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**Youth Unite: Fostering Tolerance and
Inclusivity through Education and
Engagement**

Project n° 2024-1-PL01-KA220-YOU-000248204

Youth Unite

Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity through Education and Engagement

(Erasmus + - KA2: Cooperation Partnership | Youth – Project n° 2024-1-PL01-KA220-YOU-000248204)

D2.1 Current State of Play

Report

Comparative Study Across 5 Countries

WP2 - Curriculum Development, Training and Capacity Building

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Partnership

Stowarzyszenie Integracja i Rozwój,
Poland, Coordinator



Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo
Dolci – ETS, Italy



Un Monde Migrant, France



Social Innovation Fund (SIF), Lithuania



KMOP - Social Action and Innovation
Centre, Greece





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1. Introduction

Youth Unite - Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity through Education and Engagement is a project co-funded by the Erasmus + program, created in response to the urgent need to reduce discrimination, racism, and intolerance, especially among young people, in an increasingly diverse European context. To achieve this, it aims to strengthen the competences of people working with youth, helping them to promote an inclusive environment that fosters



dialogue and active participation in the community. By involving young people and youth workers from Italy, Poland, France, Lithuania and Greece, the project aims to build intercultural relationships based on respect and inclusiveness, supported by validated training tools and an educational curriculum designed to address current social challenges.

For further information, please check the project website: <https://www.youth-unite.eu/>

2. State of Play report: context and Objectives

The current document shows the results of the first step of the Youth United project: this first phase is aimed at analysing the national contexts through a literature review and identifying the learning needs of youth workers via organizing focus groups. The related results are necessary to develop a curriculum, which will be the core of the future training involving youth workers in the partner countries. The definition of these two actions has a specific reason behind: before conducting the focus groups planned, it is indeed essential to analyze the national sociocultural background of each partner country concerning racism, intolerance, and inclusion. This analysis, organized as a literature review, ensures that future initiatives align with specific local conditions and provide a shared information base. Consequently, this report's objective is to provide a comparative perspective on racism, discrimination, and inclusion in youth contexts, alongside the initiatives and policies in place to address these issues.

3. Methodology

The implemented methodology to carry out this report, as mentioned before, was organized around two main actions following a specific standard for each one:

- **Literature Review:** each partner country analyzed existing data, policies, and initiatives concerning racism, intolerance, and inclusion, with a specific focus on youth. The review was structured around three guiding questions and supported by recent and reliable sources, analyzing how young people experience and perceive intolerance and inclusion in their communities. A template has been provided to each partner in order to gather data according to the same criteria and structure.
- **Focus Group Reports:** each country organized focus groups involving youth workers to explore their perspectives, challenges, and best practices regarding inclusion and diversity. A standardized set of questions as well as reporting procedure ensured comparability across countries. Specifically, each focus group followed a structured approach:
 - **Participants:** Youth workers from various backgrounds.
 - **Environment:** A neutral, distraction-free space to ensure open discussions.



- **Ethical Considerations:** Signed consent forms and confidentiality agreements were collected.

Both the results of the two actions are summarized in the 2 main sections of this document, with a final analysis and conclusions.

4. A complex landscape

In recent years, European countries have continued to face significant challenges related to racism, intolerance and social inclusion, phenomena that affect the population across the board, but which have a particularly severe impact on young people and minorities. From the five national contexts analysed - Italy, France, Greece, Poland, and Lithuania - a complex picture emerges, made up of regulatory progress, but also of persistent systemic and cultural discrimination.

In **Italy**, racism and intolerance are expressed through practices such as racial profiling by law enforcement and through widespread discriminatory behaviors, such as racism, homophobia, and antisemitism. According to the ECRI (2024), the groups most affected are Roma, LGBTQ+, and people of African descent. 70% of Italians admit that Black people are often victims of racism (Ipsos, 2023), and over 60% of students report having experienced or witnessed discriminatory incidents (Save the Children, 2023).

In **France**, 2023 marked a deterioration in social cohesion due to an increase in antisemitic acts and xenophobic rhetoric. The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) reports a worrying decline in tolerance, especially among young people: 58% of those between 18 and 39 years old say they have experienced discrimination based on origin or skin color (2023).

Poland, on the other hand, is facing strong social polarization and a hostile climate towards the LGBTQ+ community and migrants. The country ranks last in the ILGA-Europe index for LGBTI rights (ILGA-Europe, 2020), and several regions have passed resolutions declaring themselves "LGBT-free zones". Although urban youth show more open attitudes, hate messages and misinformation on social media pose a growing threat (ECRI, 2023).

In **Greece**, despite some legislative progress, discrimination against migrants, Roma, and LGBTQ+ people remains widespread. The Racist Violence Recording Network (RVNR) recorded 158 episodes of racist violence in 2023, many of which were against refugees and LGBTQ+ youth (RVNR, 2023). Furthermore, 17.7% of Greek youth are NEET, with higher rates among minorities (OECD, 2024).



Finally, in **Lithuania**, while public awareness of discrimination has increased, inclusive attitudes remain fragile. Roma, LGBTQ+, and migrant communities face systemic barriers in education, employment, and healthcare. A recent study found that only 27% of citizens believe anti-discrimination policies are truly effective, while issues like racial bullying in schools are still widespread (Ciuladiene, 2024; Spinter Tyrimai, 2024).

Across all these countries, a common pattern emerges: the difficulty of translating regulations into concrete actions, the presence of deeply rooted stereotypes, and unequal access to essential services like education, healthcare, employment, and civic participation. Young people, especially those with migrant backgrounds or from minority groups, are often excluded from decision-making processes and face multiple forms of discrimination. Intercultural education and the creation of safe and inclusive spaces remain key tools for building fairer and more cohesive societies.

4.1 Existing Initiatives and Responses

The five countries analyzed – Italy, France, Greece, Poland, and Lithuania – have developed over time a series of policies, programs, and interventions aimed at combating racism and discrimination, though with varying approaches and levels of effectiveness. Institutional responses are organized around regulatory, strategic, and educational plans, with an increasing role for civil society and the education sector in promoting inclusion.

In **Italy**, the legal response is rooted in the Constitution, which enshrines the principle of equality in Article 3. At the legislative level, Law 654/1975 and Legislative Decree 215/2003 introduced penalties for discriminatory acts and established the UNAR (National Office Against Racial Discrimination) as the coordinating body for anti-racism policies (UNAR, 2023). Strategically, among all the different initiatives active at national level, the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Sinti 2021–2030 and educational projects such as DiversaMente and All different, all equally promote a culture of respect and participation (ICEI, 2021).

France has a solid legal framework, with a strong, historic basis such as the Law on Freedom of the Press (1881) and more recently the Penal Code (1994), and the inclusion of xenophobic speech under the category of abuse of freedom of expression (CNCDH, 2023). The National Plan Against Racism, Antisemitism, and Discrimination (2023–2026) aims to coordinate actions in education, employment, and culture. However, France has been criticized by the UN Committee for not adequately addressing systemic racism, particularly in the security sector (Amnesty International, 2023).

In **Greece**, the National Plan Against Racism 2020–2023 is one of the most structured in Europe, with targeted actions in education, housing, employment, and the judiciary (ECRI,



2022). Among the most significant measures is Law 5089/2024, which legalizes same-sex marriage as part of a broader LGBTQI+ Equality Strategy (Hellenic Republic, 2021). Other measures include the reform of the Immigration Code (Law 5038/2023) and actions against hate speech online (Law 4779/2021).

Poland has amended the Penal Code (Art. 256 and 53 §2a) to sanction hate speech and has recognized sexual orientation as a vulnerability criterion in asylum procedures (ECRI, 2023). Locally, the city of Gdańsk is an advanced model of integration, with the creation of a Migrant Council that supports municipal policies on inclusion (Council of Europe, 2023). However, the lack of a national migration strategy and the exclusion of LGBTQ+-related topics from school curricula remain significant challenges.

In **Lithuania**, the legal framework is based on the Law on Equal Treatment (2003) and the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens (2018), which guarantee access to public services and prohibit discrimination (Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 2021). The country has implemented language, employment, and social integration programs for migrants, but institutional support remains weak due to limited funding and public trust. The Integration Program for Foreigners (2016) and the Lithuanian Integration Fund provide courses, legal assistance, and cultural orientation, but they are often poorly known or poorly implemented (Ministry of the Interior of Lithuania, 2021).

In all these contexts, the importance of both formal and non-formal education as a key tool in building an inclusive culture emerges. Programs and courses addressed to youth workers such as EDI GO (Greece), NELA (France), Hate – Delate (Poland), and Youth Affairs Training (Lithuania), DiversaMente (Italy) provide practical tools to recognize and combat discrimination, promote intercultural dialogue, and value diversity in educational and community settings (CEMEA, 2019; HREA, 2020). In the table below, the above-mentioned initiatives are shown (further resources/cases are listed in the national reports in the annexes to this report).

Name of Curriculum	Country/Year of Implementation	Description	Learning Objectives	Contents	Skills & Competencie	Link
EDI GO	GREECE 2024	Curriculum on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	Understanding EDI principles, inclusive	5 modules: EDI theory, space, relationshi	Intercultural skills, communicatio	https://edigo-



		for Youth Workers	recruitment, space design, and inclusive language	ps, community , youth work	n, and training design	curriculum. df
NELA	FRANCE 2019	Program by CEMEA to deconstruct prejudice and racism through media and historical analysis	Raise awareness on human equality and stereotypes	Workshops on critical media analysis, history, and biology	Critical thinking, anti- discrimination awareness	https://cemea.asso.fr/le-champs-d-action/questions-societales/la-nous-et-les-autres-des-prejuges-au-racisme
Diversa Mente - Youth Against Discrimi- nation	ITALY 2021	Program for youth workers to raise awareness on diversity and inclusion	Recognise and fight discrimination, promote active citizenship	Stereotype s analysis, anti- discrimination methods, and inclusion workshops	Identify stereotypes, inclusive facilitation skills	https://icei.it/progetti/diversamente/
Hate – Delate	Poland 2016	Workshops addressing online hate speech and discrimination	Raise awareness on hate speech, develop group communication	Simulated scenarios, group reflection, discussions , presentations.	Communication, cooperation, and intercultural competence	Narzędziowik edukacyjny materiałów dla edukatorów / movie nienawiści poznaj, reaguj



Youth Affairs Training Program	Lithuania 2018	5-module training for youth workers on non-formal education, psychology and social work	Equip youth workers with tools to support and empower diverse youth	Modules: youth work, psychology, social work, education, youth policy	Interpersonal skills, inclusive facilitation, teamwork, guidance techniques	https://old.d.lt/informacija-dirbantiems-su-jaunimu/jaunimo-darbuotojai
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Despite differences between countries, all show a growing commitment to building more inclusive societies. However, obstacles remain: a lack of funding for anti-discrimination authorities, the absence of disaggregated data, slow reporting mechanisms, and a general difficulty in recognizing structural racism. Addressing these gaps requires an integrated approach that combines effective laws, educational programs, and active participation from youth and civil society.

5. Learning needs, national gaps, and desired curricula: Focus Group results' overview

This section of the report collects and analyses the results of focus groups carried out in the above-mentioned five European countries participating in the project. The aim of this action, after the understanding of the general context, was to create a common picture of the perceptions, experiences, obstacles, and good practices that have emerged, taken directly from the youth workers active in the field.

The Focus Groups involved **29 participants**, nationally distributed according to the following table:

Organization	Country	N° of youth workers reached
Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci - ETS	Italy	5
Un Monde Migrant	France	8



KMOP	Greece	5
Stowarzyszenie Integracja i Rozwój	Poland	5
Social Innovation Fund	Lithuania	6
Total		29

5.1 Key Findings by Country

Below, the main results of what has emerged from all the countries are summarized, allowing to provide an overview of the main insights.

Question (Q) 1: Who are you, and what do you do?

If you had to describe your role as a youth worker in one word, what would it be, and why?

The focus group participants' description of their role revealed a strong vocational and relational component. Despite differences in national contexts, a shared image of the youth worker as a support figure, a bridge between young people and the community, and a promoter of active participation emerged everywhere.

In **Italy** and **Greece**, participants defined their role as that of educational companion, emphasising the creation of bonds of trust and support for personal growth. In **France**, some identified themselves as process activators, capable of stimulating critical reflection, collective action, and creativity. In **Poland**, the youth worker is mainly perceived as a facilitator, able to adapt to young people's needs and support their ideas. In **Lithuania**, emphasis was placed on the dimension of mediation between cultures, especially in contexts with a high presence of young migrants.

Recurring terms such as “mentor”, “guide”, “inspiration”, “bridge”, “facilitator”, “non-formal educator” reflect a multidimensional view of the role, combining empathy, active listening, relational competence and social engagement. All participants emphasised that their role does not end with technical or educational tasks, but implies a responsibility towards cultural change and inclusion.

Finally, a shared reflection emerged on the lack of institutional recognition of the role: despite being central to youth participation processes, many youth workers operate without contractual protection, career paths, or formal status. Nevertheless, all agreed that this work is a valuable choice and a concrete form of active citizenship.

Some dwelt on the profound significance of the educational relationship, emphasising that their task is not to provide ready solutions but to walk alongside young people, creating spaces for listening, trust and experimentation. Others highlighted the transformative



dimension of youth work, which also involves those who practice it: accompanying young people in their growth inevitably means questioning, adapting, growing together with them.

A reflection on the value of recognition also emerged: in many countries, the role of the youth worker is not formally recognised, which can generate frustration. However, the passion and dedication with which it is performed testify to a strong professional identity even in the absence of official status. Youth work is experienced as a profound exchange, a fertile ground for building citizenship, promoting rights and sowing hope.

Q2 – Educational opportunities

Could you describe to the group your educational background/path and how this led you to work with young people?

The paths are varied and interesting: there are people with backgrounds in pedagogy, psychology, art, or law, but also those who come from less traditional paths such as economics or stage design. One of the transversal pieces of evidence that emerged in the focus groups concerns the absence, in all five partner countries, of a unified and recognised educational pathway to become a youth worker. None of the participants described direct and specific university training for their role: the majority gained skills through practical experience, short courses, European initiatives, or local projects.

In Italy and Greece, it was highlighted that many people come to youth work from volunteering, often within the third sector or European projects such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. In France, several youth workers come from artistic or pedagogical backgrounds, but complain about an excessive fragmentation of the training offer. In Poland and Lithuania, most participants acquired their skills directly in the field, facing a very steep learning curve and often without initial support.

In spite of this heterogeneity, a shared desire for more structure, continuity and educational recognition clearly emerges. Participants demand learning pathways that combine theory and practice, flexible but consistent, capable of truly preparing them for intervention in youth contexts. There is also a strong demand for specific training on sensitive topics, such as diversity management, facilitation, intercultural communication and emotional care.

In summary, the youth workers interviewed have been mostly trained informally, with limited resources, but with high motivation and adaptation. Strengthening educational pathways is one of the priorities for the enhancement of the sector and for the quality of youth work.

Q3: Your Community

How would you define tolerance, inclusivity, and diversity in the context of youth work? Could you give us an example?



All the groups expressed similar definitions around the requested concepts: **tolerance** can be a bit of a tricky concept for some people; just because you tolerate something doesn't mean you're actually welcoming it. **Inclusion**, however, is viewed as a more active endeavor. It takes ongoing effort to create equal opportunities and foster a genuine sense of belonging. **Diversity** is often seen as a valuable asset that can enhance groups, but it can also lead to conflict if we're not mindful about it. Striking a balance between appreciating our differences and nurturing a sense of community is really important. Many of the participants believe that focusing on language, intercultural communication, and creating truly inclusive environments is key to making this happen.

What challenges related to inclusion and diversity at the national level does your community face? What about youth?

Among the main critical issues at the national level that emerged during the focus groups, the participants identified the following: school drop-out in Italy, lack of educational continuity in France, and discrimination against LGBTQ+, migrant or disabled young people in Poland and Lithuania. In addition, there is stigmatisation related to clothing and identity in France, and the disconnection between the needs of young people and what institutions offer. In Greece and Poland, there is also the politicisation of inclusion and the reluctance of educational institutions to collaborate with unconventional methods.

In France, educators point to the exclusion caused by school policies, which disproportionately affect marginalized students. Furthermore, social expectations exert pressure on young people, encouraging them to conform, making it difficult for them to freely express their identities.

Q4: Obstacles

Can you share a significant experience where you dealt with a case of intolerance or discrimination, at a professional level but also a personal one? What did you learn from it?

What changes would be necessary to achieve it?

In the focus groups, the question about significant episodes of intolerance or discrimination elicited very profound personal testimonies. Participants shared experiences that have marked their professional and human journey, underlining how difficult, but also formative, it is to face exclusion first-hand or to witness it in educational contexts.

In **Italy**, some practitioners told of LGBTQ+ young people being insulted or excluded in school and sports environments. The pain of these episodes led many youth workers to look for tools to intervene more competently and promptly.



In **France**, a mental health workshop was recalled in which a participant reacted with verbal aggression to the mere mention of the topic of inclusion. The situation was successfully managed thanks to the presence of a psychologist, but the episode revealed how diversity is still experienced as a threat by some sectors of the population.

Social and ethnic segregation is reinforced by pressure to remain within one's own community, limiting their openness to the outside world. A sense of identity, particularly within the Muslim community, requires open dialogue and bridges of communication

In **Greece**, an experience of microaggression concerned a female trainer who, while talking about gender issues in a school environment, was subjected to sexist comments by older colleagues. This led to a reflection on the importance of also protecting educators in the contexts in which they work, ensuring respectful and aware working environments.

In **Lithuania**, a case in point was a youth event that did not provide translation for migrant participants. The exclusion, although unintentional, generated a feeling of marginalisation that left a strong mark on both the young people and the workers involved.

In **Poland**, one worker recounted the difficulty of supporting a young Muslim girl in a hostile school environment, where the headscarf was an object of ridicule by classmates and teachers. This highlighted the urgent need for structured educational interventions for school staff, not only for young people.

The lessons learnt from these episodes were numerous: the need for more training, the creation of shared guidelines for dealing with discriminatory episodes, the adoption of a preventive and not just a reactive approach. All participants stressed that to really change things it is essential to work in a network, involving schools, families, institutions and local communities.

Q5: Effective tools

What strategies or activities do you use to promote inclusion and diversity in youth work while ensuring your initiatives are accessible and welcoming to young people from diverse backgrounds? Is there anything that works particularly well or that you'd like to improve?

The practices may vary depending on the context, but what unites them is an active and engaging approach. Among the most popular methodologies are **Theatre of the Oppressed, storytelling, simulations, artistic activities, and role-playing.**

Roundtable discussions where students from different backgrounds share their personal experiences, leading to better mutual understanding and the formation of friendships. Adopting creative and interactive approaches to promote inclusion. Specifically, in Lithuania, great emphasis is placed on European Corps Solidarity projects, while in Greece, toolkits for



self-assessment of inclusive practices are used. The ultimate goal is to create safe spaces where young people can express themselves freely, without fear of being judged.

Q6: Technology and youth

Do digital platforms help or hinder inclusive dialogue among young people? Can you share an example?

The digital world is seen as a place full of contradictions. Digital platforms represented one of the most controversial topics discussed in the focus groups. In all the partner countries, participants highlighted how technology, while offering enormous potential, also poses significant challenges in the context of youth work.

In particular, the usefulness of digital tools to amplify the voices of young people from marginalised backgrounds was emphasised in **Greece** and **France**. Platforms such as *Zoom*, *Miro* and *Padlet* proved to be crucial during the pandemic to ensure educational continuity and access to training even from rural or isolated areas. Some participants also reported that these technologies facilitated international collaboration and intercultural exchange. In France, views on digital platforms were mixed: while some saw them as tools for connection, others warned of their risks. Participants called for digital literacy programs and stressed the importance of in-person interactions.

However, in **Poland** and **Lithuania**, the problem of inequality in digital access strongly emerged: in many areas, especially rural ones, young people do not have stable connections or adequate devices, with the risk of exclusion. Furthermore, the use of social media has been associated with negative phenomena such as disinformation, hate speech, and radicalisation, accentuating polarisation among young people.

In **Italy**, a more critical approach was expressed: many youth workers believe that direct contact is irreplaceable for creating authentic relationships, working on empathy, and addressing issues of inclusion. Digital platforms, if not carefully guided, can reduce the depth of dialogue and discourage active engagement, especially on sensitive topics such as diversity or personal distress.

Overall, participants agreed that technology is neither good nor bad in itself, but must be accompanied by awareness, critical digital skills, and targeted educational strategies.

Q7: Missing Skills

What kind of training or support have you received to address issues of diversity and inclusion in youth work?

What skills or knowledge would you like to develop to better address the challenges of inclusion and tolerance when you work with youth?



From the analysis of the five focus groups clearly emerges a shared need to strengthen the skills of youth workers, especially in order to effectively address inclusion and diversity challenges. In all national contexts, participants reported a lack of structured and up-to-date training courses. Many of them acquired skills through informal experiences, self-learning, and European programmes, but only in a few cases did they receive specific training.

Among the skills most in demand are:

- **Nonviolent communication** and **active listening**, to manage difficult dialogues and strengthen the educational relationship.
- **Conflict management** and **intercultural mediation**, considered essential for working in increasingly diverse contexts.
- **Psycho-pedagogical skills**, especially to deal with emotional fragility and exclusion dynamics in youth groups.
- **Intercultural awareness** and **deconstruction of prejudices & bias**, to work in a fair and reflective manner.
- **Self-reflection** and **self-care**, considered fundamental for preventing burnout and maintaining an effective educational presence.

Participants also expressed interest in practical and modular training paths, including concrete tools (such as exercises, models, and simulations), spaces for peer discussion, and professional supervision sessions. Continuing education and formal recognition of skills acquired in the field were indicated as urgent priorities to support the professionalisation of the sector and ensure a positive and lasting impact in youth work.

In France, recruiting educators is a complex process, often favoring non-qualified individuals who are seen as more easily influenced. A lack of political and economic commitment to investing in social work and sports further restricts the resources available.

Q8: The Ideal Curriculum

If you could design a curriculum for youth workers on inclusion, what would you definitely include? What kind of methodology? What kind of activities?

According to the participants, an effective youth worker curriculum should be based on an experiential and multidisciplinary approach, integrating theory with practice, and personal reflection with fieldwork. Key contents would include: **identity** (understood as the complex interplay between personal self-perception, cultural belonging, and social roles. This includes



exploring how individuals construct their sense of self in relation to their environment, community, and societal expectations), **stereotypes and prejudices**, **multiple discrimination**, privilege, **intersectional approaches**, **inclusive communication** and **managing group dynamics**. Some partners also suggest modules on **legal instruments** to counter discrimination and on **organising public campaigns** to promote diversity.

Among the methodologies indicated: Theatre of the Oppressed, the Fishbowl method, participatory design workshops, real-life case studies, simulations and interactive exchange moments. The curriculum should promote not only learning but also empowerment, stimulating critical awareness, empathy and the ability to act in complexity. It is also important that activities are modular, intercultural and accessible to all age groups.

Q9: A suggestion for change

What advice would you give to those creating this curriculum to make it truly effective?

In the five countries involved, participants expressed a clear and shared vision of what makes a curriculum for youth workers effective: rootedness in reality, co-design, adaptability and concreteness.

A first element that emerged was the need to build the curriculum together with youth workers themselves, involving them in all phases: design, testing and evaluation. This participative approach ensures that the contents truly reflect the daily challenges experienced by the workers in their specific contexts.

Secondly, a flexible structure is required, organised in independent but connected modules that can be used in different contexts (schools, youth centres, informal spaces) and with different levels of professional experience. In Poland and Lithuania, it was proposed to include practical examples, case studies and operational guidelines to facilitate application in the field.

Another recurring theme was the importance of caring for workers: many youth workers emphasised the need to include modules on stress management, emotional well-being and peer support. In France and Greece, the need for training on how to manage internal team conflicts and how to deal with emotionally complex situations was also mentioned.

Finally, it is suggested that the curriculum should not be limited to the educational dimension alone, but should include elements of advocacy, social design and community leadership, so that youth workers can also be promoters of systemic change in their communities.

In summary, the advice gathered converges on the idea of a curriculum built ‘from the bottom up’, which can be updated over time, enhances experiential skills and provides real tools for dealing with the complexity of inclusion in youth work.



Instead of concentrating solely on academic content, the program should prioritize critical thinking, self-reflection, and activities that foster empathy. One proposal was to establish “youth hubs”—dedicated spaces where young people from diverse backgrounds can connect, share experiences, and learn from one another.

Q10: A message

What is the main message you'd like to leave young people to promote inclusivity and tolerance?

From the words of the participants emerges a deep trust in young people as an engine of social transformation. The messages addressed to them are authentic and motivational. There is a constant invitation to get to know oneself, to value one's uniqueness and, at the same time, to open oneself with curiosity and respect towards others. A strong message is that inclusion starts from within: only those who have learnt to accept their own history, their own frailties and differences can truly welcome those of others. Young people are encouraged to become promoters of a cultural change that starts from the bottom, through small daily gestures of solidarity, dialogue and courage. There is no lack of reflections on responsibility: building a fairer and more inclusive society is a collective task, which requires commitment, but also imagination and hope.

6. Analysis and Synthesis of Results

6.1 Connection between literature review and focus group findings.

The comparative analysis between the literature review and the results of the focus groups conducted in the five partner countries of the Youth Unite project reveals a strong coherence between the two actions of research and needs identification, but also offers significant points for deepening and complementing the information. The literature drew a clear picture of the structural challenges related to racism, discrimination and inequality in youth contexts. In all the countries analysed - Italy, France, Greece, Poland and Lithuania - the presence of systemic phenomena clearly emerges, including:

- discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities,
- the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ people,
- the existence of cultural stereotypes and language barriers,
- the lack of effectiveness of public policies against structural racism.

The focus groups not only confirmed the trends that emerged from the data but also enriched them with qualitative contributions from the direct experience of those who work with young



people on a daily basis. The testimonies collected offer a more vivid and articulated picture of the dynamics at play, providing valuable insights to better understand the reality on the ground.

In particular:

- In **Italy** and **Poland**, participants reported episodes of intolerance in school and sports contexts, in line with national data showing a growing hostility towards LGBTQ+ people and ethnic minorities;
- In **Greece** and **France**, some trainers expressed a sense of unease in dealing with inclusive issues, reflecting the climate of polarisation also reported in their respective national reports;
- The lack of training tools and adequate institutional support for those working in the youth sector emerged as one of the most relevant critical issues, confirmed by both academic sources and direct experiences shared during the focus groups.

The literature analysis highlights the presence of national programmes and initiatives in all the countries examined. However, what emerged from the focus groups reveals a more complex reality: despite the formal existence of these measures, they are often little known, difficult to access, or have limited effectiveness in practice. **This discrepancy between what is provided at a regulatory level and what happens on the ground represents one of the most significant critical issues** identified during the study.

Another transversal issue concerns the **fundamental role of non-formal education**. While on the one hand the literature recognises its value in the context of social inclusion, on the other hand, the operators involved emphasise the need for greater institutional recognition, accompanied by structured and adequate training courses for those working in this sector.

Both sources - theoretical and qualitative - converge, moreover, on some urgent priorities, such as:

- enhancing the skills of youth workers and the need for formal recognition of their work.
- ensuring the accessibility of effective educational tools and resources;
- promoting the active involvement of young people in decision-making processes;
- supporting a culture of respect and diversity through coherent, visible, and lasting policies.

In conclusion, the literature review offers a systemic framework, while the focus groups highlight the concrete impact on the ground. The integration of these two levels of analysis



provides a solid basis for the definition of policy recommendations and the design of targeted interventions in the field of youth work and social inclusion.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The five focus groups realised within the Youth Unite project revealed a number of shared elements, but also differences linked to the cultural and operational contexts of the various countries involved. These reflections offer a more articulated and realistic view of the challenges and potentials related to youth inclusion in Europe.

Among the most significant aspects that emerged

- A **widespread lack of formal recognition of the figure of the youth worker**, together with a **lack of structured and tailor-made training pathways** for this role;
- A **strong sense of professional identity** on the part of youth workers, who describe themselves as facilitators, companions and promoters of social change within their communities;
- The presence, in all contexts, of **systemic - sometimes even internalised - forms of discrimination** affecting LGBTQ+ young people, migrants, people with disabilities or members of ethnic and religious minorities;
- The **recognised value of non-formal education and participative methodologies**, which are considered fundamental tools for promoting inclusion, mutual respect and active citizenship;
- The **challenges related to the use of digital technologies**: while on the one hand they offer opportunities for inclusion, on the other hand they expose young people to risks such as isolation, polarisation and misinformation;
- The **transversal needs to acquire specific skills to manage diversity** and ensure safe and welcoming environments for all;
- A **common interest in the creation of a shared European curriculum**, which is concrete, flexible, accessible and adaptable to different local contexts, with a focus also on the well-being of operators.

Based on the data collected and the literature review, the following key recommendations aim to strengthen inclusion in the field of youth work. These insights are grounded in both theoretical evidence and lived experiences, offering a foundation for more coherent, participatory, and sustainable approaches.

- **Recognise and value the role of youth workers**: national and European policy frameworks should clearly define the competencies, scope of action, and professional status of youth workers to ensure their contribution is fully acknowledged and supported.



- **Invest in high-quality, continuous training:** accessible, practical, and multidisciplinary training pathways are essential—especially for those working in informal settings or rural areas, where resources are often limited.
- **Co-develop a shared European curriculum on inclusion:** a common training framework, designed collaboratively with youth workers and young people, should be grounded in real-life experiences and provide transferable tools applicable across different contexts.
- **Strengthen local and transnational networks:** building strong connections between organisations, schools, families, and institutions is vital to respond effectively and collectively to emerging educational and social needs.
- **Support youth workers' wellbeing:** tools for self-reflection, professional supervision, and psychosocial support are crucial to prevent burnout and sustain motivation and effectiveness in the long term.
- **Foster critical digital education:** youth workers need the right tools and training to guide young people in navigating technology and digital environments responsibly, while countering misinformation, isolation, and polarisation.
- **Amplify young people's voices:** young people must be actively involved in decision-making processes—not only listened to, but recognised as key actors in building inclusive, open, and fair communities.

These recommendations offer a starting point for the development of youth policies and educational tools that are truly oriented toward inclusion and social justice.



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