YouthProAktiv

Co-funded by the European Union

Youth Leadership

EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICES



2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Who this document is for
1.2 Objectives
1.3 How to use this document

---

02 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Leadership in action
2.2 Effective management practices
2.3 Effective advocacy and policy-making in youth organisations

---

03 PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Asociación Amicos
3.2 EuroMirada
3.3 YouthProAktiv
3.4 Fundacja reGeneracja

---

04 EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICES

4.1 Asociación Amicos
4.2 EuroMirada
4.3 YouthProAktiv
4.4 Fundacja reGeneracja

---

05 RECCOMANDATIONS

---

06 CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of youth leadership across Europe has become an essential priority for organisations committed to democratic participation, social inclusion, and the advancement of the EU Youth Strategy. In a context marked by rapid socio-economic transformation, digital acceleration, and evolving policy frameworks, youth organisations increasingly recognise the need to exchange concrete practices that enhance their capacity to lead, manage, and advocate effectively. The Youth Leadership *Exchange of Best Practices* emerges precisely within this landscape: as a structured space for peer learning, cross-border cooperation, and collective reflection on how youth leadership can be cultivated in ways that are both context-sensitive and future-oriented.

This publication brings together the practices shared during the May 2026 hybrid exchange, which convened youth leaders from diverse European and neighbouring countries. The initiative was designed to support organisations in analysing their own leadership models, management systems, and advocacy strategies, while learning from the experiences of peers operating in different socio-political environments. By documenting these practices, the collection aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how youth organisations can strengthen their internal governance, enhance the quality of their educational and community-based activities, and reinforce their role as intermediaries between young people and public authorities.

The document is structured to offer both conceptual grounding and practical insight. It begins by outlining the theoretical foundations of three pillars: leadership in action, effective management practices, and advocacy and policy-making in youth organisations. These sections provide a shared analytical framework for understanding the practices presented later in the publication. The subsequent chapters introduce the participating organisations, each operating within distinct cultural, institutional, and organisational realities. Their contributions illustrate how youth leadership can take multiple forms: from environmental stewardship and inclusive community engagement to digital empowerment, policy literacy, and local advocacy.

The core of the publication is the section dedicated to the *Exchange of Best Practices*, where each organisation offers a concrete illustration of its work. Rather than presenting fragmented elements, these contributions unfold as coherent narratives that trace the evolution of a single initiative, from its initial purpose to the way it was implemented, led, and managed. Through these accounts, the reader gains insight into how organisations navigate real challenges, mobilise their teams, engage with communities and institutions, and reflect critically on the outcomes achieved. Each practice thus becomes a window into the lived experience of youth leadership, revealing not only what was done, but how learning emerged through action.

Ultimately, this collection seeks to support youth organisations in strengthening their strategic capacities, deepening their cooperation with public authorities, and enhancing their contribution to the EU Youth Goals. By fostering a culture of mutual learning and by making successful practices visible and transferable, the publication aspires to reinforce the role of youth work as a cornerstone of democratic resilience, social cohesion, and inclusive participation across Europe.

1.1 WHO IS IT FOR

his document is intended for a broad yet clearly defined community of actors engaged in youth leadership, youth work, and non-formal education across Europe and neighbouring regions. Its primary audience consists of youth organisations, workers, and young leaders who seek to strengthen their strategic, managerial, and advocacy capacities. For these actors, the collection offers a structured resource that translates diverse organisational experiences into actionable knowledge, enabling them to reflect on their own practices and to integrate new approaches into their daily work.

A second key audience includes educators, trainers, and facilitators operating within non-formal education settings. For these practitioners, the publication provides concrete examples of leadership in action, effective management practices, and advocacy strategies that can be adapted to different learning environments. The document supports them in designing programmes that foster youth participation, critical thinking, and civic engagement, while remaining sensitive to cultural and organisational diversity.

The collection is also relevant for policymakers, institutional stakeholders, and public authorities working in fields such as youth policy, education, culture, social inclusion, and community development. For these actors, the publication offers insight into how youth organisations operationalise EU values, implement leadership models, and engage with policy processes. It highlights the conditions under which youth-led initiatives can flourish and identifies opportunities for strengthening cooperation between institutions and civil society.

Finally, the document serves researchers, students, and analysts interested in contemporary youth leadership and non-formal education. By presenting a curated set of practices grounded in real organisational experiences, it contributes to a growing body of knowledge on youth participation, organisational development, and cross-border peer learning.

Across all these audiences, the publication aims to function as both a reference and a catalyst: a reference for understanding how youth leadership is enacted in practice, and a catalyst for deeper collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment to empowering young people as active contributors to Europe's democratic life and social cohesion.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this publication is to strengthen the quality and strategic capacity of youth organisations by facilitating a structured exchange of practices in leadership, management, and advocacy. Through the documentation of concrete organisational experiences, the collection seeks to transform individual practices into shared knowledge that can inform future programme design, organisational development, and cross-border cooperation. In doing so, it contributes to a broader effort to enhance the professionalism, coherence, and impact of youth work across Europe.

A second objective is to deepen dialogue with and among young people, recognising that meaningful youth participation requires not only opportunities for engagement, but also the organisational capacity to support it. By presenting diverse approaches to leadership in action and participatory governance, the publication encourages organisations to reflect on how young people can be positioned as active contributors rather than passive beneficiaries.
The document also aims to raise awareness of the central role of youth work and non-formal education in advancing the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Youth Goals. The practices included illustrate how values such as inclusion, participation, equality, and sustainability can be operationalised through concrete activities, thereby demonstrating the relevance of youth organisations as partners in policy implementation.

A further objective is to reinforce cooperation between youth organisations and public authorities. By showcasing examples of effective advocacy, structured dialogue, and policy engagement, the publication highlights the conditions under which youth-led initiatives can influence decision-making processes and contribute to more responsive and inclusive policies. It also underscores the importance of institutional support in enabling youth organisations to sustain their work and expand their impact.

1.3 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is structured to support an accessible and purposeful reading experience, allowing users to navigate the material according to their interests and organisational needs. While it can be read sequentially, it is equally suitable for selective consultation, particularly for practitioners seeking inspiration for programme design, organisational development, or cross-border cooperation.

Readers interested in exploring potential collaborations may first refer to the section on participant organisations, which provides an overview of each partner's mission, expertise, and operational context. Those seeking inspiration for new initiatives or wishing to understand how different approaches have been implemented in practice may turn to the exchange of best practices. Finally, readers in need of conceptual clarity, methodological structure, or analytical tools will find the theoretical foundations particularly valuable, as they offer the framework underpinning the entire publication.

Taken together, this paper offers a practical and adaptable resource. Readers may draw inspiration from the examples, adapt methods to their own contexts, or use the publication as a reference for strengthening the quality, coherence, and strategic depth of their youth activities.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

This chapter examines the concept of leadership in the context of youth work, tracing its conceptual frameworks and practical applications. It opens by defining leadership and distinguishing it from formal authority, before introducing the more specialised framework of youth leadership and its developmental dimensions. The content block then explores how leadership manifests at a collective and institutional level, with particular reference to the approach adopted within the European Union, analysing its two predominant styles, collective and value-based, along with their respective strengths and limitations.

The following sections outline the key principles that underpin effective youth leadership programmes, as well as the methodological tools employed to cultivate leadership competences in practice. This section concludes by situating youth leadership within the broader landscape of contemporary youth work, highlighting its role as a vehicle for empowerment, social inclusion, and systemic change.

Defining Leadership: Concept and Distinctions

Leadership and authority are frequently conflated in everyday discourse, yet they represent fundamentally distinct concepts.

Leadership

Leadership is best understood as the ability to influence, guide, motivate, and inspire people toward achieving a common goal. Crucially, a leader gains followers not through formal mandate but through vision, trust, effective communication, and personal example.

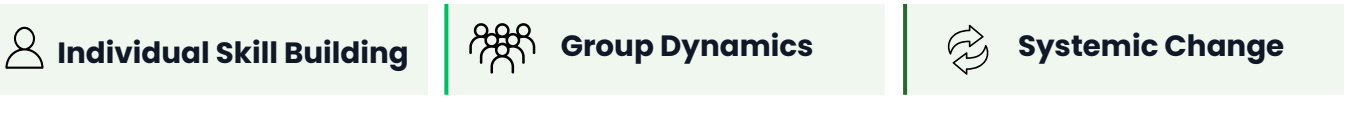
Authority

Authority is the formal right or power to make decisions, give orders, and enforce obedience, a capacity that is institutionally granted through a position, role, or organisational structure. While authority can exist without leadership, and leadership can emerge independently of authority.

Youth Leadership

Within this broader framework, youth leadership constitutes a specialised and multifaceted concept that operates at two distinct levels: the internal and the external. Externally, it refers to the capacity to guide or direct others on a course of action and to influence the opinions and behaviours of a group. Internally, it denotes the ability to analyse one's own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and maintain the self-esteem necessary to engage community resources for positive social change. This dual definition, articulated by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth), underscores the intrinsic connection between personal growth and collective influence that characterises youth leadership.

It is also important to situate youth leadership within the wider field of youth development. While youth development is a holistic process that prepares young people for the challenges of adulthood across all dimensions of life, youth leadership is a specialised subset of that process, one that focuses on the mastery of specific competences such as responsibility, teamwork, and vision. Contemporary frameworks further emphasise that youth leadership should not be conceived merely as preparation for the future; rather, it functions as a proactive force for driving change in the present, shifting focus from individual achievement toward collaboration, civic engagement, and the mobilisation of others to address complex social, environmental, and political challenges. This approach is commonly applied through a holistic lens operating at three distinct levels:



Leadership in the European Union: Styles and Approaches

Leadership does not take a single, universal form; rather, it manifests through a variety of styles that reflect different values, organisational structures, and cultural contexts. In the context of the European Union, two leadership styles are particularly relevant and coherent with the principles of youth work: collective leadership and value-based leadership. Both approaches move beyond traditional hierarchical models and align with the participatory and ethical commitments that characterise EU institutions and their approach to youth engagement.

1 Collective Leadership

Collective leadership is a style in which responsibility, decision-making, and influence are distributed among the members of a group and not concentrated in a single individual. In this model, leadership is conceived as a team effort: different individuals contribute their skills, knowledge, and perspectives in pursuit of common goals.

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Collective Leadership

Advantages	Disadvantages
Encourages teamwork and cooperation across the group	Decision-making processes may be slower and more complex
Draws on diverse skills and perspectives	Conflicts or disagreements among members can emerge
Builds trust and a sense of shared ownership	Roles and responsibilities may become unclear without structure
Promotes creativity and innovation through collective input	

2 Value-Based Leadership

Value-based leadership is an approach in which a leader's decisions, actions, and behaviour are guided by strong ethical values and moral principles. Rather than focusing solely on the achievement of objectives, a value-based leader prioritises what is right, fair, and responsible. The defining characteristics of this style include integrity, respect for others, personal accountability, trustworthiness, and a commitment to leading by example.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Builds trust through consistent honesty and ethical conduct	Decision-making may be slower due to ethical deliberation
Encourages a culture of responsible and fair behaviour	Ethical choices may conflict with short-term financial or competitive interests
Increases team commitment and loyalty	Differing interpretations of shared values can cause disagreements
Enhances the organisation's public reputation and credibility	Leaders face heightened scrutiny and expectations of consistent conduct
Supports sustainable, long-term growth over short-term gains	May encounter resistance in environments focused on rapid results

Key Principles of Youth Leadership Development

The development of youth leadership is underpinned by a set of foundational principles that guide both the process of skill acquisition and the desired outcomes for participants. These principles reflect an understanding of leadership not as an innate trait but as a learnable, relational, and context-dependent capacity. The following principles are widely recognised as central to effective youth leadership programmes.

Individual and Ethical Growth. Effective youth leadership programmes begin with the individual: they facilitate the discovery of personal leadership styles and strengths, while simultaneously fostering the development of ethics, values, and critical reasoning. Central to this principle is the cultivation of high expectations and genuine respect for the young people involved.

Experiential Learning and Reflection. A cornerstone of youth leadership development is the principle that leadership is best acquired through active participation rather than passive instruction. Experiential learning involves a cyclical process in which individuals engage in a concrete activity, reflect critically on the experience, and apply their insights to future actions. This approach is operationalised through genuine leadership opportunities, such as serving as a team captain, club officer, community representative, or peer juror, which allow young people to test theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts and build self-efficacy through practice. Complementary methodological tools include Human-Centred Design and Design Thinking, which equip young leaders with empathy-based problem-solving frameworks for addressing complex social challenges, and Service-Learning, which integrates meaningful community engagement with structured reflection to foster civic responsibility alongside academic and leadership competences.

Collaboration and Inclusion. Youth leadership moves deliberately beyond traditional top-down models by prioritising teamwork, networking, and collective well-being. Inclusion is a foundational principle: effective programmes ensure that all participants feel a sense of belonging and are able to contribute meaningfully to a shared vision, regardless of background or ability.

Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement. Leadership in youth work is intrinsically connected to service to others and to a deep understanding of one's social, cultural, and historical context. This principle positions young people not merely as beneficiaries of community support but as proactive changemakers with the capacity and the responsibility to address complex social and environmental challenges.

Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP). A critical principle in contemporary youth work is the deliberate shift toward youth-driven models of decision-making. This involves a power-sharing dynamic in which adults and young people navigate organisational boundaries together, share constructive feedback, and treat youth as primary stakeholders. Practically, this is facilitated through shared meeting management, co-leadership of projects, and structured mechanisms ensuring that youth voices are authentically integrated into organisational processes.

Mentorship and Nurturing Relationships. Sustained leadership development is frequently predicated on the quality of relationships young people have with mentors and positive role models. These relationships provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability over time.

Core Competences for Youth Leaders

The competences associated with youth leadership are organised within a broader developmental framework encompassing five interconnected domains: working, learning, thriving, connecting, and leading. While comprehensive youth development addresses all five areas, youth leadership programmes place primary emphasis on leading and connecting as the domains most directly tied to leadership mastery.

LEADING COMPETENCIES

These encompass the capacity to articulate personal values, maintain integrity, and demonstrate responsibility toward oneself and others. At a more advanced level, they include the ability to formulate and communicate a compelling vision, motivate and empower others, share authority, and navigate change through continuous reflection and improvement.

CONNECTING COMPETENCIES

This domain focuses on interpersonal capacities, building trust, practising active listening, and developing empathy. In the context of leadership, it extends to the ability to influence and mobilise others, communicate effectively to convey a specific message or direction, and serve as a credible and inspiring role model for peers.

COMPETENCES FOR INCLUSION

For young people with disabilities or from other marginalised groups, an additional set of competences is emphasised, centred on self-advocacy: the ability to understand one's own strengths and limitations, communicate one's needs clearly, and navigate systems to secure appropriate accommodations and support. The development of independent living skills is also a key outcome in this context.

Relevance of Youth Leadership in Contemporary Youth Work

The significance of youth leadership in contemporary youth work derives from its transformative potential: its capacity to reposition young people from passive recipients of services into proactive partners and primary stakeholders in their communities. By reconfiguring organisational structures, shifting from adult-driven "for youth" models toward genuinely "youth-driven" environments, youth work creates the conditions in which young voices become a driving force for innovation, critical thinking, and meaningful risk-taking. This structural transformation is foundational to building cultures of empowerment that respond to the real-life challenges young people face today, rather than deferring their agency to an uncertain future.

At the individual level, youth leadership is a critical mechanism for fostering self-efficacy and resilience. Research consistently demonstrates that young people who occupy multiple leadership roles report significantly higher levels of self-confidence and a stronger belief in their capacity to effect meaningful change in their environment.

Youth leadership is also highly relevant as a vehicle for social inclusion and transition support, particularly for young people from marginalised groups. For those living with disabilities, or navigating the transition out of foster care or other institutional systems, leadership development programmes provide essential tools for self-advocacy and independent living. By equipping these young people to analyse their own strengths, set meaningful goals, and access community resources, youth work enables them to assert their civil rights and to participate in the shaping of the policies that directly affect their lives.

At a systemic level, youth leadership represents a vital instrument for addressing both community-specific and global challenges. By embedding leadership development at the heart of youth work practice, practitioners equip the next generation to function not merely as future citizens but as present-day social innovators and entrepreneurial changemakers, individuals capable of mobilising others, challenging entrenched inequalities, and advancing sustainable responses to issues as complex and urgent as climate change, poverty, and structural discrimination.

2.2 EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

This chapter examines the principles and practices that underpin effective management within youth-focused initiatives, with a particular emphasis on meaningful participation and empowerment as both guiding values and operational objectives. It begins by defining the core concept, youth participation and empowerment, situating it within broader frameworks such as the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach and the widely used ladder of participation. The chapter then identifies the key management principles necessary to ensure that youth projects remain sustainable, ethical, and genuinely participatory, moving beyond tokenism toward authentic co-creation. The following section addresses the main tools and competences available to youth workers and young people themselves, covering practical instruments ranging from governance documents to programme improvement processes.

The discussion ends with an examination of the broader relevance of these practices in contemporary youth work, highlighting their role in fostering systemic innovation, individual agency, and long-term community ownership.

Definition of the Concept

At the heart of effective management within youth work lies the concept of meaningful youth participation and empowerment, understood as both a fundamental right and a cornerstone of democratic citizenship. Youth participation refers to the active engagement of young people in the decision-making processes that shape their lives and communities, a commitment that extends well beyond consultation or symbolic inclusion. A widely used framework for conceptualising degrees of participation is the "ladder of participation," in which the highest rungs are characterised by shared decision-making and youth-led initiatives. This model draws a clear distinction between genuinely transformative engagement and practices that remain at the level of tokenism or decoration, where young people are visibly present but hold no meaningful influence.

Closely linked to participation is the concept of youth empowerment, which functions simultaneously as a process and an outcome. As a process, empowerment requires adults to create the necessary space, structures, and support for authentic youth engagement. As an outcome, it results in young people gaining greater control over their own lives and developing the capacity to drive community change.

The Positive Youth Development Framework

The theoretical foundation for these concepts is provided by the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, a strengths-based and ecological approach that fundamentally reframes how young people are perceived and engaged within organisations. Rather than viewing youth through the lens of risk or as problems to be managed, PYD positions young people as valuable community members and active partners whose persistence, resilience, and creativity are essential assets for sustainable social progress. In practice, this translates into a model of meaningful, mutually respectful partnership between youth and decision-makers, one in which the contributions of young people are not only valued but actively inform the design, implementation, and funding of policies and programmes.

Key Principles of Effective Management

The effective management of youth-focused initiatives is grounded in a set of core principles that ensure projects remain sustainable, safe, ethically sound, and authentically participatory. These principles do not operate in isolation; rather, they constitute an integrated framework for organisational practice that places young people at the centre of decision-making at every stage.

Collective Management and Co-creation. Effective youth project management requires a deliberate departure from top-down administrative structures in favour of shared decision-making models. Co-creation, in which young people and adults jointly plan activities, set milestones, and develop work programmes, is central to this approach. Genuine collective management actively resists tokenism by ensuring that youth contributions produce tangible results and that the process itself is experienced as meaningful by all participants.

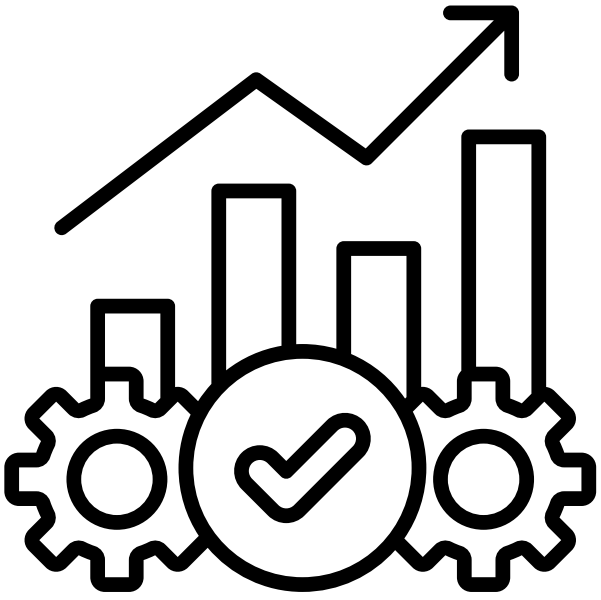
Comprehensive Risk Management and Safety. The protection of participants represents a non-negotiable management responsibility. This requires a systematic four-step approach: assessing potential exposures (including adult-to-youth ratios and physical environment safety), developing targeted mitigation strategies, implementing these measures in practice, and continuously evaluating their effectiveness. Risk management must also extend to the digital sphere, with organisations establishing clear codes of conduct for electronic communication and ensuring full compliance with data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Inclusion, Diversity, and Ethics. Managers must proactively ensure that the composition and culture of youth projects reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, accounting for dimensions such as gender, age, socioeconomic background, and disability. This commitment to an inclusive ethos goes beyond structural representation: it requires the active identification and challenging of bias, and the promotion of equitable practices at every level. Ethical management further demands clear and enforceable guidelines regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, and professional conduct for both staff and young participants.

Sustainability and Institutional Memory. Long-term organisational viability depends on deliberate succession planning. Effective management maintains a balanced age range within youth groups to enable a natural cycle of turnover in which experienced members mentor those who are newer to the organisation. Equally important is the systematic documentation of processes, decisions, and institutional knowledge in handover materials, ensuring continuity when staff or board members change.

Alignment of Needs and Capacity. Before initiating a project, managers must conduct a realistic assessment of institutional capacity, encompassing available time, funding, and human resources. It is equally essential that the expectations placed on young people are commensurate with their voluntary status and individual motivations.

Continuous Quality Improvement. Effective programmes must remain genuinely responsive to the evolving needs of young people, as determined by the young people themselves. This is achieved through a structured programme improvement process grounded in participant data, including annual youth surveys, which enables organisations to cultivate a culture of ongoing reflection, learning, and iterative adjustment.



Core Competences

Table 1: Core Competences for Youth Workers and Young People

Young People	Youth Workers and Staff
Critical thinking and self-management	Facilitation without micro-management; patience and flexibility
Advanced communication and public speaking	Approachability and respect for youth as equal partners
Policy research and paper drafting	Competence in e-safety and GDPR compliance
Intercultural sensitivity and respect for diversity	Capacity to work effectively in intercultural and diverse teams
Capacity to participate meaningfully in organisational decision-making	High relational energy and ability to sustain motivating environments

Relevance of Effective Management in Youth Work

The significance of meaningful youth participation and effective management practices in contemporary youth work is rooted in a fundamental paradigm shift: the transition from treating young people as passive beneficiaries of services to recognising them as active citizens and indispensable partners in democratic life. This reconceptualisation has wide-ranging implications across several interconnected dimensions.

Youth participation enhances the relevance and sustainability of programmes, as young people introduce perspectives that challenge established assumptions and generate more appropriate solutions. Their involvement is both an ethical commitment and a driver of organisational innovation and systemic effectiveness.

Effective engagement requires environments that are physically and emotionally safe, since safety enables learning, identity exploration, and creative risk-taking. Over time, sustained involvement fosters a sense of ownership, reinforcing the durability of community initiatives and contributing to the accumulation of social capital, which supports collective action and organisational resilience.

These practices align closely with European policy frameworks, particularly the EU Youth Action Plan (2022–2027), which promotes Youth Advisory Structures and Youth Sounding Boards to strengthen participatory governance. Programmes such as the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ demonstrate how individual leadership development can be linked to broader social needs, supporting the shift from youth-serving to genuinely youth-centred organisations.

2.3 EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AND POLICY-MAKING IN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

This chapter examines the concept of advocacy and policy-making as practised within youth organisations, exploring both its theoretical foundations and its practical dimensions.

It opens by defining advocacy and distinguishing it from two closely related concepts, lobbying and campaigning, before framing its specific significance in the context of youth engagement and voice. The following section presents the main tools, methods, and competences available to youth advocates, from strategic analytical frameworks to direct political engagement techniques. The narrative concludes by situating advocacy within the wider ecosystem of youth work, where it functions as a tool for systemic influence, empowerment, and inclusive practice.

Definition of the Concept

Advocacy is best understood as an encompassing process of deliberate actions and activities designed to influence individuals or groups who hold formal power to develop, change, or implement public policies (Youth Forum). It serves as the primary mechanism through which non-profit organisations and civil society stakeholders gather support and build momentum for systemic change within political, economic, and social institutions. Distinguishing advocacy from two related but distinct concepts, lobbying and campaigning, is essential for precision in both analysis and practice.



Advocacy, Lobbying, and Campaigning



LOBBYING

Lobbying is often used interchangeably with advocacy but carries a more specific meaning: it refers to direct interactions with politicians and decision-makers, such as formal meetings, written submissions, or negotiations, with the explicit aim of passing or preventing specific legislation.



CAMPAIGNING

Campaigning refers to a specific subset of advocacy methods focused on public mobilisation, awareness-raising, and community organising. It relies on a coordinated set of interlinked activities designed to involve a large number of individuals in creating visible pressure for change.

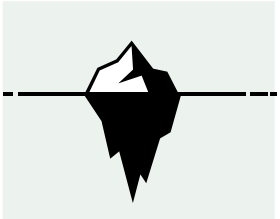
Advocacy in the Context of Youth Engagement

In the specific context of youth work, advocacy is characterised by young people demanding that policymakers and leaders pay genuine attention to their perspectives and to the needs of their communities. Crucially, it is not merely about speaking on behalf of youth; it is about enabling young people to speak their own truth and tell stories from their own points of view, thereby informing the entire policymaking continuum. This distinction is fundamental: authentic youth advocacy is youth-authored, not youth-themed.

Tools, Methods, and Skills for Advocacy

Effective advocacy requires a combination of strategic analytical frameworks, a diverse repertoire of action methods, and a well-defined set of professional competences. These three dimensions are mutually reinforcing: tools structure the analysis, methods translate it into action, and competences enable practitioners to deploy both with skill and adaptability.

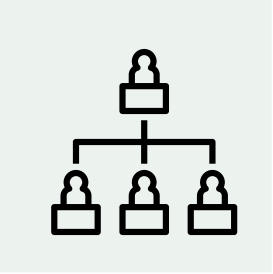
Strategic Planning and Analysis Tools



Iceberg Model. Used to analyse whether a given situation represents a visible symptom or a deeper structural problem. By distinguishing surface-level events from underlying systemic causes, this model helps advocates identify the root issues that their work must ultimately address.



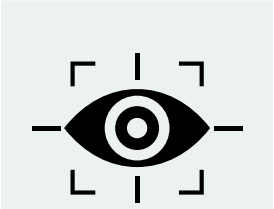
PEST Analysis. A framework for identifying the external Political, Economic, Sociological, and Technological factors that shape a given issue. This analysis is essential for understanding the broader environment in which advocacy takes place and for anticipating how macro-level forces may enable or constrain change.



Problem and Objectives Tree. A visual methodology for mapping the causes and effects of a problem. Once the problem tree is constructed, its negative impacts can be systematically converted into positive, SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-oriented, and Time-bound), providing a clear strategic foundation for advocacy planning.



Stakeholder Power Mapping. Utilising a Power/Interest Matrix, this tool identifies which actors have the influence necessary to trigger change and prioritises engagement strategies accordingly. It enables advocates to distinguish between allies to be mobilised, decision-makers to be persuaded, and adversaries to be monitored or neutralised.



Monitoring and Evaluation Tools. Effective advocacy includes long-term monitoring mechanisms to measure political and societal change over time. Quantitative indicators and participatory tools, such as the CIVICUS Monitor or the Youth Progress Index, provide structured frameworks for assessing whether advocacy efforts are producing measurable impact and where course corrections may be required.

Main Methods of Action

Table 2: Advocacy Methods by Type and Policy Cycle Stage

Method	Description	Policy Cycle Stage
Public Mobilisation	Petitions, protests, social media campaigns, and creative interventions in public spaces designed to attract media attention and build visible public pressure.	Agenda-setting / Problem identification
Knowledge Production	Publishing academic research, policy reports, and monitoring tools to generate credible evidence-based arguments that legitimise advocacy positions.	Policy formulation / Analysis
Direct Political Engagement	Letters to policymakers, lobbying meetings, pledge campaigns, and field trips enabling decision-makers to witness the real-life impact of issues first-hand.	Decision-making / Adoption
Formal Participation	Responding to public consultations, drafting precise amendments to legislative proposals, and securing a seat in official advisory or deliberative bodies.	Implementation / Evaluation

Core Competences

Table 3: Core Competences for Youth Advocates

Competence Area	Key Skills
Communication Skills	Press release writing, social media production, public speaking, framing, and storytelling to enable youth to speak their truth effectively.

Competence Area	Key Skills
Political and Analytical Skills	Negotiation, policy paper drafting, and knowledge of institutions and legislative processes.
Project and People Management	Event management, budget planning, volunteer management and training, and community building.
Technical Literacy	Digital mobilisation tools, data protection (GDPR) compliance, and e-safety protocols

Relevance of Advocacy in Youth Work

In the context of youth work, advocacy is a critical function that fundamentally repositions young people, from passive beneficiaries of services to active agents of systemic change. Its relevance is grounded in the core mission of youth organisations to empower young people and to defend their rights within a democratic society. By engaging in advocacy, youth work contributes what might be called the missing ingredient in policymaking: the unique, direct, and irreplaceable perspectives of those who are most immediately affected by political decisions.

Advocacy enables young people to engage with the full policy cycle, producing solutions that are more accurate and more widely supported thanks to the sense of co-ownership it generates. Through this process, youth develop democratic agency and essential citizenship competences, transforming their creativity and lived experience into structured influence. Genuine advocacy requires moving beyond tokenism by building trust, offering mentoring, and ensuring that marginalised groups have a platform to shape policy agendas. At the organisational level, structured advocacy strengthens institutional memory and professionalisation, reducing the loss of knowledge caused by high turnover.

3. PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Asociación Amicos (Spain)

Asociación Amicos is a Galician non-profit organisation committed to promoting the inclusion, autonomy, and well-being of people with intellectual disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, and other support needs. Through a combination of educational, therapeutic, and community-based programmes, the organisation supports individuals across all stages of life, fostering personal development and social participation.

3.2 Euro Mirada (Spain)

Euro Mirada is a Spain-based non-profit organisation committed to advancing human rights, social inclusion, and youth empowerment through international exchange and community engagement programmes. By creating inclusive learning and participation opportunities, the organisation supports young people from diverse backgrounds in strengthening their personal development and active civic role. Through a broad portfolio of activities, Euro Mirada fosters solidarity, inclusion, and social awareness.

3.3 YouthProAktiv (Belgium)

YouthProAktiv (YPA) is a Belgium-based organisation dedicated to fostering a proactive and entrepreneurial generation committed to positive societal change. The organisation works with young people, youth leaders, and youth workers to strengthen leadership, employability, and innovation skills, enabling them to contribute to job creation, sustainable development, and active citizenship. YouthProAktiv also plays an active role in advocating for entrepreneurship-friendly and youth-inclusive policies at both national and international levels, with the aim of empowering young people and promoting decent and sustainable employment opportunities.

3.4 Fundacja reGeneracja (Poland)

Fundacja reGeneracja is a Polish organisation focused on education, social inclusion, and community development. It supports children, young people, seniors, and vulnerable groups through non-formal learning, digital skills training, and social support initiatives. The foundation promotes active citizenship, equal opportunities, and intergenerational solidarity by offering programmes that strengthen key life competences, from digital literacy to entrepreneurship.

4. EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICES

This chapter compiles the best practices shared by the four partner organisations participating in the YouthProAktiv Exchange of Best Practices. Each practice is presented through a structured overview, covering its context, target groups, and challenge addressed, followed by a detailed account of its implementation and an analysis of how it relates to the three thematic pillars explored during the exchange: leadership in action, effective management practices, and effective advocacy and policymaking in youth organisations.

The examples gathered here represent a diverse range of approaches to youth work, from environmental empowerment in Spain to grassroots advocacy in Poland, intensive training in Rome, and EU-level policy engagement in Belgium. Together, they illustrate that meaningful youth leadership can take many forms and can be adapted to different local, national, and European contexts.

4.1 Asociación Amicos

Organisation	Asociación Amicos
Title	Youth Environmental Ambassadors: Leading the Green Transition
Country	Spain
Period	2024 – 2026

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE:

Asociación Amicos developed this practice within two Spanish national environmental projects, LabMar and Cabalga. The initiative integrates social inclusion with environmental protection by empowering young people with intellectual disabilities to act as professional "Environmental Agents", training them to lead the protection of natural ecosystems and to implement circular economy practices in their communities.

Challenge addressed: The core challenge was the need to move beyond traditional care models that position youth with disabilities as passive recipients of support. The practice sought to dismantle the social stigma associated with intellectual disability by demonstrating that these young people are capable, credible, and valuable contributors to addressing global environmental challenges.

Main target groups: Young people with intellectual disabilities enrolled in Amicos' occupational centres, as well as community stakeholders, middle and high school students, and local associations who participated in the workshops delivered by the young Environmental Agents.

PRACTICE IN ACTION:

The practice was organised around three sequential implementation phases:

- In the first phase, Technical Training, participants received specialised instruction on identifying and managing marine waste and preserving coastal biodiversity. This phase was essential to ensure that young people entered their leadership roles equipped with genuine, professional-level knowledge.
- In the second phase, Field Execution, youth led environmental actions directly on the Galician coastline, including the professional management of marine debris. This direct engagement in real-world tasks was central to building their confidence and credibility as environmental leaders.
- In the third phase, Knowledge Transfer, participants designed and delivered technical workshops to diverse community groups, including local associations, schools, and fishing guilds.

A concrete illustration of the practice in action is provided by the LabMar project, in which young "Marine Guardians" with disabilities offered technical training to local fishing guilds and community organisations on the importance of circular economy practices. This role reversal, in which a typically marginalised group becomes the expert teacher, was itself a powerful advocacy act.

Workshop 1: Leadership in Action

Leadership within this practice was organised in a decentralised manner: young participants with intellectual disabilities were positioned as the primary protagonists, guiding both their peers and external audiences. The applied model was explicitly empowerment-based, positioning youth as technical experts rather than beneficiaries.

What proved most effective was the psychological and relational shift involved; the transition from being "helped" to being the "expert" produced measurable gains in leadership confidence and competence among participants.

The principal challenge encountered was confronting deep-seated social stigmas; this was addressed not through messaging campaigns but through the direct demonstration of technical expertise in solving problems of genuine public relevance

Workshop 2: Effective Management Practices

The practice was coordinated through a collaborative management model in which young people with intellectual disabilities took direct ownership of specific operational, educational, and communicational tasks. Digital monitoring tools, including reporting systems and image documentation, were used by participants and volunteers to track the environmental impact of activities on the Galician coastline.

The most effective management system proved to be what Amicos terms the "Collaborative Expertise-Sharing Protocol": a structured approach in which young participants independently manage the design and delivery of technical workshops for external stakeholders.
The primary management challenge was ensuring cohesive coordination between the technical requirements of outdoor environmental projects and the personalised support needs of each participant, a balance that required ongoing attention and flexibility.

Workshop 3: Effective Advocacy and Policy Making

The advocacy component of this practice operated through an "Experts by Experience" programme, in which youth took on the role of specialised instructors for national and international environmental initiatives. The practice led to measurable outcomes: increased community understanding of the environmental, economic, and social consequences of pollution and climate change, as well as a tangible shift in public perception of young people with disabilities.

The key insight about advocacy gained from this experience is that it is most effective when it is active and expert-led, when it shifts the narrative from "need" to "contribution". The practice's model is regarded as scalable: its transferability depends on organisations committing to treating people with intellectual disabilities as genuine experts and providing them with professional-grade tools and training.

4.2 Asociación Euro Mirada

Organisation	Asociación Euro Mirada
Title	Leadership BootCamp for Youth Workers
Country / Location	Rome, Italy
Period	May 2025 (5-day course)

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE:

Asociación Euro Mirada designed and delivered an intensive five-day international training course in Rome in May 2025, bringing together 24 youth workers from Italy, Spain, Greece, and Malta. The BootCamp combined non-formal education methodologies with structured peer exchange to strengthen leadership competences, project management skills, and intercultural collaboration capacity.

Challenge addressed: The practice responded to a recognised gap in the youth work sector: many practitioners possess strong field experience but lack structured competences in leadership and project management that would allow them to scale their impact.

It also addressed the need for more inclusive, digitally competent, and transnationally connected youth work practices across Europe. The design explicitly acknowledged a key assumption, that leadership skills can be effectively introduced through short intensive formats, while noting that long-term behavioural change requires sustained follow-up, which the project sought to address through mentoring arrangements.

Main target groups: Youth workers between 25 and 35 years old on average, including facilitators and NGO staff working with young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

PRACTICE IN ACTION:

The BootCamp was implemented through a structured sequence of phases.
A co-design phase conducted online prior to arrival allowed participants to contribute to shaping the training content through consultations, fostering a sense of ownership from the outset.

The BootCamp was implemented through a structured sequence of phases:

- A co-design phase conducted online prior to arrival allowed participants to contribute to shaping the training content through consultations, fostering a sense of ownership from the outset.
- The on-site phase in Rome combined interactive workshops on leadership and conflict resolution, group-based project simulations, intercultural team challenges, and digital collaboration exercises.
- Daily reflection cycles, structured debriefing sessions, ensured that practical experience was consistently connected to learning outcomes.
- The programme concluded with a synthesis phase in which participants designed small-scale action plans for applying their learning in their local contexts, followed by formal Youthpass certification.

A concrete and illustrative example occurred during a simulation exercise on managing a youth inclusion project under time and budget constraints. Mixed-nationality teams were given limited resources and conflicting stakeholder demands. One group initially struggled due to unclear internal roles. Following a facilitator intervention that encouraged distributed leadership, the team reorganised responsibilities across communication, finance tracking, and stakeholder negotiation, and successfully delivered a coherent project pitch. This episode demonstrated vividly how effective leadership can emerge through adaptive coordination rather than formal hierarchy.

Workshop 1: Leadership in Action

Leadership was distributed throughout the BootCamp: while facilitators guided the overall process, participants rotated roles: coordinator, mediator, rapporteur; within group tasks, and decisions were made collaboratively within teams.

The applied model was participatory and experiential, grounded in the conviction that youth workers learn leadership more effectively by practising shared decision-making than by observing hierarchical models. The rotation of roles proved particularly effective in ensuring broader engagement, while real-time problem-solving exercises strengthened accountability.

Participation was occasionally uneven due to cultural and personality differences, which made the use of structured facilitation techniques essential. Language barriers also emerged, but were mitigated through visual tools and simplified task formats that supported clearer communication. Time pressure, identified during the first day, was addressed by introducing more precise milestone planning, which helped stabilise the workflow and ensure a more balanced contribution from all participants.

Workshop 2: Effective Management Practices

Coordination was shared between the hosting organisation and partner representatives, with daily coordination meetings ensuring alignment across sessions and responsiveness to evolving group dynamics. Tools employed included non-formal education methodologies (learning-by-doing, role play), digital collaboration tools, visual planning boards, and a QR-based daily feedback evaluation system.

The standout management innovation was the "daily feedback loop system": each evening, participants submitted short, structured feedback, which was analysed overnight and used directly to adjust the following day's agenda. This real-time responsiveness significantly enhanced the quality and relevance of the learning experience.

The main management difficulties were the need for rapid content adaptation and the increased preparation time required for coordination across multilingual groups.

Workshop 3: Effective Advocacy and Policy Making

Within the BootCamp, participants developed mini-policy proposals focused on improving youth work recognition and inclusion practices at local and EU level. These proposals were shared with partner organisations and documented for broader dissemination. Stakeholders targeted included youth organisations, local authorities involved in youth policy, and European youth work networks.

No direct policy change was achieved within the project timeframe; however, participants reported increased confidence in engaging with local institutions after returning to their home countries, particularly in relation to inclusion initiatives.

The key insight on policy influence gained from this experience is that short-term training, while unable to directly change policy, can create "policy-literate practitioners", professionals who are more confident, better prepared, and more strategically equipped to engage with institutional actors in their own national and local contexts.

4.3 YouthProAktiv

Organisation	YouthProAktiv
Title	Bringing EU Youth Policy Closer to Young People: From CULT Committee Awareness to Policy Engagement
Country / Location	Belgium / European Union level
Period	2025 (YouthShapingEU2025 project)

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE:

YouthProAktiv implemented this practice in 2025 under the YouthShapingEU2025 project, as part of the organisation's Engagement pillar. It combined two complementary strands of action: a youth-friendly communication series titled "Inside the CULT Committee", presenting 60 Members of the European Parliament serving on the Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education; and a structured policy engagement process involving direct outreach to policymakers, ongoing monitoring of CULT Committee priorities, and participation in EU-level consultations. The practice was delivered primarily online through YouthProAktiv's social media channels, while the policy engagement strand involved direct communication with MEPs and their offices.

Challenge addressed: The practice responded to a persistent challenge in youth participation: many young people and youth organisations experience EU policymaking as distant, technical, and difficult to influence. Parliamentary committees, policy files, and consultations often remain inaccessible to those most affected by decisions in education, youth, culture, employment, digital transformation, and inclusion. At the same time, youth organisations lack structured and reliable ways to follow EU processes and identify engagement opportunities. The practice addressed both needs simultaneously: translating institutional processes into youth-friendly formats, and creating stronger channels of dialogue between youth organisations and EU policymakers.

Main target groups: Young people interested in EU affairs and democratic participation; YouthProAktiv member organisations and other youth organisations seeking to understand EU policymaking; youth workers and civil society actors; Members of the European Parliament; and wider online audiences reached through social media.

PRACTICE IN ACTION:

The practice unfolded through six sequential steps:

- First, YouthProAktiv mapped the composition of the CULT Committee, identifying 60 MEPs and reviewing publicly available information on their roles, political groups, and policy priorities.
- Second, the team developed a consistent editorial and visual template for the series, ensuring coherence and recognisability across all publications.
- Third, 60 social media highlights were produced and published between February and April 2025, disseminated via Instagram and Facebook.
- Fourth, in parallel, YouthProAktiv monitored CULT Committee meetings, reports, and policy discussions throughout 2025, covering areas including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Solidarity Corps, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, media literacy, and youth policy.
- Fifth, the organisation carried out direct outreach to MEPs and policymakers through meetings, structured exchanges, and follow-up communication.
- Finally, all findings were transformed into advocacy, communication, and reporting outputs, including the Policy Engagement Outcomes Report.

The "Inside the CULT Committee" series provides a particularly clear illustration of the practice. For each MEP, the highlight connected their role and priorities to areas directly relevant to young people: education, culture, media literacy, youth mobility, digital skills, inclusion, and democratic values. By using a consistent and recognisable template, the series helped audiences understand not only who sits in the CULT Committee, but why its work matters for young people's everyday lives. Crucially, the same institutional mapping that informed the public series also supported YouthProAktiv's identification of priority contacts for policy outreach.

Workshop 1: Leadership in Action

Leadership was organised in a coordinated but distributed manner. YouthProAktiv's team held overall strategic direction, while responsibilities were divided according to the different components of the practice: some members focused on policy monitoring and research, others on communication, visual production, and social media dissemination, and others on institutional outreach and follow-up.

A participatory, distributed, and advocacy-oriented leadership model was applied, chosen because the practice required different types of expertise simultaneously. What worked particularly well was the combination of a clear shared framework, which maintained consistency across 60 highlights, with a flexible division of tasks that allowed the work to progress efficiently. The practice also benefited from the synergies created between research and advocacy: the same institutional knowledge that underpinned the communication series directly informed and strengthened the policy engagement strand.

Workshop 2: Effective Management Practices

The practice was managed through a structured workflow integrating research, editorial planning, content production, dissemination, policy monitoring, and stakeholder outreach. The team defined two main workstreams at the outset, the communication series and the policy engagement process, and built internal structures for mapping MEPs, drafting and reviewing content, producing visual materials, and scheduling publication.

The most effective management system was the standardised editorial and visual template for the 60 highlights, which ensured consistency, enabled quality control, and significantly reduced the time required for design and editing across a large volume of content.

The main management difficulties were balancing accuracy with accessibility in translating complex institutional content for social media audiences, managing the volume of work across the two parallel strands, and adapting to the unpredictability of institutional agendas and policymaker availability.

Workshop 3: Effective Advocacy and Policy Making

The advocacy approach combined three complementary actions: strengthening youth political literacy through accessible communication about the CULT Committee; monitoring EU policy processes throughout the year; and engaging directly with MEPs through structured outreach, meetings, and follow-up. Stakeholders targeted included CULT Committee members, MEP offices, EU-level institutional actors, and YouthProAktiv member organisations.

Concrete results included increased visibility of the CULT Committee's work among youth audiences, a structured overview of 60 MEPs linked to youth-relevant policy areas, and the strengthening of YouthProAktiv's institutional dialogue capacity.

Three key lessons on advocacy emerged: that it is more effective when young people and organisations first develop political literacy and understand the institutional spaces they aim to influence; that social media communication strengthens advocacy only when it is integrated with stakeholder mapping, policy monitoring, and structured outreach; and that influencing policy requires patience, continuity, and the sustained cultivation of trust with policymakers, even when immediate policy change cannot be claimed.

4.4 Fundacja reGeneracja

Organisation	Fundacja reGeneracja
Title	Creating a Youth Safe Space in Ciechanów through Local Advocacy
Country / Location	Poland
Period	Ongoing (initiated 2024–2025)

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE:

Fundacja reGeneracja led this initiative to create a safe, accessible physical space for young people in Ciechanów, Poland.

The initiative combined community needs identification, partnership building, and civic advocacy through a formal petition campaign.

Challenge addressed: Young people in Ciechanów lacked a dedicated, safe place where they could meet, express themselves, and engage in positive social and educational activities. Beyond the physical gap, there was also an absence of structured dialogue between youth and local authorities, a systemic deficit that the practice sought to address by creating both the space and the channel for sustained institutional engagement.

Main target groups: Young people (teenagers and young adults) from Ciechanów; local decision-makers including the city vice-president and city council; and youth organisations and informal youth groups operating in the city.

PRACTICE IN ACTION:

The practice was implemented through a clear sequence of steps.
The process began with the identification of the need through direct conversations with young people, followed by internal organisational discussion and the identification of possible solutions. The team then contacted a collaborator working within the municipality who could facilitate access to decision-makers. A meeting was arranged with the vice-president of the city, at which the concept of a youth safe space was presented with concrete examples drawn from young people's experiences.
The vice-president responded positively to the proposal but requested tangible evidence of public demand: specifically, a petition with a minimum of 300 signatures. This led to the organisation of a structured petition campaign among young people, which succeeded in mobilising local youth, collecting the required signatures, and building visible community support for the initiative. The petition was subsequently submitted to local authorities for formal consideration. This sequence of ideas, institutional meeting, petition, and submission, provided the project with a clear and manageable structure throughout.

The meeting with the vice-president serves as a particularly instructive example of the practice in action. Rather than presenting an abstract proposal, the team grounded the discussion in real experiences shared by young people. The official's requirement for a petition was not an obstacle but a productive condition: it transformed the initiative from an NGO proposal into a community-backed demand, significantly strengthening its legitimacy and reach.

Workshop 1: Leadership in Action

Leadership within this practice was shared across the team: key decisions were made collaboratively, while specific responsibilities: communication, meeting organisation, petition management, were divided among members according to capacity and skills. The approach applied was participatory and youth-led, premised on the understanding that genuine youth ownership increases both engagement and the credibility of the initiative in the eyes of decision-makers.

What worked particularly well was the clear division of roles combined with strong internal communication. The main challenges were coordinating schedules and sustaining motivation during the petition phase, both addressed through regular team meetings and informal communication via messaging applications.

Workshop 2: Effective Management Practices

The project was coordinated through regular team meetings, task delegation, and ongoing communication with stakeholders. Tools employed included social media for outreach and petition promotion, messaging applications for internal coordination, in-person meetings with municipal stakeholders, and simple task planning through shared documents and to-do lists.

The most effective management approach was the division of the project into clearly defined stages, idea, institutional meeting, petition, submission; which kept the process structured and maintained the team's sense of progress. The principal management difficulties encountered were limited prior experience with formal advocacy processes and the challenge of sustaining consistent engagement from a large number of young people throughout the campaign.

Workshop 3: Effective Advocacy and Policy Making

The advocacy action consisted of presenting the youth safe space proposal directly to local decision-makers and organising the petition campaign to demonstrate broad community support. Stakeholders targeted included the vice-president of the city, the city council, and municipal representatives. The practice resulted in the initiative reaching the stage of formal consideration by the city council, meaningfully increasing the prospects of obtaining a dedicated space and associated funding.

Three key lessons on policy influence emerged from this experience: that building relationships with institutional insiders, such as the municipal collaborator who facilitated access, is a critical enabling factor; that decision-makers require credible evidence of public support before committing to action; and that youth voices can effectively influence local policy outcomes when they are well organised and grounded in demonstrated community need. The practice is regarded as a simple, replicable model of local youth advocacy that connects grassroots mobilisation with formal institutional decision-making.

CROSS-CUTTING REFLECTIONS

The four practices presented in this chapter illustrate the breadth of approaches through which youth leadership, management, and advocacy can be effectively enacted. Despite their significant differences in context, scale, and methodology, several common threads emerge across all four cases.

In terms of **leadership**, all four organisations applied participatory and distributed models, consciously moving away from hierarchical authority toward shared responsibility and co-ownership.

Whether through the decentralised expertise of Amicos' Environmental Agents, the rotating roles of Euro Mirada's BootCamp, the task-divided coordination of YouthProAktiv, or the collaborative team structure of Fundacja reGeneracja, the evidence consistently points to the value of distributed leadership in building both engagement and outcomes.

In terms of **management**, all four cases emphasise the importance of clear structure, whether through formal protocols, standardised templates, stage-based planning, or daily feedback loops, as the foundation that enables participatory approaches to function effectively without becoming chaotic. Structure and flexibility, far from being in tension, proved mutually reinforcing across all four contexts.

In terms of **advocacy**, the clearest shared lesson is that influencing policy requires combining multiple complementary actions: building relationships with institutional insiders, generating credible evidence of need or public support, and communicating consistently over time. None of the four cases produced immediate systemic change; all of them, however, contributed meaningfully to building the conditions for sustained future engagement between young people and the institutions that shape their lives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the insights generated through the exchange, several recommendations emerge for organisations seeking to strengthen youth leadership, management practices, and advocacy capacities.

First, organisations should prioritise meaningful youth participation by embedding co-creation mechanisms at every stage of programme design and governance. This requires moving beyond consultation toward shared decision-making structures that give young people real influence over strategic choices.

Second, investment in capacity-building for both youth and staff is essential. Training in facilitation, intercultural communication, risk management, and advocacy equips teams to navigate diverse groups, manage complex initiatives, and support young people's agency in a sustainable way. Complementary to this is the need for structured mentorship systems that ensure continuity, nurture emerging leaders, and strengthen institutional memory.

Third, organisations should adopt evidence-informed management practices, including regular feedback loops, youth-led evaluation processes, and systematic documentation of learning. These mechanisms help maintain programme quality, support organisational resilience, and ensure that activities remain responsive to the evolving needs of young people.

Fourth, strengthening cross-sector cooperation is crucial. Partnerships with public authorities, schools, community actors, and European networks expand the reach of youth initiatives and create more coherent pathways for participation in democratic life. Such cooperation also reinforces the legitimacy of youth organisations as key actors in policy implementation.

Finally, organisations should continue to engage with European and international frameworks, using tools such as the EU Youth Strategy, the EU Youth Goals, and the Council of Europe's youth sector priorities to guide their strategic development. These frameworks offer shared reference points that support alignment, visibility, and long-term impact.

6. CONCLUSION

This publication demonstrates that youth leadership, effective management, and advocacy are deeply interconnected dimensions of contemporary youth work. When young people are positioned as partners rather than beneficiaries, organisations become more innovative, more inclusive, and more capable of responding to the complex challenges facing European societies.

The practices documented throughout this report show that leadership is cultivated through action, reflection, and shared responsibility; that meaningful participation requires intentional structures and ethical management; and that advocacy is both a tool for systemic influence and a pathway to empowerment.

By bringing together diverse organisational experiences, the Youth Leadership Exchange of Best Practices contributes to a growing ecosystem of mutual learning across Europe. It highlights how youth organisations can strengthen their internal governance, enhance the quality of their educational and community-based activities, and reinforce their role as intermediaries between young people and public authorities. More broadly, it affirms youth work as a cornerstone of democratic resilience, social cohesion, and inclusive participation.

Ultimately, the report invites organisations, policymakers, and practitioners to continue investing in youth-centred development, not only as a strategic priority, but as a shared commitment to empowering young people as active contributors to Europe's present and future.

Co-funded by
the European Union

YouthProAktiv

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors, only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."