strengthening the position of youth workers in the society. It is foreseen in the development plan that Estonia should move towards making youth work qualification compulsory. This could bring along competitive salaries for youth workers (equal to formal education) and support the growth of the recognition of youth work in the society. Relevant aspects in this process should be sufficient support to youth workers in their self-development - this is in line with the previous research and need, described also in this document.

Out of the four strategic goals in the current national development plan one goal focuses explicitly on youth workers. The goal number 3 focuses generally on the quality of youth work, but highlights also the need for qualified youth workers in every municipality in Estonia. There is a clear tendency, which is in accordance with broader tendencies of European youth work developments as well (ibid.), to work on the systems and models of assessing and developing the quality of youth work and its services. There is a strong need to develop youth work based on the evidence and knowledge and the youth workers community should be well equipped for that - this is a step towards general development, but also the recognition of youth work and its visibility in the society. (Noortevaldkonna arengukava...; Rannala et al, 2021 ).

The new development plan also focuses on the integration of formal and non-formal learning so that young people's competences acquired through youth work would also be recognized in formal education. The project ["Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning"](#) has been launched as a first step towards this. Some of the research done at Tallinn University together with youth work MA students also focuses on the non-formal learning in youth work: how we understand it or if youth workers should be better equipped for it (Karu et al, 2019; Rannala, Allekand, 2018). This focus is also in accordance with European tendencies of uplifting and strengthening the educational, specifically non-formal learning role of the youth work (Rannala et al, 2021).

The ongoing global challenge for Estonian youth work, as probably other countries in Europe as well, is the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst youth workers across Europe were forced to quickly learn how to do youth work in digital spaces and keep in touch with their young

people, there were many challenges the youth workers were now facing which they didn't have quick solutions to. According to conversations with the members of the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, young people are tired of the unknown future of the pandemic and as in other places in Europe, young people's mental health has suffered. Some youth workers also lost contact with their young people during the periods of social distancing and restrictions - especially with younger young people, who didn't have their own IT devices. The challenge was also sometimes engaging young people virtually in youth work activities after young people had done a full day of tiring distant learning. (Lavizarri et al, 2020).

Even though the awareness of mental health problems and the ways to support your mental health has already been raised in recent years, the pandemic has brought it more than ever to the attention of youth workers. The society and youth workers among them have seen the rise of the mental health issues among young people at least partly caused by the pandemic (Eesti Noorte Vaimse Tervise Liikumine, 2020). The youth workers are in need to train themselves on how to best help young people with their mental health challenges, who to refer them to as well as how to look after their mental health and wellbeing in the midst of it.

The most recent youth monitoring yearbook focuses on the aspects of the life of young people and youth work, like young people's wellbeing and mental health or environmental challenges and young people - topics that haven't been in the focus of youth work until the recent years.

As appeared from the report of the ESF funded programme "Developing youth work training" youth workers need and expect more training programmes instead of many different youth work training courses. The Estonian Association of Youth Workers has also been providing training courses for youth workers but has been developing four new training programs for youth workers. For example, in 2021 The Estonian Association of Youth Workers piloted a training programme for the beginner youth workers who have no previous experience or education/qualification in youth work.

Some general dilemmas and discussions on the goals and values of youth work, which so far may have been more visible in English speaking countries (see for example Davis 2021; St Croix, 2018) have slowly also reached Estonia: the questions on if and how much youth work should be "serving" neo-liberal agenda of supporting economic growth and concentrating quite narrowly on employability of young people or "targeted" youth work, are raised. It is

evident (as described above) that a significant amount of resources have been directed into the youth work in Estonia through European funds. Most of these resources have come with a certain label and expected indicators to reach. Considering the fact that youth work is under-recognized and under-financed, all extra resources have, of course, been valuable and desirable. Still, some important questions must be answered: for example - how sustainable are the solutions developed within the projects or how well they link to the every-day practice of youth work? Another important question to be answered concerns the values and principles of youth work - how well can they be kept within the “services delivered” way of doing youth work? Youth work in its’ essence is the process which starts from the needs and interests of young people - working on predestined indicators might violate this principle. The third question is connected with the second one - in desire to become a recognized profession youth work has to define itself clearly and gain autonomy over the content of work or may be rather gain autonomy to work according to its’ values and principles (Sercombe, 2018) - as long as anyone (with the funds) can (re)define what youth work has to do (or how), it will remain unclear and weak. In the context of this report it is necessary to understand that in countries who are “new” in youth work one cannot just take over the practises of other countries or concentrate only on structures, environments and methods of the work. There is a need to make sense and reflect on the essence of the practice within a certain context - this cannot be done without a strong and knowledgeable community of youth workers.

## **6. Summary**

The history of contemporary Estonian youth work goes back about 20 years. Estonian youth work started to develop rapidly in the early 2000s with the first Youth Work Act being passed in 1999. Around that time youth work organisations, like the Estonian Association of Youth Workers and Association of Open Youth Centres were also formed.

In Estonia youth work is taught in three universities: Tallinn University (BA and MA level), Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy (BA) and Tartu University Narva College (BA). Youth workers acquire youth worker qualification upon graduating from university - BA students level 6 qualification and MA students level 7. Those youth workers who don’t have the formal youth work education can still acquire the qualifications by compiling a portfolio according to the Youth Worker Occupational Standard that lists the competencies level 4, level 6 or level 7 youth workers must have in order to be qualified. Additionally there have

been funds available from the European Social Funds to the field of youth work in the periods of 2008-2013 and 2015-2019 to improve the quality of youth work and the training of youth workers which means Estonian youth workers have been able to participate in various training courses that support their professionalisation.

In this paper the authors have compared the ETS Competence model to the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard. Both documents can be used as tools by youth workers for self-reflection and self-assessment. Additionally, the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard is a compulsory self-assessment tool for acquiring occupational qualifications. In the ETS model the competencies are described through the four dimensions of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. In the Estonian Youth Worker Occupational Standard the competencies are described as the set of skills, knowledge and dispositions, i.e. competence requirements, needed for successfully accomplishing job tasks both locally and internationally.

According to the surveys conducted for mapping the training needs of Estonian youth workers, it appeared that (self)reflection and analytical skills required for self-development, but also for supporting young people's development within the process of non-formal learning are also one of the main needs to be tackled in youth workers training and education. It also became evident that youth workers are expecting fewer but meaningful longer term training courses. Youth workers want to learn more about communication (communicating with the public), collaboration and networking - these skills are also essential to promote youth work and grow its recognition and understanding in the society - challenges that are confirmed in strategic plans of youth work in Estonia as well as in Europe.

There will always be a need for the training courses for the novice youth workers who have no previous youth work background or qualification, but above that there is a general demand for a stronger and knowledgeable community of practice, as without it youth work quality, development, conceptual basis and innovation will not thrive.

Altogether it can be stated that the strong legal framework, structures of youth work, formal education and qualification system together with the support for developing quality, research and practice are all needed to assure that youth work can become visible and stronger practice. It is relevant that all stakeholders - the state, local governments, universities, youth

work(ers) associations and most of all - young people themselves - actively continue to participate in co-creating and discussing the practice of youth work that best suits Estonian context, but not forgetting the wider context as well.

### **Suggestions for further reading**

1. We recommend to start from Youth Wiki, where you can get rather sufficient overview on Estonian youth work, updated each year and continue with an overview on the history of Estonian youth work or vice versa

<https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/estonia/overview>

[https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262055/H4\\_Estonia.pdf/35c039ec-6c00-4c7e-8106-19ce70919e06](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262055/H4_Estonia.pdf/35c039ec-6c00-4c7e-8106-19ce70919e06)

2. If you are interested in legislation when please read:

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/511072014006/consolide>

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/517062014006/consolide>

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524092014010/consolide>

3. More specific overview on starting youth work education in Estonia and generally the issues of teaching youth work in higher education (including Estonia):

<https://creatingyouthworkers.com/estonia-3/>

[https://www.humak.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020-01-Teaching-Youth-Work-in-Higher-Education\\_web.pdf](https://www.humak.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020-01-Teaching-Youth-Work-in-Higher-Education_web.pdf)

4. More information on some specific areas like smart youth work, youth centres and youth monitor and statistics

<https://harno.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2021-03/Nutika%20noorsoot%C3%B6%C3%B6%20kontseptsioon%20ENG.pdf>

[https://ank.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Noortekeskuse\\_Hea\\_Tava\\_2018-EN-1.pdf](https://ank.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Noortekeskuse_Hea_Tava_2018-EN-1.pdf)



[https://haridusportaal.edu.ee/youthmonitoring?fbclid=IwAR1FQH3KKqdkl3-7dgF1dxwtWLG  
NrtSyZMLeBAZfv2QsxWXZHQXiu48UsM](https://haridusportaal.edu.ee/youthmonitoring?fbclid=IwAR1FQH3KKqdkl3-7dgF1dxwtWLG<br/>NrtSyZMLeBAZfv2QsxWXZHQXiu48UsM)

<https://juhtimislauad.stat.ee/en/dashboard-6/whole-country-1>

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