Building a Skilled Youth Workforce: A Competence Model Based Training for Youth Workers

BeCompetent Handbook 2025

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YOUTHABILITY

FOREWORD

The BeCompetent project was conceived as a response to the growing need for professionalization and recognition in youth work across Europe. Youth workers today operate in a rapidly changing environment, marked by technological innovation, shifting social realities, and complex challenges that affect young people's lives. To remain effective, they must be equipped not only with enthusiasm and empathy but also with well-developed competences that allow them to adapt, reflect, and lead with purpose.

This handbook is both a product and a reflection of that commitment. Developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, BeCompetent aims to strengthen the professional identity of youth workers by focusing on the European Competence Model for Youth Workers. It provides practical tools and conceptual grounding for those who wish to deepen their practice, improve their self-awareness, and connect their work with broader European standards.

BeCompetent is more than a project; it is a collaboration among dedicated organizations from Greece, Türkiye, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, and Bulgaria. Together, they explored how competence development can be experienced, shared, and sustained. The result is a living resource that combines theory, practical examples, and reflection on what it means to work competently with young people in diverse contexts.

This handbook invites readers to engage in a journey of learning that does not end with the last page. Competence development is not a destination but a continuous process of questioning, improving, and rediscovering meaning in one's work. The BeCompetent partnership hopes that the insights, models, and practices described here will support youth workers in their daily mission: empowering young people to become active, creative, and resilient members of society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BeCompetent project represents the collective effort of many people who believed in the transformative power of youth work. It was born from a shared vision to strengthen professional competences, build bridges across cultures, and inspire continuous learning within the European youth sector. This handbook, as one of the project's main results, stands as a testament to the dedication, creativity, and cooperation of everyone who contributed to making this journey possible.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all partner organizations for their commitment, innovation, and perseverance throughout the project's development and implementation. Each partner brought unique expertise, cultural perspectives, and professional insights that enriched the process. The collaboration among organizations from Greece, Türkiye, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, and Bulgaria embodies the very essence of European solidarity. Together, they demonstrated that when people work with respect, empathy, and shared purpose, the outcome is more than the sum of its parts.

Special appreciation is given to the coordinating organization in Greece, whose leadership and coordination ensured that every phase of BeCompetent was managed with care, precision, and vision. Their attention to detail, responsiveness, and commitment to quality made it possible for all partners to contribute confidently and effectively.

We also wish to acknowledge the trainers, facilitators, and experts who designed and implemented the training course in Thessaloniki. Their ability to combine structure with creativity transformed the learning process into a truly dynamic experience. They guided participants through reflection, experimentation, and intercultural exchange with professionalism and sensitivity. Their openness to feedback and their constant encouragement created a space where participants could take risks, learn deeply, and grow both personally and professionally.

Heartfelt thanks go to the twenty-four youth workers who participated in the BeCompetent training course. Their energy, curiosity, and willingness to share made the program a living example of experiential learning in action. Coming from six different European countries, they brought diverse experiences, values, and realities into one learning community. Their honest reflections, critical questions, and inspiring contributions became the heart of this handbook. Each participant played a role not only as a learner but as a co-creator of knowledge.

We express deep appreciation to the local communities and organizations in Thessaloniki that opened their doors and shared their work with the participants. Their stories, challenges, and successes provided valuable insights into the real-life application of youth work competences. These encounters reminded everyone that competence development is not an abstract goal but a living process rooted in people, places, and relationships.

Our gratitude also extends to the project managers, administrators, and communication officers who worked behind the scenes. Their organizational skills, attention to timelines, and care for the smallest details ensured that the project ran smoothly. Their invisible but essential contributions allowed others to focus on creativity and learning.

We recognize the invaluable support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, whose commitment to education, inclusion, and youth empowerment makes initiatives like BeCompetent possible. The program's emphasis on lifelong learning and cross-border cooperation continues to inspire thousands of organizations to innovate and to make positive change. The funding and trust provided by Erasmus+ enabled this partnership to transform ideas into action and action into meaningful results.

We also wish to thank the national agencies and local stakeholders who offered guidance, feedback, and encouragement during the implementation of the project. Their support and expertise helped ensure that BeCompetent remained aligned with the broader goals of European youth policy.

Finally, this publication is dedicated to youth workers everywhere who devote their time, compassion, and creativity to the empowerment of young people. Their daily work often happens quietly, yet its impact is profound. They are mentors, guides, and advocates who help young people discover their potential and contribute to society with confidence and care. Their commitment forms the backbone of social innovation, community resilience, and democratic participation across Europe.

To all who participated, supported, or inspired the BeCompetent project, we offer our sincere appreciation. This handbook carries not only knowledge and methodology but also the spirit of collaboration and learning that defines youth work at its best.

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INTRODUCTION

THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE OF YOUTH WORK

Youth work in Europe has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past two decades. What was once understood primarily as voluntary, community-based activity has evolved into a recognized and strategic part of lifelong learning, civic participation, and social inclusion. Across the continent, youth work has matured from informal neighborhood initiatives to a structured and professional field that contributes directly to education, democracy, and social cohesion.

This transformation did not happen by chance. It reflects Europe's growing awareness that young people are not only future citizens but active shapers of the present. Investing in their personal, social, and civic development has become a central objective of European policy. Both the Council of Europe and the European Union have consistently emphasized that youth work is a vital force in building democratic societies. It helps young people find their voice, develop their competences, and engage meaningfully in their communities.

Youth work occupies a unique position in European societies. It bridges formal and informal education, combining learning with participation and creativity with responsibility. It also provides an inclusive space for young people who may feel disconnected from traditional institutions. In many countries, youth workers are often the first to reach young people who face barriers such as poverty, discrimination, or limited access to education.

By doing so, youth work strengthens the fabric of society by ensuring that every voice can be heard.

The European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn Process have brought this vision into sharper focus. These frameworks identify competence development as one of the main pillars of quality and recognition in youth work. They underline the need for youth workers to have access to structured professional learning, fair working conditions, and policy environments that support their growth. The Agenda also highlights the importance of research, dialogue, and cooperation between local, national, and European levels. In this context, youth work is not an isolated practice but part of a wider ecosystem that links education, employment, health, and culture.

The BeCompetent project emerged directly from this European momentum. It was designed to respond to the shared need for a competence-based approach to youth work training. The project builds on the European Competence Model for Youth Workers, which offers a coherent framework for professional learning and reflection. By translating this model into concrete experiences, BeCompetent connects theory with practice and encourages youth workers to become active learners throughout their careers.

Across Europe, youth workers now face an increasingly complex and demanding reality. They are expected to address a wide range of issues, from mental health and well-being to digital literacy, climate anxiety, and social polarization. They play roles as educators, mentors, facilitators, mediators, and advocates, often within limited resources and challenging contexts. To meet these expectations, they must combine professional competence with emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and a deep sense of ethical responsibility.

The digital transformation of society has also changed the nature of youth work. Online spaces have become new arenas for participation, learning, and identity formation. While these environments create opportunities for connection, they also bring challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and social isolation. Youth workers must therefore develop digital competences that allow them to guide young people safely and creatively through an increasingly virtual world.

In addition to digitalization, the social landscape of Europe is marked by diversity and mobility. Migration, multiculturalism, and intergenerational change have made intercultural dialogue essential to the work of every youth professional. Inclusion and equity are no longer optional values but central dimensions of quality.

The BeCompetent project recognizes that competence development must include not only practical skills but also the capacity to understand difference and to promote belonging.

Economic and environmental challenges add further complexity. High youth unemployment in some regions, the climate crisis, and the long-term effects of global instability shape young people's lives and perspectives. Youth workers often serve as guides in helping them navigate uncertainty, develop resilience, and discover a sense of purpose. In this context, competence development becomes not just a professional necessity but a moral responsibility.

At the heart of all these challenges lies an opportunity. Youth work can serve as a platform for innovation and social renewal. It fosters creative thinking, encourages active citizenship, and supports the development of critical and reflective individuals. The European dimension of youth work, expressed through Erasmus+ and other cooperation programs, allows professionals to share methods, build networks, and expand their understanding of what youth empowerment can look like in different contexts.

The BeCompetent project contributes to this vision by creating spaces for learning that are inclusive, participatory, and transformative. It connects everyday practice with European competence standards and encourages youth workers to see themselves as part of a broader community of professionals who share common goals and values. The project's training activities and this handbook are designed to strengthen the link between local action and European policy, making competence development both personal and collective.

Youth work today stands at the crossroads of education, social policy, and community development. It is no longer a marginal activity but a strategic field that influences how societies prepare for the future. It requires the ability to adapt to rapid change, the courage to innovate, and the commitment to uphold the values of inclusion, equity, and respect for human dignity.

The BeCompetent Handbook positions itself within this dynamic landscape as both a guide and a mirror. As a guide, it offers frameworks, methods, and inspiration for professional growth. As a mirror, it reflects the evolving identity of youth work in Europe and the people who dedicate their lives to it. It celebrates the idea that competence is not simply about performance but about purpose. To be competent in youth work means to act with awareness, empathy, and a continuous desire to learn.

This introduction sets the stage for what follows. It invites readers to explore how competence development can transform not only professional practice but also the wider culture of youth work. It calls for an understanding of youth work as a field where learning, participation, and social change meet. The BeCompetent project believes that by investing in the competence of youth workers, Europe invests in its own democratic strength and in the potential of its young people to create a fairer and more inclusive future.

PURPOSE AND VISION OF BECOMPETENT

The BeCompetent project was developed in response to a clear need within the European youth work sector: the need for professional growth that is structured, inclusive, and focused on long-term development. As youth work evolves, the responsibilities of practitioners have expanded far beyond traditional facilitation. Youth workers are now expected to be educators, mentors, advocates, and community leaders. They operate in diverse cultural and social contexts, often addressing complex challenges that require both technical knowledge and emotional intelligence.

The purpose of BeCompetent is to strengthen the quality and recognition of youth work by emphasizing competence development as the foundation of professional practice. The project is inspired by the European Competence Model for Youth Workers and by the priorities of the European Training Strategy. Its goal is to turn these frameworks into practical learning experiences that help youth workers reflect on their roles, identify areas for improvement, and gain the confidence to respond to new realities.

At its core, BeCompetent is about empowerment. It aims to support youth workers in understanding their professional identity and in developing the competences necessary to facilitate meaningful change for young people. The project creates learning spaces where reflection, creativity, and action come together in a supportive and collaborative environment.

The vision of BeCompetent rests on three interconnected pillars: professional growth, inclusion, and cooperation.

Professional growth represents the belief that youth workers deserve continuous opportunities for learning. Professional development is not limited to attending occasional training courses or collecting certificates. It is a lifelong process of reflection, experimentation, and improvement. The project promotes the idea that competence is something dynamic and evolving. It grows through practice, feedback, and the willingness to adapt to new contexts.

Throughout the BeCompetent training and its follow-up activities, participants were encouraged to take ownership of their learning journey. They were guided to set personal development goals, explore their strengths, and identify specific areas they wanted to enhance. This approach follows the principles of lifelong learning and helps transform learning into a habit rather than a temporary goal.
Inclusion is the second pillar of the project's vision. Youth work exists to support all young people, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance. Real competence in youth work cannot exist without a genuine commitment to inclusion. Every aspect of BeCompetent, from its design to its implementation, was shaped by a respect for diversity. Participants came from six European countries and brought a wide range of perspectives, realities, and experiences. Their diversity made the learning process richer and more relevant.

Inclusion also means ensuring that all youth workers have access to high-quality professional development, not only those in well-resourced urban areas. BeCompetent was designed to reach practitioners from different regions and organizational contexts, including those who often face barriers to participation.

By doing so, it supports equality of opportunity and promotes fairness across the European youth field.

Cooperation forms the third pillar of BeCompetent's vision. Youth work thrives when organizations and individuals collaborate across borders. The project brought together partners from Greece, Türkiye, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, and Bulgaria, each contributing specific expertise and cultural understanding. This partnership illustrates the European value of unity through diversity and shows how collaboration can turn shared goals into tangible results.

Cooperation was not only a practical necessity but also a learning experience in itself. The BeCompetent partnership worked through open dialogue, shared decision-making, and mutual trust. During the training in Greece, these same principles were applied. Participants co-created sessions, contributed ideas, and took responsibility for shaping the learning atmosphere. This participatory approach turned the course into a living example of how cooperation can strengthen both learning and motivation.

Another key dimension of the project's vision is its role in connecting policy with practice.

Too often, European strategies and frameworks remain distant from the realities of daily youth work. BeCompetent sought to bridge this gap by translating the European Competence Model into accessible tools and methods that can be applied directly in the field. The project shows that competence frameworks are not abstract documents but practical guides for reflection, planning, and growth.

The project also highlights the ethical side of competence development. Youth work is not only about what professionals do but also about how and why they do it. Ethics, empathy, and respect for human dignity are at the heart of professional excellence. BeCompetent encourages youth workers to reflect on the values that shape their actions and to ensure that their practice remains consistent with principles of equity and participation.

Through this holistic approach, BeCompetent promotes a renewed understanding of professional identity in youth work. It helps practitioners see themselves as part of a larger European community of learners and changemakers. The training, follow-up initiatives, and this handbook all provide youth workers with both practical tools and a sense of belonging to a professional field that values reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning.

The BeCompetent Handbook embodies this vision. It serves as a resource for youth workers who want to deepen their competences and as an inspiration for organizations that wish to invest in the professional growth of their teams. It presents competence development as a path toward empowerment for individuals, institutions, and communities.

Ultimately, BeCompetent contributes to a vision of Europe where youth work is valued and recognized as an essential profession. By strengthening the competences of youth workers, the project enhances the capacity of societies to support young people in reaching their full potential. Its vision is that every youth worker, regardless of where they come from, can access opportunities to learn, exchange, and grow within a European framework of shared quality and care.

BeCompetent stands as both a practical initiative and a symbol of European cooperation in action. It reflects the belief that competence is more than skill. It is a shared language that connects professionals, inspires young people, and strengthens communities across Europe.

THE VALUE OF COMPETENCE-BASED YOUTH WORK

Competence-based youth work represents one of the most significant developments in the professionalization of the field across Europe. It provides a framework that connects everyday practice with broader educational and social goals. By focusing on competences, youth work becomes more intentional, reflective, and accountable, while maintaining the flexibility and creativity that define non-formal education.

At its essence, competence-based youth work is about understanding what youth workers need in order to perform their roles effectively and meaningfully. It recognizes that good intentions and enthusiasm, while essential, are not enough on their own. Youth work requires a balanced combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow practitioners to respond to the needs of young people in dynamic and complex environments.

The concept of competence brings structure to a profession that thrives on diversity. It allows youth workers, organizations, and policymakers to share a common language about quality and professional growth.

The BeCompetent project embraces competence-based youth work as a pathway to empowerment for both professionals and participants. For youth workers, it offers a framework to analyze their practice, recognize their strengths, and identify learning needs. For organizations, it provides a structure for supporting staff development and ensuring quality outcomes. For young people, it creates a learning environment where they can develop their own competences through guided participation and reflection.

The approach also helps bridge the gap between local practice and European policy. By aligning training with the European Competence Model, youth workers contribute to the wider European Youth Work Agenda and the Bonn Process.

This connection ensures that local initiatives feed into continental progress and that European frameworks remain grounded in real experience. Competence-based youth work thus reinforces the sense of shared purpose that unites practitioners across borders.

Competence-based methods encourage self-awareness. They invite youth workers to look at their own learning styles, motivations, and emotional responses. This process deepens understanding of one's professional identity and fosters a reflective attitude that supports lifelong development. In the BeCompetent training, for instance, participants were asked to reflect not only on what they had learned, but on how they learned and how that learning might influence their behavior in the future. Such reflection transforms experience into growth and growth into wisdom.

Another key advantage of competence-based youth work is its inclusiveness. Because it focuses on practical abilities rather than formal qualifications, it recognizes diverse forms of knowledge and experience. Many excellent youth workers enter the field through volunteering, activism, or personal experience rather than formal study. Competence-based frameworks validate this diversity by acknowledging learning that happens in non-formal and informal settings. This recognition empowers individuals and makes the profession more accessible and equitable.

Competence-based approaches also strengthen cooperation between different sectors.
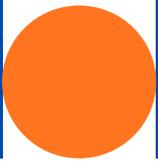
By adopting a shared language of competences, youth work can collaborate more effectively with education, employment, and social services. This alignment helps create smoother pathways for young people moving between learning environments and increases the visibility of youth work's contribution to society.

At an organizational level, competence-based learning promotes a culture of reflection and dialogue. Teams that discuss competences together tend to develop stronger communication, clearer goals, and a sense of shared responsibility. Managers and trainers can use competence frameworks to guide supervision, design training programs, and evaluate progress. In this way, the approach not only benefits individuals but also improves institutional performance.

The BeCompetent project demonstrates that competence-based youth work is not a rigid or bureaucratic model. It is a flexible and adaptable approach that respects diversity and context. Each organization or practitioner can interpret the competences in a way that fits their reality while still maintaining the shared European vision of quality and inclusion. The framework serves as a compass rather than a rulebook. It guides direction without limiting creativity.

In the end, the value of competence-based youth work lies in its ability to connect purpose with practice. It helps youth workers understand not only how to act, but why they act, and what impact their actions create. It promotes professionalism without losing the authenticity and humanity that make youth work unique.

The BeCompetent Handbook builds on this philosophy. It offers tools, methods, and reflections that bring the competence model to life. It invites youth workers to use competence not as a checklist, but as a pathway for continuous growth. The ultimate aim is to create a European community of professionals who share a common language of quality and a shared belief in the transformative power of learning.

Competence-based youth work is therefore both a method and a mindset. It is a commitment to learning, to responsibility, and to the well-being of others. It ensures that youth work continues to evolve with integrity and purpose, preparing young people and professionals alike to meet the challenges of a changing world with confidence and care.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Youth work today operates within a rapidly changing and often unpredictable social landscape. Across Europe, youth workers face a multitude of challenges that reflect broader transformations in society. Technological progress, global mobility, social inequality, and political instability all influence the lives of young people and shape the conditions under which youth work takes place. These factors create both opportunities for innovation and obstacles that require resilience and adaptability.

The twenty-first century has brought unprecedented connectivity. Young people are growing up in a digital world where information, communication, and identity are constantly evolving. Online platforms offer spaces for self-expression and participation, but they also introduce risks such as misinformation, digital dependency, and social isolation.

Youth workers are often among the first to witness these effects. They play an essential role in helping young people navigate digital environments responsibly, critically, and creatively. To do this effectively, youth workers themselves must develop strong digital competences and understand how technology shapes learning, relationships, and behavior.

At the same time, globalization has increased diversity in almost every European community. Migration, cultural exchange, and international mobility have enriched societies but also introduced new forms of inequality and misunderstanding. Youth workers must be able to facilitate intercultural dialogue, build inclusive spaces, and address discrimination in all its forms. They are called to model respect, empathy, and openness in contexts where difference can sometimes lead to tension.

Economic and social disparities continue to affect young people unevenly across Europe. In some regions, unemployment and precarious work limit opportunities for independence and self-realization. In others, high pressure to succeed and constant competition create stress and insecurity. Youth work provides a counterbalance to these trends. It creates spaces where young people can learn at their own pace, develop self-confidence, and explore their identity without fear of failure. This human-centered approach offers stability and belonging in times of uncertainty.

Mental health has emerged as one of the most significant issues facing young Europeans. Studies consistently show increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among young people.

These problems are often linked to social media use, economic instability, or the pressures of modern education and employment. Youth workers are not mental health professionals, yet their role in prevention and support is crucial. They are trusted adults who can recognize signs of distress, create safe spaces for discussion, and guide young people toward appropriate resources. To fulfill this role, they need training in emotional intelligence, communication, and trauma-informed practice.

Environmental challenges have also become central to youth work. The climate crisis is not only an ecological issue but also an educational and psychological one. Young people experience eco-anxiety and frustration about the future, while at the same time showing strong commitment to sustainability and activism. Youth work can channel this energy into constructive action. By promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices, youth workers help young people see that their actions matter and that they can contribute to positive change.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed both the strengths and vulnerabilities of youth work. During lockdowns, many youth organizations demonstrated creativity by moving activities online, supporting communities, and maintaining contact with young people who felt isolated. However, the pandemic also highlighted gaps in digital readiness, funding stability, and professional recognition. These experiences reinforced the importance of competence development, flexibility, and collective learning in the sector.

Politically, youth work must navigate shifting landscapes. In some contexts, civic participation is shrinking, and trust in institutions is declining.

Youth workers therefore have a critical role as mediators of democracy. They help young people understand their rights, express their opinions, and engage in social dialogue. This requires both pedagogical skill and courage to address sensitive issues such as discrimination, inequality, and political polarization.

The BeCompetent project was designed with these realities in mind. It recognizes that the challenges youth workers face are complex and interconnected. The project responds by offering a competence-based training approach that strengthens professional identity, encourages reflection, and builds networks of support. By focusing on competences such as facilitation, communication, teamwork, and intercultural awareness, BeCompetent equips practitioners with practical tools for navigating complexity.

Another dimension of the challenge lies in recognition. Although youth work has gained greater visibility in recent years, its professional status varies significantly across countries. In some places, youth workers are integrated into national education systems, while in others, the role remains informal or underfunded. This inconsistency affects not only working conditions but also the motivation and stability of professionals. BeCompetent contributes to the European effort to standardize recognition and promote youth work as a respected, evidence-based profession.

Funding and sustainability remain ongoing concerns. Many youth organizations operate with limited budgets and rely on short-term project funding. This often leads to uncertainty and limits opportunities for long-term planning. Competence-based approaches can help organizations demonstrate impact and quality, which in turn supports advocacy for more stable investment in youth work.

Social cohesion is another pressing issue. Europe continues to face divisions based on economic inequality, migration, and political attitudes. Youth work has the potential to act as a unifying force by fostering understanding, participation, and solidarity. Projects like BeCompetent show that European cooperation can bridge these divides by creating spaces where youth workers from different countries learn together and build trust.

The cultural dimension of youth work is equally important. As societies change, so do the ways young people communicate, learn, and express themselves. Youth workers must stay attuned to these shifts. They need to understand contemporary youth culture, from digital trends to social movements, in order to connect authentically with the people they serve. This requires curiosity, flexibility, and ongoing reflection. Amid these challenges, there is also great opportunity. The complexity of today's world calls for creative, competent, and compassionate professionals who can adapt and lead with vision. Youth work is uniquely positioned to meet this need. It combines education, social engagement, and emotional support in a way that no other sector does.

The BeCompetent project acknowledges that the future of youth work depends on investing in those who deliver it. By providing high-quality training and by aligning with European competence standards, it helps youth workers respond to the demands of a changing world with professionalism and confidence. The project embodies the belief that competence development is not a one-time effort but a lifelong journey of learning and reflection. Ultimately, the context in which youth work operates today calls for renewed commitment. It requires cooperation between practitioners, organizations, and policymakers. It demands the creation of structures that support learning, recognition, and sustainability. The BeCompetent project contributes to this shared mission by equipping youth workers with the skills and perspectives they need to help young people thrive in a world that is diverse, digital, and constantly transforming.

Youth work remains a field of hope and possibility. Even in times of crisis, it continues to inspire connection, creativity, and courage. By addressing current challenges with competence and care, youth workers ensure that Europe's next generation grows not only more skilled but also more compassionate, resilient, and engaged in shaping the future.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EUROPEAN POLICY LINKS

The BeCompetent project is grounded in a solid theoretical and policy framework that connects its objectives with wider European priorities in the field of youth work and education. This framework ensures that the project is not an isolated initiative but part of a long-term effort to strengthen competence development, recognition, and professionalization across Europe. At the heart of this foundation lies the European Training Strategy (ETS), a key initiative of the European Union that guides the capacity building of youth workers and youth organizations.

The ETS defines competence as the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to act effectively in specific contexts. It encourages youth workers to view learning as a lifelong journey that extends beyond formal education. According to this perspective, competence is not simply about acquiring information but about developing the ability to apply learning creatively, ethically, and collaboratively in real-life situations.

The European Training Strategy also highlights the importance of non-formal learning. It emphasizes that young people and youth workers learn best when education is participatory, experiential, and reflective. This philosophy aligns with the BeCompetent approach, which views competence development as an active process that takes place within relationships, communities, and real experiences.

Another pillar of the BeCompetent theoretical framework is the European Youth Work Agenda (EYWA). Developed through the Bonn Process, the Agenda aims to build a common direction for youth work across Europe. It recognizes that quality youth work contributes directly to democracy, social inclusion, and personal development. The Agenda calls for stronger systems of competence development, better cooperation between practice, research, and policy, and the recognition of youth work as a profession that makes a measurable impact on society.

The BeCompetent project reflects the vision of the European Youth Work Agenda in practical form.

It creates spaces where policy aspirations become tangible experiences. By offering structured competence-based training, BeCompetent helps implement the Bonn Process at the grassroots level. It demonstrates how European principles can be translated into tools, methods, and learning environments that empower youth workers in their daily practice.

Both the European Training Strategy and the European Youth Work Agenda share a common understanding: competence development is central to the quality and sustainability of youth work. Without well-prepared and reflective practitioners, youth work cannot fulfill its mission of empowering young people and strengthening communities.

Connecting Theory and Practice

The BeCompetent project also draws on well-established theories of experiential and transformative learning. Two thinkers have had a particularly strong influence on its design: David Kolb and Paulo Freire.

David Kolb's model of experiential learning provides a clear structure for understanding how people learn through experience. His four-stage cycle describes learning as a continuous process that begins with concrete experience, moves into reflection, leads to conceptual understanding, and finally culminates in active experimentation. This cycle mirrors the rhythm of the BeCompetent training, where participants engage in activities, reflect on them, connect insights to theory, and apply what they have learned to new contexts.

Kolb's approach highlights that knowledge is created through transformation. Learning does not end with understanding but continues with the application of ideas in practice. This dynamic relationship between experience and reflection is what makes competence development both practical and meaningful.

Paulo Freire's ideas bring an equally important dimension to the BeCompetent philosophy. Freire emphasized dialogue, critical awareness, and participation as essential elements of education. He believed that learners should not be passive recipients of information but active co-creators of knowledge. This approach ensures that learning remains democratic and empowering.

In the context of youth work, Freire's concept of critical consciousness encourages practitioners and young people to question assumptions, reflect on social realities, and recognize their capacity to act for change. The BeCompetent training embraces this principle by fostering dialogue, encouraging critical reflection, and promoting values of equality and inclusion.

Competence Development as a Holistic Process
The theoretical and policy foundations of BeCompetent converge on one essential idea: competence development must be holistic. It must address not only technical skills but also personal attitudes, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. Youth work is not limited to implementing activities; it is about shaping environments that nurture growth, participation, and well-being.

The European Training Strategy provides a framework for this holistic view by recognizing competence as a balanced combination of knowing, doing, and being. The BeCompetent project applies this by integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral learning. Participants are encouraged to think critically, to engage empathically, and to act responsibly.

This holistic perspective also ensures that competence development is sustainable. When youth workers strengthen their awareness and self-confidence, they become better equipped to adapt to change, manage complexity, and continue learning throughout their careers. In this way, BeCompetent supports not only individual growth but also the professionalization and resilience of the entire youth sector.

European Integration and Local Relevance
Another key aspect of the BeCompetent framework is its ability to bridge European policy and local practice. While the European Training Strategy and the Youth Work Agenda provide shared values and guidelines, each country and community applies them in its own way. The project respects this diversity by allowing flexibility in interpretation and adaptation.

For example, partner organizations from Greece, Türkiye, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, and Bulgaria implemented the competence model according to their contexts while maintaining alignment with European standards. This balance between consistency and local relevance is what gives BeCompetent its strength. It proves that European cooperation can generate both unity and diversity, offering models that are adaptable and inclusive.

By linking theory, policy, and practice, BeCompetent contributes to the broader goal of creating a Europe-wide learning ecosystem. It shows that quality youth work is not built only on passion and good intentions but also on knowledge, structure, and shared responsibility.

A Framework for Reflective Action
Ultimately, the theoretical and policy foundations of BeCompetent encourage youth workers to see themselves as both educators and learners. The European Training Strategy provides the structure for competence development, while experiential and transformative learning theories provide the methods. The Youth Work Agenda connects these processes to policy, ensuring that individual learning contributes to collective progress.

This integrated framework gives youth workers a sense of belonging to a larger professional community. It reinforces the idea that their daily practice is part of a wider European effort to strengthen democracy, inclusion, and lifelong learning.

By combining academic depth with practical relevance, BeCompetent creates a bridge between thought and action. It equips youth workers to act with purpose, to reflect with insight, and to contribute to social change with confidence. In this sense, theory and policy are not abstract backgrounds to the project. They are living foundations that shape how youth work grows, evolves, and continues to make a difference across Europe.

THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE MODEL FOR YOUTH WORKERS

The European Competence Model for Youth Workers stands as one of the most significant milestones in the professionalization of youth work across Europe. Developed within the framework of the European Training Strategy, the model provides a shared language and structure for understanding what quality youth work looks like in practice. It defines the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable youth workers to act effectively, ethically, and creatively in their roles.

The competence model was not designed as a rigid system but as a flexible framework that can be adapted to different national contexts and organizational cultures. It acknowledges that youth work is diverse across Europe, shaped by unique histories, policies, and traditions.
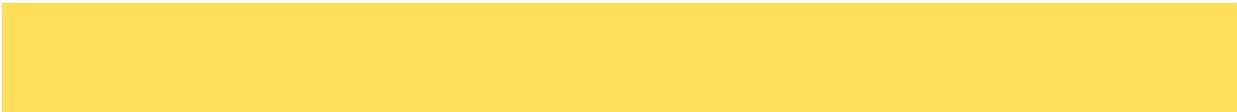
At the same time, it affirms that all youth work shares a common foundation: a commitment to learning, participation, inclusion, and empowerment.

The model is built around eight core competence areas. Each area represents a distinct dimension of professional practice, yet all are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Together they provide a comprehensive map for personal and professional development. The areas include facilitation, program design, resource management, teamwork, communication, intercultural awareness, networking and advocacy, and evaluation and continuous improvement.

Facilitation: Creating Meaningful Learning Experiences

Facilitation is at the heart of youth work. It represents the ability to design and lead learning processes that are engaging, inclusive, and transformative. A competent facilitator does not impose knowledge but creates conditions where learning can emerge naturally through participation and reflection.

Facilitation involves sensitivity to group dynamics, an understanding of motivation, and the capacity to adapt to the needs of participants. A facilitator observes not only what is said but how people interact, what energy is present in the group, and what emotional climate supports learning. They balance structure and freedom, providing enough guidance to maintain focus while leaving space for creativity and discovery.

In the BeCompetent project, facilitation was practiced as a living art. Trainers guided participants through experiential learning cycles where every activity was followed by reflection and application. Participants learned that good facilitation requires authenticity, empathy, and self-awareness. It is as much about who the facilitator is as about what they do.

Program Design: From Needs to Action

Program design refers to the ability to translate identified needs into structured educational activities. It combines planning, creativity, and strategic thinking. A youth worker skilled in program design can assess the needs of a target group, define clear learning objectives, select suitable methods, and evaluate the results.

Designing a program is both analytical and imaginative. It involves research and consultation with young people to ensure relevance and ownership. It also requires flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. A well-designed program reflects inclusivity by considering accessibility, diversity, and participation at every stage.

In the BeCompetent framework, program design is viewed as a collaborative process. Youth workers are encouraged to involve young people as co-designers of learning experiences. This participatory approach enhances motivation and ensures that activities respond to real interests and challenges.

Resource Management: Responsibility and Sustainability

Youth work relies on the wise use of resources. Resource management includes financial planning, use of materials, coordination of human resources, and time management. Effective resource management ensures that projects are sustainable, transparent, and aligned with ethical standards.

Competent youth workers plan ahead, communicate clearly with stakeholders, and prioritize tasks efficiently. They understand that resources are not only material but also relational. Time, energy, and trust are equally important assets that must be managed with care.

In BeCompetent, resource management was seen as an expression of professionalism and accountability. Participants learned how transparent budgeting, clear delegation of responsibilities, and environmental awareness contribute to both quality and sustainability. They also explored how good resource management reflects values of fairness and respect for public funding, which is central to European cooperation.

Teamwork: Cooperation and Collective Intelligence
Teamwork is a fundamental competence because youth work is rarely a solitary effort. It is grounded in cooperation among professionals, volunteers, and community partners. Effective teamwork depends on trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose.

A competent team member communicates clearly, listens actively, and contributes to collective decision-making. They recognize and value diversity within the team, understanding that different perspectives can enrich creativity and problem-solving. Teamwork also requires emotional intelligence, as teams often face stress, disagreement, or uncertainty.

The BeCompetent training modeled teamwork at every level. Participants collaborated on international projects, learned to balance leadership and cooperation, and reflected on their team roles. They discovered that effective teams are built on communication, empathy, and a willingness to learn from one another.

Teamwork in youth work mirrors the participatory values the field promotes. When youth workers experience genuine collaboration, they are better prepared to foster it among young people.

Communication: Building Connection and Understanding
Communication is a bridge that connects ideas, people, and communities. For youth workers, it is an essential competence that influences every aspect of their work. It includes the ability to listen, express oneself clearly, and facilitate dialogue in diverse contexts.

Good communication goes beyond words. It involves body language, tone, timing, and emotional presence. Youth workers must adapt their communication style to suit different audiences, whether they are talking with young people, parents, policymakers, or colleagues.

In BeCompetent, communication was explored as both a technical skill and a relational art. Participants practiced active listening, conflict resolution, and non-violent communication. They reflected on how language shapes power and inclusion, and how clarity and empathy can transform relationships.

Communication competence also includes digital communication. In an increasingly online world, youth workers need to navigate virtual spaces responsibly, using technology to connect and educate while promoting safety and critical thinking.

Intercultural Awareness: Valuing Diversity
Intercultural awareness enables youth workers to engage constructively with diversity. It requires sensitivity to cultural differences, self-awareness regarding one's own assumptions, and the ability to create spaces where everyone feels respected and included.

Intercultural competence is not about mastering facts about other cultures but about developing curiosity, empathy, and humility. It involves recognizing the richness that diversity brings and addressing stereotypes or bias that may limit understanding.

The BeCompetent project placed intercultural awareness at the center of its philosophy. Participants from six countries learned from one another's perspectives and explored how culture influences communication, learning, and identity. They practiced intercultural facilitation, discovering that inclusion begins with awareness and is sustained through ongoing dialogue.

Networking and Advocacy: Strengthening Systems and Visibility

Youth work does not exist in isolation. It is part of a larger ecosystem that includes educational institutions, civil society, policymakers, and international organizations. Networking and advocacy enable youth workers to build relationships across these sectors, share resources, and promote the recognition of their work. Networking involves identifying allies, creating partnerships, and participating in professional communities. Advocacy goes a step further by influencing policies and public attitudes that affect young people. Competent youth workers use their experience to communicate the value of youth work and to contribute to evidence-based decision-making.

During the BeCompetent training, participants explored advocacy as a form of storytelling. They learned how to present their work to stakeholders in ways that highlight its social impact. They also discussed how networks can serve as platforms for peer learning, mentorship, and solidarity. Networking and advocacy strengthen both individual practitioners and the youth work sector as a whole. They ensure that the voices of young people and youth workers are heard in the places where decisions are made.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Learning from Experience

Evaluation closes the competence cycle and ensures that learning remains dynamic. It involves reflecting on practice, gathering feedback, and identifying lessons for improvement. A competent youth worker evaluates not only results but also processes and relationships. Evaluation requires honesty and openness to change. It is not about criticism but about growth. It encourages youth workers to ask what worked, what did not, and why. Continuous improvement means transforming insights into new strategies and better practices. In BeCompetent, evaluation was woven into every stage of the learning process. Participants practiced self-assessment, peer feedback, and group reflection. They learned to view evaluation as an empowering tool that builds accountability, confidence, and competence.

A Holistic Model for Professional Growth

The European Competence Model for Youth Workers is more than a theoretical framework. It is a living guide for reflective action. It invites youth workers to see competence as an evolving set of abilities grounded in values and purpose. These eight competence areas form a holistic picture of what it means to be a professional in youth work. They emphasize that competence is not static or technical. It grows with experience, self-awareness, and collaboration.

The BeCompetent project embodies this philosophy by translating the model into practice.

It helps youth workers recognize their strengths, identify areas for growth, and take ownership of their learning. In doing so, it contributes to a stronger, more connected, and more confident community of professionals who share a common European vision for youth empowerment and inclusion.

THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Reflection is one of the most powerful instruments for professional growth. It turns experience into understanding and transforms daily action into meaningful learning. For youth workers, reflection is not an occasional exercise but a core habit that gives direction and depth to their work. It ensures that practice remains intentional, thoughtful, and grounded in values rather than routine.

Youth work often unfolds in unpredictable and dynamic environments. Each group of young people brings its own rhythm, challenges, and energy. Reflection allows practitioners to navigate this complexity with awareness and adaptability. By pausing to observe what happens, interpreting its significance, and planning what to do next, youth workers create a bridge between experience and improvement. This process helps them stay responsive without losing sight of their purpose. The reflective process begins with awareness. After a session or activity, the youth worker takes a moment to recall what occurred. They consider how participants reacted, what emotions were present, and how they themselves felt during the interaction. This act of noticing creates the foundation for learning because it captures authentic moments before they fade into memory.

The next stage involves interpretation. Here, the practitioner examines why certain things happened and what can be learned from them. A discussion that failed to engage participants, for example, might reveal that the topic felt too abstract or that the atmosphere lacked safety. A successful workshop might highlight effective facilitation techniques or group chemistry. By identifying patterns and causes, youth workers move from observation to insight.

THE POWER OF SELF-AWARENESS IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Self-awareness forms the foundation of professional competence. It enables youth workers to understand their motivations, emotions, and reactions and to use this understanding to guide their practice with purpose and balance. In many ways, self-awareness marks the beginning of wisdom in youth work because it links personal identity to professional action.

Youth workers play a vital role as role models for the young people they accompany. Their words, gestures, and emotional presence shape the atmosphere of every activity they lead. Young people quickly sense authenticity. A youth worker who is self-aware communicates sincerity, confidence, and respect. Awareness of one's strengths and limitations helps build relationships that are based on trust rather than authority. It allows the professional to remain consistent, grounded, and empathetic even in moments of tension or uncertainty.

Self-awareness begins with reflection but extends deeper into self-inquiry and emotional honesty. It calls for the courage to ask questions that may not have simple answers. Why do I work with young people? What values influence my decisions? How do I respond to conflict, disappointment, or success? Asking such questions regularly helps youth workers remain connected to their purpose and aware of how their personal history and beliefs influence their behavior.

During the BeCompetent training course in Greece, participants explored self-awareness as an essential professional skill. Through guided exercises, they traced their personal and professional journeys, identified experiences that shaped their attitudes, and shared defining moments from their work.

These conversations revealed how much of youth work depends on self-knowledge. When youth workers understand themselves, they are better able to understand others.

Participants also took part in activities that examined values, identity, and motivation. By mapping their professional paths, they could see patterns in how they approach challenges and relationships. They recognized moments when they felt most effective and moments when they struggled, learning that both kinds of experience contribute to growth. Self-awareness also includes emotional intelligence, which is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions. Youth workers often navigate complex emotional landscapes that include enthusiasm, frustration, empathy, and stress. Understanding one's emotional responses helps prevent impulsive reactions and supports clear, compassionate communication. Emotional intelligence creates space for calm decision-making and builds resilience against burnout. It reminds professionals that caring for others begins with caring for oneself.

Developing self-awareness is not a single task to complete but a continuous process that matures with time and experience. It can be nurtured through feedback, supervision, peer reflection, and self-assessment. Tools such as the European Competence Model help youth workers analyze their competences and understand how personal traits influence professional performance. Honest feedback from colleagues or mentors offers new perspectives that might not be visible from within.

In organizations that value self-awareness, supervision and mentoring become integral parts of professional development. Regular reflection sessions help staff articulate what they feel, what they learn, and what they want to improve. Such spaces encourage honesty and prevent the buildup of stress or frustration. They also create a sense of collective care and shared responsibility. Over time, self-awareness becomes a stabilizing force. It allows youth workers to stay centered amid uncertainty, to adapt thoughtfully to new situations, and to respond to challenges with empathy and perspective. It helps them recognize when to take initiative and when to step back, when to offer guidance and when to listen.

Professionals who cultivate self-awareness are more capable of transforming experience into learning. They see every interaction as a mirror that reflects their practice and invites growth. They remain curious, adaptable, and compassionate. Self-awareness gives depth to competence because it connects technical ability with inner understanding. It transforms knowledge into wisdom and turns professional practice into a journey of personal integrity and continuous discovery.

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND INCLUSION IN PRACTICE

Intercultural learning is one of the central pillars of European youth work. It encourages individuals to view diversity as a source of richness and creativity rather than a cause of separation. Inclusion ensures that every person, regardless of background, identity, or ability, can take part fully, express themselves openly, and feel respected and valued. Together, these principles lay the foundation for cohesive and peaceful communities where mutual understanding becomes a shared goal. The BeCompetent project integrates these values throughout its structure. From the very beginning of the training course in Greece, participants from five countries brought with them different languages, traditions, and perspectives. Diversity was embraced not as a problem to manage but as a valuable resource for collective learning. The mixture of viewpoints created an atmosphere of curiosity, openness, and genuine human exchange.

Intercultural competence develops through a gradual process that combines awareness, knowledge, and practice. The first step is awareness of one's own cultural identity. Youth workers learn to recognize how their upbringing, social environment, and education shape their attitudes and ways of communication. This self-understanding helps them approach others with greater sensitivity and adaptability. The next step involves learning about others. Intercultural learning does not require agreement or uniformity. It seeks appreciation and understanding. It teaches youth workers to listen attentively, to ask questions with respect, and to withhold judgment. The aim is not to erase differences but to learn from them.

During the BeCompetent training course, participants engaged in structured and informal activities that encouraged intercultural dialogue. In one exercise, they created visual maps of their identities to explore how elements such as gender, nationality, language, and family background shape who they are.
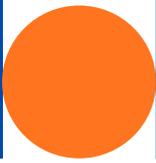
This process revealed that identity is multifaceted and constantly evolving. Participants discovered that every individual embodies multiple cultural influences that coexist and change over time.

Intercultural learning also took place outside of formal sessions. Shared meals, evening walks, and informal conversations became moments of connection and discovery. These everyday interactions helped participants see that intercultural understanding grows naturally through human contact, shared experiences, and the willingness to learn from one another.

Inclusion was present throughout the learning environment. Facilitators used diverse teaching approaches to accommodate different learning styles and communication preferences. Visual, verbal, and experiential methods were balanced so that everyone could participate meaningfully. Translation support and peer assistance were offered when necessary, ensuring that language did not become a barrier. The emotional climate of the group emphasized respect, patience, and empathy.

The principles of inclusion extend far beyond the boundaries of a single project. Youth workers apply them in every context, whether they work in multicultural urban areas, small rural communities, or digital spaces. True inclusion means creating opportunities for all young people to take part in learning and decision-making. It involves removing obstacles, adapting methods, and examining one's own biases to ensure that participation is genuine and equitable.

Intercultural learning strengthens core competences such as empathy, flexibility, and emotional intelligence.

These qualities are essential in a world that is increasingly interconnected yet often divided. Youth workers who develop intercultural competence are better equipped to help young people communicate across boundaries, resolve conflicts peacefully, and appreciate diversity as a strength.

The long-term impact of intercultural learning lies in its power to cultivate cooperation and solidarity. It shows that differences in culture or identity need not create distance but can lead to mutual enrichment. When youth workers embody this mindset, they inspire young people to do the same. They help them see themselves as citizens of a shared Europe where every culture contributes to a collective story.

The BeCompetent project demonstrates that intercultural learning and inclusion are inseparable. Together, they form the living heart of European youth work. They remind us that education is not only about knowledge but also about relationship and respect, and that real learning happens when people meet, listen, and grow together.

THE ROLE OF VALUES AND ETHICS IN YOUTH WORK

Values and ethics form the moral foundation of youth work. They serve as a compass that guides decisions, shapes relationships, and ensures that professional actions remain consistent with human dignity, fairness, and respect. Without a strong ethical framework, competence alone cannot guarantee quality or integrity.
At the heart of youth work lies a belief in equality, participation, inclusion, and empowerment. These are not distant ideals but living principles that inform everyday practice. They influence how youth workers design activities, how they interact with young people, and how they engage communities. Every choice, from the tone of communication to the structure of a project, reflects an underlying set of values.

Ethical practice in youth work begins with awareness and reflection. Youth workers occupy positions of trust and influence, and this position requires responsibility. Young people often look to them for guidance, support, and recognition. The power inherent in that relationship must be exercised with care. Ethical youth workers are conscious of the impact their behavior can have. They protect confidentiality, promote fairness, and ensure that every participant is treated with equal respect. They reject any form of discrimination, favoritism, or manipulation.

The BeCompetent project highlights ethics as a fundamental dimension of competence. Throughout the training, participants engaged in discussions about real-life dilemmas drawn from their professional experience. These conversations explored how values shape decisions, especially in situations where choices are complex or uncertain.

For instance, participants debated questions such as: How can one balance inclusion with safety when a participant's behavior disrupts the group? How can a youth worker respect a young person's autonomy while also maintaining accountability and responsibility toward the group or organization? These reflections reminded participants that ethical decision-making is rarely about absolute answers but about thoughtful reasoning guided by core values.

European frameworks provide additional guidance on these matters. The Council of Europe's Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention and the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life both affirm that ethics are inseparable from quality. They emphasize that youth work must always protect the rights, well-being, and participation of young people. These documents recognize youth work as a human-centered practice grounded in respect, justice, and empowerment.

Ethics in youth work are not only personal but also collective. Individual integrity must be supported by organizational ethics. A single youth worker can act responsibly, but sustainable ethical practice requires systems and structures that reinforce those values. Organizations play a vital role in establishing codes of conduct, safeguarding procedures, and transparent decision-making processes. Open communication, fair workload distribution, and a culture of reflection help prevent burnout and unethical behavior.

Within BeCompetent, the principle of collective ethics was reflected in the design of the project itself. Partnership cooperation was based on equality and respect among all organizations involved. Decisions were made collaboratively, and responsibilities were distributed fairly. This approach demonstrated that ethics are not limited to youth work delivery but extend to how projects are managed and partnerships maintained. Ethical youth work also involves advocacy. Youth workers must sometimes speak out against injustice, whether within their own organizations or in society at large. Acting ethically requires courage. It means being willing to challenge inequality, to question harmful practices, and to stand by the principles of respect and inclusion even when doing so is difficult.

At the same time, ethical practice requires humility. Mistakes are inevitable in human work. What defines professionalism is not the absence of error but the willingness to learn, to take responsibility, and to make amends. Youth workers who can acknowledge their own limits and imperfections model authenticity for young people, showing that integrity is a continuous process of learning and self-correction. Ultimately, ethical youth work is about alignment between values and action. It means ensuring that what one believes is visible in what one does. When values guide decisions, trust grows. When ethics shape practice, credibility follows. Ethical youth workers not only protect young people but also strengthen the legitimacy of the entire field.

The BeCompetent approach recognizes that competence and ethics are inseparable. Technical skills may produce results, but only ethical awareness ensures that those results serve the well-being of individuals and communities. Ethics give purpose to competence and transform youth work into a profession that uplifts people and contributes to a more just and compassionate Europe.

THE TRAINING COURSE IN THESSALONIKI

The BeCompetent training course was conceived as a living example of competence-based learning. It took place in Thessaloniki, Greece, from the fifth to the tenth of May 2025, with arrival on the fourth and departure on the eleventh. For six days, twenty-four youth workers from five European countries (Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye) came together to learn, exchange experiences, and reflect on the European Competence Model for Youth Workers. Although the Cypriot partner organisation was unable to send participants, it remained involved in dissemination and visibility activities. The training offered an immersive opportunity to experience in practice the principles that underpin competence development, intercultural learning, and reflective growth.

Thessaloniki was selected not only for its accessibility but also for its symbolic value. As a city that historically connects East and West, Thessaloniki embodies cultural diversity, dialogue, and coexistence. Its blend of traditions, languages, and communities made it an ideal setting for an international training course focused on inclusion and understanding. The training venue, located near the city center, provided a space that balanced focus with creativity. Participants could easily explore the surrounding environment, engage with local initiatives, and connect their learning with real social contexts.

The course was structured around the principles of experiential learning. Each day was designed as a complete learning cycle that combined action, reflection, and conceptualization. Mornings began with short energizers and intention-setting circles. These moments helped participants arrive fully in the space, connect with one another, and define personal learning goals. The core part of the day was devoted to thematic workshops and group activities centered on specific competence areas. Evenings provided time for reflection, cultural exchange, and informal networking that deepened relationships and reinforced learning.

The training was facilitated by a team of experienced educators who viewed themselves as facilitators rather than instructors. Their role was to guide and support participants as they discovered knowledge through experience and dialogue. Instead of delivering content, trainers created frameworks in which learning could emerge naturally. Participants were encouraged to take initiative, contribute ideas, and even co-create parts of the program. This approach reflected one of the core principles of competence development: that learning is most effective when individuals actively shape it. Non-formal education methods formed the foundation of the training. Activities were designed to engage both intellect and emotion, promoting creativity and collaboration. Simulations, storytelling, visual expression, and outdoor learning challenged participants to use multiple senses and perspectives. One memorable session invited participants to design a youth project using limited materials and time. The task revealed how leadership, problem-solving, and adaptability intersect in real situations. Another session focused on empathy and communication, exploring how values influence interaction and how awareness of one's emotional responses strengthens professional relationships.

Thessaloniki itself became an integral part of the learning process. The group visited local organizations that work with young people from diverse backgrounds, including migrants, individuals with disabilities, and disadvantaged communities.

Each evening concluded with a collective learning circle. These sessions offered time for reflection, dialogue, and emotional integration. Participants shared what they had learned, how they had felt, and what insights they planned to take forward. The circles became spaces of honesty and trust where personal stories met professional learning. Many participants described these reflective moments as among the most powerful parts of the course, as they revealed the deeper meaning behind each activity and connected individual growth with group experience.

The rhythm of the week balanced structure with flexibility. Participants were given opportunities to express their needs and to shape the flow of learning. Cultural evenings introduced the richness of partner countries through music, food, and storytelling. Informal moments of laughter, conversation, and exploration further strengthened the sense of belonging that developed among the group.

By the end of the week, participants reported significant growth in confidence, self-awareness, and intercultural competence. They expressed a clearer understanding of their own professional identity and a renewed motivation to continue learning. Many described the training as a transformative experience that changed how they approach their work with young people. They left Thessaloniki with new tools, ideas, and friendships, as well as a shared commitment to applying competence-based methods in their local contexts.

The impact of the training extended beyond its duration. Participants remained in contact through follow-up meetings and online collaboration. Several organizations initiated joint projects inspired by the BeCompetent approach. The Thessaloniki experience thus became more than a one-time event. It marked the beginning of a community of practice that continues to grow, linking youth workers across Europe in a shared effort to strengthen the quality and visibility of youth work.

LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE: NON-FORMAL EDUCATION TOOLS AND METHODS

Non-formal education stands at the heart of the BeCompetent approach. It is grounded in the belief that meaningful learning does not happen only in classrooms or academic settings but also in the lived experiences of people. It recognizes that youth workers and young people alike learn most effectively when they are actively involved in shaping their own learning process. Non-formal education empowers individuals to explore, experiment, and connect knowledge with real situations, creating understanding that is both personal and practical.

The theoretical foundation of non-formal education rests on the concept of experiential learning. David Kolb's model describes learning as a continuous cycle consisting of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In simple terms, learning begins when a person experiences something new, reflects on that experience, draws meaning from it, and then applies the new understanding in practice. This process transforms experience into insight and insight into competence.

The BeCompetent training course was designed according to this model. Every session invited participants to move through the full learning cycle. They began by engaging in a shared experience such as a group challenge or creative task. Afterward, they reflected on what had happened, both individually and collectively. They then identified lessons or principles that could be generalized from the activity and finally explored how those insights could be applied in their professional practice. This approach created learning that was not theoretical but rooted in real behavior, emotions, and collaboration.

A wide variety of non-formal education methods supported this process. Group discussions helped participants share perspectives and build collective understanding. Simulations and role-playing created safe environments where they could experiment with new forms of communication, leadership, and problem-solving.

Artistic methods such as drawing, theatre, and storytelling activated creativity and emotional awareness. Outdoor activities, which included physical and strategic challenges, promoted teamwork, resilience, and adaptability. Each method offered a different path toward the same goal: to make learning active, meaningful, and inclusive.

The trainers carefully selected each method based on its educational purpose. Activities were never used for entertainment alone. Every exercise was directly linked to specific competences within the European Competence Model for Youth Workers. For example, designing a youth project supported the development of planning, resource management, and teamwork. Storytelling enhanced communication skills and self-awareness. Group reflection sessions strengthened critical thinking and the ability to connect theory with practice. This alignment between method and purpose ensured that learning outcomes remained focused and relevant. Reflection was a consistent element that tied the entire training together. After every activity, participants paused to consider what they had learned and how the experience related to their professional reality. Trainers used structured reflection tools such as guiding questions, group sharing circles, and visual mapping to help participants articulate their insights. This stage of reflection turned raw experience into conscious understanding and encouraged participants to take responsibility for their learning.

Non-formal education is also inherently inclusive. It values diversity of thought, background, and expression. Because it uses a variety of sensory and creative approaches, it accommodates different learning styles and abilities. In the BeCompetent course, participants were encouraged to express themselves in the languages and forms most comfortable for them. Visual communication, body language, and artistic expression complemented verbal discussion. The flexibility of methods helped ensure that everyone could contribute meaningfully, regardless of linguistic or cultural differences. This inclusivity fostered a sense of equality and belonging that strengthened the group dynamic. The impact of non-formal education reaches far beyond the training setting. When youth workers apply these methods in their daily work, they help young people become active participants in their own learning journeys. Non-formal education nurtures self-confidence, curiosity, and a sense of responsibility. It helps young people discover that they are capable of shaping their communities and influencing the world around them.

In this way, learning becomes more than a transfer of knowledge. It becomes an act of empowerment. The youth worker becomes not a teacher but a facilitator who supports exploration and critical thinking. Young people are encouraged to take initiative, to express their opinions, and to learn from both success and failure. This process builds the foundation for active citizenship, creativity, and lifelong learning. The BeCompetent project demonstrates that non-formal education is not a supplement to formal education but a vital complement. It offers tools and spaces where competence can grow naturally through experience, reflection, and collaboration. When practiced with intention and care, non-formal education turns every encounter into a potential moment of transformation, reminding us that learning is a living process shaped by people, relationships, and shared discovery.

CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A safe learning environment is the foundation of effective education. In youth work, safety extends beyond the physical space to include emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Participants must feel respected, valued, and confident that their voices can be heard without fear of ridicule or exclusion. Only when people feel safe can they take the risks necessary for genuine learning and personal growth.

Creating such an environment requires awareness, intention, and consistent care. The BeCompetent training course began with activities that helped participants build trust and connection from the very first day. Icebreakers, team-building exercises, and open conversations encouraged familiarity and mutual respect. Participants worked together to define a set of group agreements that outlined shared expectations, boundaries, and values. This collaborative process fostered a sense of ownership and accountability within the group.

Trainers played a crucial role in shaping the tone of the learning environment. They modeled openness, empathy, and authenticity in their interactions. By sharing their own reflections and vulnerabilities, they demonstrated that learning involves both strength and humility. Participants were invited to speak honestly about their experiences and emotions, with the understanding that confidentiality and sensitivity would always be maintained. This approach encouraged genuine dialogue and created an atmosphere of psychological safety.
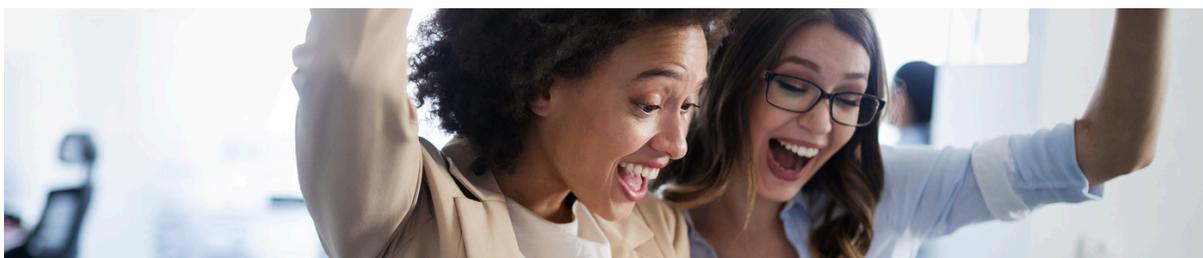
At the same time, trainers maintained a balance between challenge and support. Learning was designed to stretch participants beyond their comfort zones without creating unnecessary pressure. Activities were structured to invite participation rather than demand performance. The trainers ensured that participants could engage at their own pace while still experiencing moments of personal and professional growth.

Inclusion was treated not as a one-time objective but as a continuous practice that required attention throughout the training. The facilitation team carefully observed participation patterns and adapted methods to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to contribute. Language use was inclusive and considerate, avoiding jargon or assumptions. Activities combined visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements so that participants with different learning styles could engage fully. When cultural misunderstandings or communication barriers arose, they were addressed through dialogue and collective reflection rather than avoidance.

Creating inclusion also involves recognizing the power dynamics that exist within any group. Youth workers come from diverse cultural, social, and professional backgrounds, and these differences can influence confidence, visibility, and participation. Facilitators need to remain aware of how privilege, experience, or language proficiency can affect interactions. In BeCompetent, the trainers made a conscious effort to distribute attention and space equally. They encouraged quieter participants to share their insights and reminded more dominant voices to listen actively. These small gestures built an atmosphere of fairness and mutual respect.

The physical setting also contributed to the sense of safety. The training venue in Thessaloniki provided open and flexible spaces that supported movement, creativity, and group work. Breaks were scheduled generously to allow for rest and informal connection. Meals and social moments were treated as part of the learning process, where relationships could develop naturally. The rhythm of the week reflected a balance between activity and reflection, between collective energy and personal space.

As trust grew, participants began to take greater initiative and express themselves more freely. They experimented with facilitation, shared personal stories, and gave constructive feedback to one another. By the end of the course, the group had evolved into a true learning community, united by shared values of empathy and cooperation. This atmosphere did not emerge by chance. It was the result of consistent attention to inclusion, communication, and respect.

EMPLOYABILITY, DIGITAL SKILLS, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Employability is one of the most important outcomes of youth work because it connects personal development with participation in society. It is not limited to preparing young people for a specific job but involves developing a wide range of competences that help them navigate life, adapt to change, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Youth work strengthens these competences by creating spaces where communication, teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving are part of daily practice.

The BeCompetent project approached employability as a holistic concept. During the training course, participants developed transversal skills through practical and reflective activities. They worked in teams to design and manage projects, practiced leadership, and improved their ability to collaborate across cultural and linguistic differences. They learned to identify and articulate their learning using the Youthpass framework, which connects non-formal education to the European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. This process helped participants understand how their experiences translate into professional competences that are valuable in any career path.

The training emphasized that employability in youth work is not about competition but about empowerment. It helps individuals discover their strengths and learn how to express them. Participants reflected on how to support young people in recognizing their own potential and building confidence. Through guided discussions, they explored strategies for helping youth translate non-formal learning into professional language that can be understood by employers, educators, and institutions.

Digital skills have become a central aspect of employability and participation in the modern world. The BeCompetent course dedicated part of its program to exploring how digital tools can enhance youth work and promote inclusion. Participants learned to use online collaboration platforms to plan and communicate effectively across borders. They experimented with creating digital stories to document learning journeys and share experiences creatively.

At the same time, the training encouraged a critical and ethical approach to technology. Participants discussed the importance of digital citizenship, online safety, and information literacy.

They examined how social media shapes identity and communication, as well as how to respond to challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and screen fatigue. The group reflected on how youth workers can guide young people to use technology not only for entertainment but also for learning, civic engagement, and self-expression.

Entrepreneurial competence was explored as another key dimension of employability. It was presented not as a business concept but as a mindset that fosters creativity, resilience, and initiative. Being entrepreneurial means recognizing opportunities, taking responsibility, and transforming ideas into concrete actions that benefit others. Participants learned how to cultivate this mindset both in themselves and in the young people they support. They discussed real examples of social entrepreneurship and community projects that demonstrate how innovation can serve social good.

During practical workshops, participants were invited to design small-scale projects that addressed needs within their communities. These exercises helped them practice planning, budgeting, risk assessment, and teamwork. More importantly, they highlighted how a sense of initiative and innovation can inspire change even with limited resources. This perspective encouraged youth workers to see entrepreneurship as a tool for empowerment and social transformation rather than purely economic success.

The goal of these sessions was not only to enhance participants' own employability but also to equip them with the capacity to help young people build meaningful and sustainable futures. Employability, in this broader sense, includes self-confidence, critical thinking, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. It involves helping young people understand that success is not defined only by employment but also by the ability to contribute to society and to find purpose in their activities.

By linking employability, digital competence, and entrepreneurship, the BeCompetent project promotes a proactive and future-oriented approach to youth work. It encourages professionals to embrace innovation while staying grounded in human connection and ethical values. In a rapidly changing world, youth workers who integrate digital literacy and entrepreneurial thinking into their practice help young people become active citizens who are capable of shaping the future with creativity, responsibility, and integrity.

THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Creativity is often described as a talent, yet in the context of youth work, it is better understood as a competence that can be developed and strengthened through experience and reflection. It represents the ability to look at challenges with curiosity, to connect ideas that appear unrelated, and to generate new approaches to familiar problems. Creativity brings vitality, innovation, and flexibility to youth work practice. It allows youth workers to transform learning environments into spaces where exploration and imagination lead to growth.

In the BeCompetent training course, creativity was not an additional element but a central part of every session. Participants were encouraged to express themselves through multiple forms of art and movement. They engaged in drawing, storytelling, theatre, and design-based activities that invited them to experiment and to learn through play. These creative processes demonstrated that innovation flourishes in environments where people feel safe to take risks and where mistakes are accepted as part of learning rather than as signs of failure.

Creativity helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Youth workers often face the challenge of translating educational objectives into activities that are relevant, engaging, and accessible to diverse groups. Creative thinking allows them to adapt existing tools, design new ones, and respond flexibly to the dynamics of each group. A creative approach transforms abstract ideas into tangible experiences and ensures that learning remains active and meaningful.

The trainers in the BeCompetent course emphasized that creativity is not an isolated skill or a special gift reserved for a few. It is a mindset that combines imagination with practical problem-solving. It requires curiosity, reflection, and the courage to question assumptions. Participants practiced this mindset by working in teams to develop innovative project ideas, redesign common youth work methods, and find alternative solutions to unexpected challenges. This process encouraged them to see creativity as an integral part of competence rather than an addition to it.

Creativity also plays a powerful role in promoting inclusion. Artistic and playful methods can overcome linguistic, cultural, and social barriers that might otherwise limit participation. A drawing, a shared rhythm, or a collaborative performance can create connection even when words fall short. Creative expression gives space to emotions and identities that are sometimes difficult to articulate verbally. In the BeCompetent setting, these moments of shared creation built understanding, empathy, and trust among participants from different backgrounds.

Beyond facilitating engagement, creativity supports resilience and well-being. Youth workers often operate in complex and unpredictable environments where plans must change quickly. The capacity to think creatively allows them to adapt to new circumstances with confidence rather than frustration. It helps them find meaning in challenges and to see each difficulty as an opportunity for growth. Creative thinking keeps motivation alive, turning obstacles into possibilities and uncertainty into potential.

The BeCompetent project demonstrated that creativity and competence are deeply interconnected. Both require openness, reflection, and a willingness to step into the unknown. A competent youth worker is not one who has all the answers but one who can imagine alternatives, explore them with others, and transform ideas into action. Creativity gives depth to competence by connecting knowledge with emotion and experience.

When creativity becomes part of professional identity, it reshapes how youth workers perceive their role. They begin to see themselves not only as facilitators of learning but also as designers of experiences and catalysts of transformation. This perspective empowers them to inspire the same spirit in the young people they support. When young people witness creativity in action, they learn to trust their own ideas, express their individuality, and collaborate with others to bring change to their communities.

Creativity therefore stands as both a tool and a value within youth work. It enriches learning, strengthens relationships, and sustains motivation. It keeps youth work dynamic, human, and forward-looking. The BeCompetent project affirms that when creativity becomes an everyday practice, it turns competence development into an exciting and transformative journey that benefits both youth workers and the young people they serve.

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION IN EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK

Collaboration stands at the heart of effective and sustainable youth work. It connects people, organizations, and communities in a shared pursuit of empowerment, learning, and social progress. In the European context, collaboration carries an even deeper meaning. It strengthens solidarity, builds bridges across cultures, and turns diversity into a collective resource. When youth workers collaborate, they demonstrate the very principles of participation, respect, and unity that they seek to foster among young people.

The BeCompetent project was founded on this belief. From the beginning, it was conceived as a partnership that valued shared ownership and joint creativity. Six organizations from Greece, Türkiye, Romania, Cyprus, Spain, and Bulgaria came together to design, implement, and evaluate a competence-based training program for youth workers. Each partner brought a distinct set of experiences, perspectives, and methods, which together enriched the quality of the entire project. Collaboration was not an additional element but the foundation upon which every phase of BeCompetent was built.

Collaboration in youth work requires openness, trust, and consistent communication. It begins with the recognition that no single organization or person possesses all the answers. Youth work thrives on diversity of thought and on the combination of different strengths. When partners share their knowledge and resources, they create synergy that multiplies the impact of their efforts. In this sense, collaboration is both practical and transformative. It improves results while also changing the way people think about leadership, responsibility, and learning.

Throughout the BeCompetent partnership, collaboration took many forms. The preparation phase included detailed consultations and planning meetings among all partner organizations. These discussions helped align expectations, identify shared priorities, and ensure that the training design reflected real needs across national contexts. The process was democratic and transparent, with each organization contributing to decision-making and taking ownership of specific tasks. This shared structure built mutual trust and created a sense of equality among the partners.

During the implementation of the training course in Thessaloniki, collaboration became visible in action. Trainers from different countries co-facilitated workshops, modeling teamwork and intercultural dialogue for the participants. Their complementary skills created a dynamic learning environment that reflected the spirit of European cooperation. Participants, too, experienced collaboration firsthand. They worked in mixed international groups to design youth projects, solve creative challenges, and reflect on their experiences. Through these activities, they discovered that working across borders is not always simple but always rewarding. It requires patience, communication, and the willingness to learn from difference.

Collaboration continued in informal spaces as well. Shared meals, cultural evenings, and moments of reflection allowed relationships to deepen. These connections proved essential for sustaining cooperation beyond the duration of the project. The bonds built in Thessaloniki evolved into long-term partnerships. After the training, organizations continued to exchange resources, develop new initiatives, and support one another's local work. In this way, BeCompetent became more than a project. It became a community of practice that continues to grow and adapt.

Collaboration in youth work also carries an ethical and philosophical dimension. It represents a commitment to collective intelligence rather than competition. It values listening as much as speaking and giving as much as receiving. True collaboration is based on mutual respect and shared responsibility. It encourages individuals and organizations to see their role not in isolation but as part of a wider ecosystem working toward a common goal.

In the European youth field, collaboration is both a necessity and a vision. It ensures that good practices spread across borders, that innovation is shared rather than duplicated, and that diverse voices contribute to shaping youth policy and training standards. The BeCompetent experience shows that international cooperation is not merely an administrative arrangement but a living expression of European values. It transforms abstract ideas such as solidarity and unity into tangible experiences of partnership and trust.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

Sustainability in youth work reaches far beyond environmental awareness. It includes the capacity of projects, organizations, and individuals to create long-lasting and meaningful change. It is about ensuring that learning, growth, and cooperation continue long after a project officially ends. From its very beginning, the BeCompetent project was designed with sustainability as a guiding principle. Every phase of its design and implementation aimed to build lasting value that would continue to support youth workers and their communities in the future.

Sustainable impact begins with capacity building. The BeCompetent training course focused on equipping participants with competences they could apply, adapt, and pass on in their own contexts. Each youth worker who took part in the program became a multiplier of knowledge and inspiration. After returning home, they were encouraged to organize local workshops, mentor colleagues, and share the learning tools they had experienced in Thessaloniki. This approach ensured that the project's benefits reached far beyond the original group of twenty-four participants.

This process of multiplication lies at the heart of sustainable youth work. When knowledge is shared and applied in new settings, its impact expands. The training did not provide fixed solutions but encouraged participants to continue reflecting and experimenting. By nurturing curiosity, adaptability, and self-directed learning, BeCompetent ensured that the learning process remained alive and relevant long after the project's completion.

Institutional sustainability was another priority of the partnership. The organizations involved in BeCompetent strengthened their relationships and developed a shared understanding of competence-based learning. They exchanged methodologies, refined their approaches, and committed to ongoing collaboration. This collective learning process created a strong foundation for future cooperation and innovation. By embedding the outcomes of the project into their everyday activities, the partner organizations ensured that the influence of BeCompetent would continue to shape their work for years to come.

Dissemination was a key component of the project's sustainability strategy. Partners developed follow-up actions that shared the training's results with broader audiences. They organized presentations, workshops, and community events to spread awareness of the European Competence Model and its value for youth work practice.

Participants prepared digital materials and testimonials that could be shared with peers, local authorities, and educational institutions. In doing so, they helped bridge the gap between European-level frameworks and local-level realities. These activities not only extended the reach of BeCompetent but also strengthened the visibility of youth work as a professional and educational field.

Sustainability also has a personal dimension. Competence development is a continuous journey rather than a one-time achievement. The training encouraged participants to create personal development plans that would help them track their progress, set goals, and identify new learning opportunities. These plans served as roadmaps for future growth, reminding youth workers that professional development is an ongoing responsibility. By continuing to reflect on their competences and needs, they maintain momentum and prevent learning from stagnating once the project has ended.

The BeCompetent philosophy connects sustainability directly with values. Lasting impact can only be achieved when work is grounded in fairness, inclusion, and respect. Sustainable youth work does not depend solely on funding or external support but on the integrity of its approach. When relationships are built on trust and when actions reflect shared purpose, results endure. Sustainability, therefore, is not only about maintaining activities but about maintaining meaning. It is about creating structures and cultures that nurture cooperation, empathy, and resilience.

In the broader European context, BeCompetent contributes to the long-term development of the youth work sector. By promoting competence-based learning and intercultural collaboration, it helps strengthen a professional culture that values reflection, quality, and continuous improvement. The project also demonstrates that sustainability is achieved when learning inspires new initiatives. Every youth worker who applies their BeCompetent experience in a local project or shares it with young people continues the cycle of impact that began in Thessaloniki.

Ultimately, sustainability means continuity and evolution. It means that learning does not end with the final evaluation report but continues to grow through the people and organizations it has touched. It means that relationships built during a project become partnerships for future action. It means that each success plants the seed for the next idea. The BeCompetent project embodies this understanding by showing that true sustainability is not only about duration but about transformation. It represents a living commitment

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Personal development lies at the center of professional excellence in youth work. It reflects the understanding that competence does not remain static but evolves continually through learning, reflection, and practice. A personal development plan is one of the most effective tools for supporting this growth. It helps youth workers examine their current competences, identify areas for improvement, set achievable goals, and track their progress over time.

The BeCompetent project placed strong emphasis on personal development planning. During and after the training course, participants were encouraged to create their own individual plans. The process began with a self-assessment based on the European Competence Model for Youth Workers. Participants reflected on their strengths and on the competences they wished to develop further. This self-assessment encouraged honesty and self-awareness. It helped participants understand where they stood professionally and what steps they could take to move forward.

Once participants had identified their priorities, they moved on to defining clear and realistic goals. These goals varied according to each person's interests, context, and level of experience. Some aimed to enhance facilitation and group management skills. Others focused on improving communication, project design, or intercultural cooperation. A few participants chose to strengthen their ability to mentor others or to develop their leadership potential within their organizations. Setting specific goals gave direction to their professional growth and helped them maintain focus and motivation.

A personal development plan also involves choosing appropriate strategies for learning. These strategies can take many forms, depending on resources and opportunities. Some youth workers plan to attend additional training courses or seminars. Others prefer to read specialized literature, participate in online learning, or observe experienced colleagues in action. Joining professional networks, engaging in peer learning, or seeking guidance from a mentor are equally valuable ways to expand knowledge and skills. The key is to ensure that learning remains intentional, relevant, and connected to real practice.
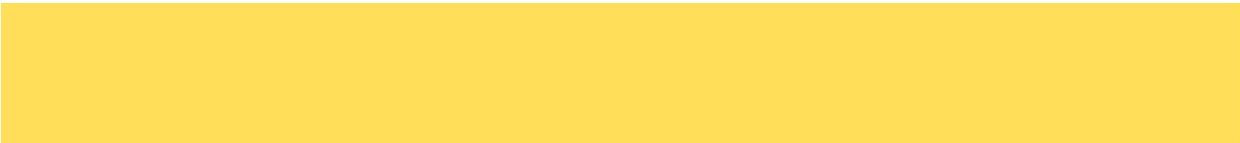
Feedback is another essential component of the process. In BeCompetent, participants were encouraged to share their plans with trainers and peers who could offer constructive comments and support. These discussions helped clarify priorities and make goals more realistic. They also created a sense of accountability and encouragement. When youth workers talk openly about their aspirations, they are more likely to stay committed and to follow through on their plans. The process of sharing also strengthens a culture of collective growth within the professional community.

The Youthpass framework played an important role in this process. It provided a structured tool for documenting learning outcomes and connecting them to the European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. By completing Youthpass, participants were able to articulate what they had achieved and how it related to broader educational and professional contexts. This recognition not only validated their progress but also enhanced their ability to communicate their competences to employers, partners, and institutions.

Personal development plans do more than organize goals. They transform learning into a continuous and reflective journey rather than a reaction to immediate needs. They encourage youth workers to take ownership of their professional evolution and to see learning as a lifelong process. When practitioners regularly review and update their plans, they stay adaptable and resilient in a constantly changing environment.

The BeCompetent project promotes personal development as both an individual and collective endeavor. While each participant follows a unique path, the exchange of experiences among peers creates mutual enrichment. Conversations about learning challenges and achievements inspire new perspectives and foster solidarity. This shared growth strengthens the overall capacity of the youth work field and builds a professional culture grounded in reflection, cooperation, and responsibility.

In the long term, personal development plans contribute to sustainability in youth work. They ensure that competence continues to evolve beyond the life of a project. A youth worker who regularly reflects, sets goals, and seeks feedback remains engaged, motivated, and capable of responding creatively to new challenges. The BeCompetent experience demonstrated that when personal development becomes a habit, it transforms not only the individual but also the quality and impact of youth work as a whole.

MONITORING QUALITY AND EVALUATING IMPACT

Quality assurance and evaluation are vital components of professional youth work. They ensure that actions lead to meaningful outcomes and that projects remain accountable, transparent, and responsive. In a field that depends on relationships, reflection, and change, evaluation serves not only as a measure of success but also as a tool for learning. It allows practitioners and organizations to understand what works, what can be improved, and how learning can evolve into long-term impact.

In the BeCompetent project, quality management was integrated from the very beginning. The partnership agreed on clear criteria for what quality would mean in this specific context. These included participant satisfaction, the degree of competence improvement observed, the inclusivity of the learning environment, and the effectiveness of dissemination after the training. The use of predefined indicators gave direction to the monitoring process and made progress visible throughout the project's different stages.

Evaluation in BeCompetent was not confined to the end of the project. It was understood as a continuous process that accompanied every phase, from preparation to implementation and follow-up. This approach reflected a belief that evaluation should support learning rather than merely assess it. During the training in Thessaloniki, participants provided daily feedback through written reflections, group discussions, and individual conversations with trainers. The facilitation team used this input to make real-time adjustments to activities, pacing, and methods. This dynamic process ensured that the program remained relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the group's evolving needs.

At the conclusion of the project, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the results. Quantitative evaluation included surveys that measured self-perceived growth in competences such as facilitation, communication, and intercultural cooperation. Qualitative evaluation explored deeper dimensions through interviews and reflective essays. These personal stories revealed how participants applied their learning in their home organizations and communities. They provided insight into the emotional and professional transformations that numbers alone could not capture.

Peer evaluation played a central role in BeCompetent as well. Participants observed one another during activities, offered constructive feedback, and discussed their impressions openly. This method promoted mutual respect and professional trust. It also encouraged youth workers to view evaluation not as criticism but as a process of shared growth. When peers engage in honest reflection together, evaluation becomes an act of empowerment. It strengthens self-awareness and builds a sense of belonging within a professional community.

The partnership also committed to organizational reflection. Each participating organization assessed its own coordination, communication, and contribution to the project. This internal evaluation ensured that learning did not stop with the participants but extended to the institutional level. Partners documented lessons learned, identified challenges, and shared strategies for improvement. This process created a collective body of knowledge that will inform future initiatives and strengthen cooperation among organizations in the European youth work field.

The impact of BeCompetent reached far beyond the immediate training group. Evaluation looked at how knowledge and methods were transferred to other youth workers, local stakeholders, and young people. Participants organized workshops, mentoring sessions, and community events where they applied the competences gained during the project. The diffusion of ideas demonstrated that BeCompetent had achieved both individual and systemic change. Its influence could be seen in local youth policies, organizational practices, and regional networks that began integrating competence-based approaches into their work.

Transparency and consistency were key principles of the project's monitoring and evaluation system. Regular communication among partners ensured that everyone understood how data were collected and used. Evaluation findings were shared openly and discussed collaboratively. This openness reinforced accountability to funders, participants, and the wider community while maintaining a spirit of trust and shared ownership.

At its core, the BeCompetent approach views evaluation as an extension of reflection. It is not an administrative formality but a meaningful dialogue about quality and purpose. When youth workers engage in evaluation with curiosity and honesty, they transform it into a learning process that strengthens both personal and organizational competence. Evaluation then becomes not a final judgment but a continuous conversation about improvement, ethics, and impact.

In this sense, monitoring and evaluation serve a dual purpose. They measure progress and ensure accountability, but they also nurture growth. They help youth workers see how their daily actions contribute to broader goals and remind organizations of their role in shaping inclusive, effective, and resilient youth work. The experience of BeCompetent demonstrates that when evaluation is approached with openness and care, it becomes a driving force for innovation and a cornerstone of quality in European youth work.

THE ROLE OF MENTORING AND PEER LEARNING

Mentoring and peer learning are among the most effective approaches for supporting competence development in youth work. Both methods rely on human connection and mutual respect. They transform learning from an individual effort into a shared journey of growth. When properly integrated into professional practice, they strengthen confidence, motivation, and the overall quality of youth work.

Mentoring is a relationship that combines guidance, reflection, and encouragement. It connects an experienced practitioner with a developing youth worker in a partnership that promotes learning through dialogue. A mentor does not instruct in the traditional sense. Instead, they listen, ask thoughtful questions, and help the mentee see their experiences from new perspectives. This process encourages critical thinking and self-awareness. The mentor acts as a mirror that reflects both achievements and challenges, helping the mentee identify the next steps in their professional journey.

In youth work, mentoring also reinforces the values of empathy and inclusion. The mentor's role is not to impose solutions but to empower the mentee to find their own. By sharing personal stories, lessons, and tools, mentors demonstrate that learning continues at every stage of a professional career. They also model ethical behavior and reflective practice, which are essential components of competence.

Peer learning complements mentoring by emphasizing equality and shared responsibility. It is based on the idea that everyone has something to teach and something to learn. In peer learning groups, youth workers exchange experiences, compare approaches, and offer constructive feedback. These conversations help transform individual insights into collective knowledge. They also foster a sense of belonging within a professional community that values openness and collaboration.

During the BeCompetent training in Thessaloniki, both mentoring and peer learning were intentionally woven into the design of the program. Participants were paired in reflective partnerships known as peer dialogues. These sessions provided structured time to talk about what had been learned, what challenges had arisen, and how each participant planned to apply new knowledge in practice. The peer dialogues became safe spaces for vulnerability, honesty, and mutual encouragement. They showed that reflection is more powerful when it is shared.

Mentoring continued beyond the training event. Trainers and partner organizations offered follow-up support as participants returned to their local contexts. They maintained communication through online platforms and check-ins, helping participants translate their training experiences into real action. This continuity ensured that learning did not end with the project but remained an active part of professional development. Sustained mentoring also strengthened accountability and encouraged participants to remain engaged in the European youth work community.

The benefits of mentoring go beyond competence building. They extend to emotional and social well-being. Youth work can be demanding and emotionally intensive, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as social exclusion, discrimination, or mental health. Having a mentor provides a supportive relationship where practitioners can share concerns, seek perspective, and receive affirmation. It reminds them that professional growth is not only intellectual but also relational and emotional. Feeling supported reduces the risk of burnout and increases resilience in challenging contexts.

Peer learning, in turn, contributes to building networks of solidarity. It fosters a professional culture based on cooperation rather than competition. When youth workers share their challenges and successes openly, they help raise the collective standards of practice. Peer learning encourages humility, as everyone becomes both teacher and learner. It builds trust and promotes innovation, since diverse experiences often lead to creative solutions.

The BeCompetent project recognized that both mentoring and peer learning are long-term investments in professional excellence. They nurture habits of reflection, dialogue, and empathy that extend well beyond the duration of any single project. In many cases, participants formed enduring professional friendships that continue to support their development. These relationships are now part of a growing European network of practitioners who learn with and from one another.

In a broader sense, mentoring and peer learning contribute to the sustainability of youth work. They create systems where knowledge circulates, where expertise is shared rather than centralized, and where new generations of youth workers are continually supported. They represent an approach to education that values human connection as much as technical skill.

Ultimately, mentoring and peer learning embody the core philosophy of BeCompetent. They show that competence is not achieved in isolation but through community. They illustrate that professional growth flourishes in relationships built on trust, respect, and shared purpose. When youth workers support one another in this way, they help ensure that the spirit of learning, cooperation, and empowerment continues to shape youth work across Europe.

BEST PRACTICES AND CASE STUDIES

One of the strengths of European cooperation is the ability to share good practices and learn from one another's experiences. The BeCompetent project gathered examples from partner countries that demonstrate how competence-based approaches can enrich youth work in diverse contexts.

Greece: Youthability in Kastoria
Youthability is an initiative that empowers young people through workshops, mentorship, and civic engagement. It combines education with community involvement by encouraging participants to identify local issues and design projects to address them. The approach builds critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Youthability reflects how competence development can promote social responsibility and leadership among young people.

Türkiye: Defne Youth Education Association

In Türkiye, the Defne Youth Education Association focuses on inclusion through art and language education. It provides learning spaces where young refugees and local youth create art together, share their stories, and build mutual understanding. The program uses creativity as a bridge between cultures and supports language acquisition, empathy, and social cohesion.

Romania: ATIC Romania

ATIC Romania works on strengthening youth participation in democratic processes. Its programs train young people in advocacy and local governance, enabling them to engage with municipal authorities and propose policy solutions. Through these initiatives, youth workers help transform young citizens into active participants who understand their rights and responsibilities.

Cyprus: Youth Dynamics

Youth Dynamics promotes experiential learning through outdoor education. Activities such as hiking, camping, and team challenges help participants develop resilience, cooperation, and environmental awareness. These programs show how nature-based learning can be a powerful tool for competence development and personal growth.

Spain: Entrejuegos

Entrejuegos integrates sport, play, and creativity to promote communication and inclusion. It engages young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in collaborative games that foster respect, teamwork, and self-expression. The organization demonstrates how simple methods can produce profound social and emotional learning.

Bulgaria: Sushal Hub

Sushal Hub develops digital competences and social innovation projects that connect technology with community empowerment. By teaching digital storytelling, coding, and media literacy, it enables young people to become creators rather than passive users of technology. Its work illustrates how digital competence can support both employability and active citizenship.

These case studies show that competence development is not abstract theory but practical reality. Across Europe, youth workers use creativity and reflection to meet local needs while contributing to a common European vision of inclusion and empowerment.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Every European cooperation project represents not only a set of activities but also a learning journey. The BeCompetent experience offered valuable insights that extend beyond its immediate outcomes. These lessons can guide future initiatives, support policymakers, and strengthen youth work practice across Europe.

The first and perhaps most important lesson is that competence development must be holistic. Youth work cannot be reduced to technical instruction or isolated training sessions. It is a process that involves the mind, the heart, and the hands. True competence emerges when knowledge, skills, and attitudes interact in balance. The BeCompetent approach demonstrated that programs integrating cognitive learning, emotional intelligence, and practical experience generate deeper and more sustainable impact. When participants engage intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally, learning becomes transformational rather than temporary.

A second lesson is the central role of reflection. Continuous reflection is what turns experience into growth. Without reflection, learning risks remaining superficial. When youth workers are given time and space to analyze their actions, recognize patterns, and draw meaning from their experiences, they gain self-awareness and professional confidence. Reflection should therefore be integrated into every phase of a project, from planning to implementation and evaluation. It should not be an additional exercise but a consistent practice that shapes decisions and relationships throughout the process.

The third lesson concerns diversity. Cultural and experiential diversity emerged as one of the most powerful assets of BeCompetent. The six partner countries brought together different traditions, educational systems, and youth work realities. At first, this diversity required careful communication and adaptation.

Over time, it became the project's greatest source of creativity and innovation. When diversity is approached with respect and curiosity, it challenges assumptions and expands perspectives. For youth work, this means that inclusive and intercultural approaches are not optional but essential to quality and relevance.

Another lesson lies in the understanding that partnership is not a static structure but an evolving process. Effective collaboration demands more than formal agreements. It requires trust, transparency, and regular communication. The BeCompetent partnership invested time in building relationships, aligning expectations, and resolving misunderstandings with openness. This investment paid off by creating a partnership culture that was resilient, motivated, and capable of collective problem-solving. The lesson for future projects is clear: time spent strengthening relationships is never wasted.

Evaluation also revealed important insights. When evaluation is participatory, it becomes a shared act of learning rather than a mechanism of control. Involving participants in defining indicators, collecting data, and interpreting results increases ownership and relevance.

The BeCompetent team discovered that evaluation can function as a dialogue about quality and purpose. It helps all stakeholders understand what success looks like and how it can be sustained. This approach transforms evaluation into a dynamic process that fosters growth instead of judgment.

A further lesson relates to sustainability. Long-term impact does not happen by chance. It requires strategic planning and ongoing commitment. The BeCompetent project integrated sustainability into every stage by encouraging participants to act as multipliers, by supporting follow-up initiatives, and by embedding competence-based approaches within partner organizations. The experience showed that dissemination and networking are most effective when they begin early and when they remain active after the project's formal conclusion. Sustainability depends on continuity, and continuity depends on relationships and shared purpose.

From these lessons, several practical recommendations emerge for policymakers, trainers, and organizations seeking to strengthen youth work across Europe.

First, organizations should embed competence development frameworks such as the European Competence Model into their internal training and supervision systems. These frameworks provide structure, consistency, and a shared language for professional growth.

Second, reflection should be institutionalized. Learning journals, peer reviews, mentoring systems, and regular feedback sessions can help youth workers maintain awareness of their progress and areas for development. Reflection should be encouraged not only for individuals but also within teams and organizations.

Third, intercultural learning should remain a central pillar of youth work. Exchanges, study visits, and international partnerships give practitioners opportunities to experience diversity firsthand and to build networks of mutual support. These experiences strengthen both professional competence and European identity.

Fourth, cooperation between formal and non-formal education sectors should be deepened. Schools, universities, and youth organizations can learn a great deal from one another. Combining academic knowledge with experiential learning methods creates a more comprehensive approach to education.

Finally, advocacy for the recognition of youth work competences must continue at local, national, and European levels. Recognition enhances professional credibility, secures resources, and raises public awareness of the value of youth work. Policymakers should ensure that youth workers have access to lifelong learning opportunities and clear pathways for career progression.

Taken together, these lessons and recommendations form a roadmap for the future. They emphasize that quality youth work depends on competence, reflection, collaboration, and a strong ethical foundation. The BeCompetent project demonstrated that when these elements come together, youth work becomes not only more professional but also more human, inclusive, and transformative. It is this combination of heart and structure that ensures the field continues to evolve as a source of empowerment and social innovation across Europe.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Lifelong learning is one of the defining principles of youth work. The BeCompetent project was designed not as an endpoint but as a step in an ongoing journey of growth and cooperation. After the training in Thessaloniki, participants were encouraged to continue developing their competences, to share their learning with others, and to remain connected to the European community of practice. A number of established European tools and frameworks support this continuous process. They link local practice to international policy and provide inspiration for future initiatives.

The European Training Strategy (ETS) serves as one of the primary frameworks for professional development in the field of youth work. It promotes a competence-based approach to learning and offers practical guidance for trainers, organizations, and policymakers. The ETS encourages youth workers to view their growth as a lifelong process that combines formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Its publications, resources, and training modules help practitioners design educational activities that align with European standards while remaining adaptable to local needs.

Closely connected to the ETS is the European Competence Model for Youth Workers, which provides a comprehensive reference for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required in quality youth work practice. The model defines eight key competence areas, ranging from facilitation and communication to intercultural awareness and evaluation. It functions as both a guide for self-assessment and a shared vocabulary for discussing professional growth. By using the model, youth workers can better understand their own strengths and plan their personal development in a structured way.

The SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres form another cornerstone of European youth work support. Operating within the framework of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, SALTO-YOUTH provides training materials, online platforms, and toolkits for youth workers, trainers, and project organizers. Each center focuses on a particular theme or region, such as inclusion, participation, or cultural diversity. Their resources offer practical examples of good practice and contribute to raising the overall quality of youth work across Europe.

Youthpass is a tool that connects personal reflection with formal recognition. It allows participants in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects to document the competences they acquire through non-formal learning.

More than a certificate, Youthpass is a process that helps learners articulate their growth and understand how their experiences relate to the European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

By using Youthpass, youth workers can validate their learning outcomes, communicate their achievements to employers and institutions, and strengthen their professional identity.

Another essential reference is the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which provides detailed information about European funding opportunities in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport. The guide helps organizations design high-quality projects and understand the priorities, eligibility criteria, and procedures of the programme. For youth workers and organizations seeking to expand their international cooperation, the guide serves as both a planning manual and a source of inspiration.

The Toolkit for Trainers in Non-Formal Education offers a wide range of practical exercises, facilitation techniques, and strategies for creating engaging learning experiences. It draws on the principles of experiential education, emphasizing reflection, participation, and creativity. Trainers can adapt its content to different contexts, making it an invaluable resource for anyone working with young people in non-formal or community settings.

Together, these resources form an ecosystem of support that enables continuous professional development in youth work. They reflect the European commitment to quality, inclusion, and lifelong learning. By using these tools, youth workers can continue to strengthen their competences, deepen their understanding of youth development, and connect with peers across borders.

The BeCompetent philosophy encourages practitioners to explore these materials actively and to share what they discover with others. Continuous learning is not only a personal responsibility but also a contribution to the growth of the entire field. As youth workers engage with these European resources, they participate in a collective effort to professionalize and elevate youth work as a vital element of social cohesion and empowerment across Europe.

FUTURE PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE

Youth work in Europe stands at a moment of profound transformation. The continent's social, technological, and environmental realities are evolving rapidly, bringing both challenges and opportunities. To remain relevant and impactful, youth work must continue to adapt while staying true to its core values of participation, inclusion, and empowerment. The future will belong to those practitioners and organizations that combine creativity with competence and values with vision.

Digital transformation will remain one of the defining forces of change. Technology continues to reshape communication, education, and participation, influencing how young people learn, interact, and organize their lives. For youth workers, this means developing strong digital competences that go beyond technical skills. It requires understanding how digital tools can be used to enhance learning, creativity, and civic engagement while also recognizing their potential risks. Critical digital literacy will become a central competence, enabling both youth workers and young people to navigate online spaces with awareness, safety, and responsibility. Technology must serve inclusion and empowerment rather than deepen inequality or isolation.

Alongside digital change, environmental sustainability is emerging as another key priority. The climate crisis affects young people directly and shapes their sense of the future. Youth work can play a leading role in responding to this challenge by integrating environmental awareness into daily practice. Activities that promote eco-friendly habits, outdoor learning, and community engagement help young people connect personal responsibility with global action.
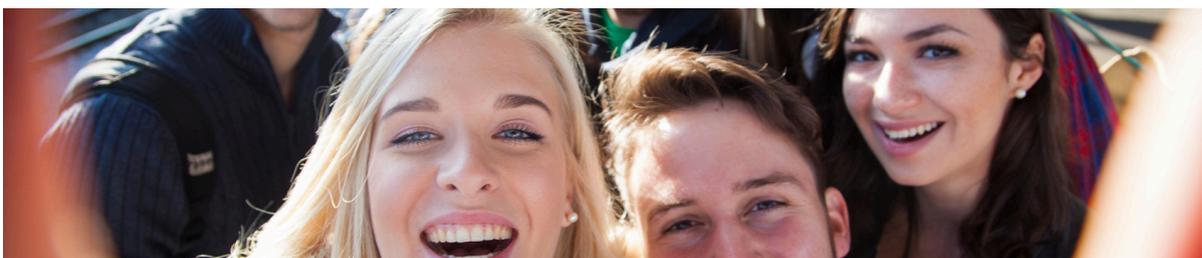
By adopting sustainable methods and reducing their ecological footprint, youth organizations can model the values of care, respect, and responsibility that lie at the heart of education for sustainable development.

Mental health and well-being represent another growing area of concern and opportunity. Across Europe, many young people face anxiety, uncertainty, and social pressures that affect their emotional balance. Youth work can contribute significantly to building resilience and promoting mental well-being. This requires youth workers to develop competences in emotional intelligence, active listening, and supportive communication. It also involves creating safe spaces where young people can express themselves, build confidence, and experience belonging. The well-being of youth workers themselves must also be prioritized, as sustainable practice depends on emotional balance and professional support.

Interdisciplinary collaboration will become increasingly important. The future of youth work will involve closer cooperation with schools, social services, cultural institutions, and health organizations. Such collaboration allows for more holistic responses to the complex needs of young people. It also enhances the visibility and recognition of youth work within broader social systems. When youth work operates as part of an interconnected ecosystem of education and community development, its impact expands significantly.

At the policy level, continued recognition of youth work as a profession remains a pressing goal. European and national institutions are gradually strengthening frameworks that support competence development, validation of non-formal learning, and professional mobility. However, further progress is needed to ensure that youth work receives the same respect and resources as other educational and social professions. The establishment of quality standards, fair working conditions, and continuous training opportunities will be essential for the sector's long-term stability.

The BeCompetent project contributes meaningfully to this evolving landscape. By providing a structured model of competence-based professionalization, it demonstrates how youth work can combine flexibility with rigor. The project offers a framework that other organizations can adapt to their local realities, supporting both individual and organizational growth. It encourages a vision of youth work that is dynamic, evidence-informed, and deeply rooted in human values.

Looking ahead, the European youth work community faces a dual task. It must embrace innovation while protecting the human connection that defines its essence. The future of youth work will depend on practitioners who can integrate new technologies, ecological consciousness, and emotional intelligence into a coherent practice that remains centered on young people.

It will require ongoing investment in competence development, strong networks of cooperation, and a shared belief in the transformative power of learning.

If the BeCompetent experience demonstrates one enduring truth, it is that youth work thrives when it combines knowledge with empathy and structure with creativity. The years ahead will demand adaptability, courage, and collaboration. Yet with these qualities, youth work in Europe will continue to serve as a force for inclusion, empowerment, and social renewal. The future will be built not only by policies and programs but by the daily actions of youth workers who believe that learning can change lives and that every young person has the potential to contribute to a more just and sustainable world.

THE LEGACY OF BECOMPETENT AND ITS ONGOING COMMUNITY

The legacy of BeCompetent continues to unfold well beyond the official duration of the project. What began as a collaboration among six partner organizations has evolved into a living community of practice that remains active, connected, and creative. The project demonstrated that genuine learning does not end when a program concludes. Instead, it grows through the actions, relationships, and ideas that participants carry forward into their own work.

From the beginning, BeCompetent was designed not only to deliver a training course but also to cultivate a lasting network of youth workers who share a common vision of competence-based practice. The participants and partner organizations remain in contact, exchanging experiences, developing follow-up projects, and supporting one another's initiatives. These ongoing connections have transformed the partnership from a temporary consortium into a sustainable European community. It is a network built on trust, shared values, and a deep belief in the power of youth work to create positive change.

The methods and insights developed through BeCompetent continue to inspire new initiatives. Trainers and educators who took part in the project have integrated competence-based approaches into their own programs. They have adapted its frameworks to local realities, ensuring that the project's principles remain relevant and responsive. The use of reflective tools, peer learning, and competence mapping has now become part of the training culture in several partner organizations. In this way, BeCompetent lives on through the daily practice of youth workers who embody its philosophy.

One of the project's most tangible legacies is its collection of learning materials and documentation. Reports, videos, and participant testimonials capture not only the outcomes but also the spirit of the project. These materials are being shared with other organizations, youth networks, and training institutions as educational resources. They serve as inspiration for those who wish to develop similar initiatives based on competence development and experiential learning. The very handbook in which this section appears forms a central part of that legacy. It gathers the lessons, reflections, and knowledge generated by BeCompetent and makes them accessible to future generations of youth workers.

The impact of BeCompetent is also visible in the strengthened cooperation among its partners. The relationships built during the project have led to new collaborations and proposals under Erasmus+ and other European frameworks. These ongoing projects reflect a shared commitment to innovation, inclusion, and professional growth. The BeCompetent network continues to function as a space where ideas are tested, good practices are exchanged, and youth work evolves collectively.

Beyond the concrete results, the most profound legacy of BeCompetent lies in its reaffirmation of a core belief: that competence development in youth work is not only a professional necessity but also a collective responsibility. The project reminded everyone involved that quality does not emerge from isolated effort. It grows through cooperation, reflection, and shared purpose. Youth workers, trainers, and organizations all contribute to a culture of learning where knowledge is continually created and renewed.

The spirit of BeCompetent is one of curiosity and commitment. It encourages youth workers to keep questioning, experimenting, and improving. It invites organizations to support staff development and to recognize learning as a long-term investment. It inspires networks to see themselves as part of a larger European movement that values human connection, democratic participation, and continuous growth.

Ultimately, the legacy of BeCompetent is not only about what was achieved but about what continues. It lives in the young people who benefit from more competent and reflective youth workers. It lives in the trainers who carry forward the project's methodology. It lives in the communities where cooperation and inclusion are practiced daily. The BeCompetent project has proven that when learning is shared and relationships are nurtured, impact becomes lasting. Its community will continue to evolve, adapt, and expand, keeping alive the vision of a European youth work field that is confident, collaborative, and committed to excellence.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

BeCompetent represents a collective European commitment to strengthening the quality and recognition of youth work through competence, compassion, and collaboration. It expresses a shared understanding that learning is a lifelong process and that every youth worker, regardless of background or experience, has the capacity to influence positive change in the lives of young people. The project and this handbook stand as both evidence and celebration of that belief.

At its essence, BeCompetent is a story of learning. It demonstrates that professional development does not depend solely on formal structures but can emerge wherever people engage with curiosity, openness, and purpose. The training course in Thessaloniki, the reflections shared by participants, and the partnerships that continue to evolve all show that youth work flourishes when learning is mutual. Each conversation, collaboration, and act of support contributes to a wider movement that promotes empowerment and solidarity across Europe.

This handbook is both a conclusion and an invitation. It concludes one phase of collaboration while inviting youth workers, trainers, and organizations to continue the journey. It encourages readers to reflect on their own practices, to adapt ideas presented here to their local contexts, and to explore what competence means in the changing realities of youth work. It challenges professionals to see their work not as a collection of tasks but as a mission rooted in empathy, participation, and care for others.

Youth work is built upon human relationships. It depends on trust, authenticity, and mutual respect. Youth workers accompany young people through uncertainty, growth, and self-discovery. They provide guidance, but they also create safe spaces where learning can occur naturally. The experience of BeCompetent illustrates that when youth workers themselves engage in reflection and collaboration, their influence expands beyond their immediate environment. The competences they develop strengthen both their personal practice and the broader community of youth work.

Competence development is not limited to acquiring new skills. It is an ongoing process that connects knowledge, values, and self-awareness. It invites professionals to act consciously and to align their decisions with their ethical principles. Competence becomes not only a professional standard but also a way of thinking and being. A competent youth worker is one who remains a learner, who approaches challenges with openness, and who practices empathy as a central element of their work.

In a Europe marked by social change, technological transformation, and environmental challenges, youth work remains an essential space for growth and inclusion. It bridges education, participation, and civic responsibility. Investing in competence means investing in the future. Empowered youth workers support empowered young people who are able to participate actively in their societies and to shape them with creativity and integrity. Together they contribute to a Europe that values learning, diversity, and cooperation.

The BeCompetent story does not end with this publication. It continues wherever youth workers meet, learn, and exchange ideas. It lives in every training program that embraces reflective practice, in every mentoring conversation that inspires confidence, and in every project that builds connections among people and cultures. Its legacy lies in the conviction that competence development is both an individual journey and a shared responsibility.

Ultimately, BeCompetent affirms a lasting truth about youth work. Growth is at its core: growth of the self, of others, and of the communities we create together. Youth work is about learning that empowers and relationships that endure. It is about building a culture of participation and respect where every young person has the opportunity to discover their strengths and contribute to the world around them. By continuing this path of competence, reflection, and collaboration, Europe invests not only in youth work but in the promise of a more inclusive and resilient future.

ANNEX I. ABOUT THE PARTNERS

The BeCompetent project was implemented by a consortium of six partner organizations representing different regions of Europe. Each brought unique expertise in youth work, non-formal education, and community development.

- Greece – Lead partner and host of the training course in Thessaloniki. Specializes in youth empowerment and intercultural learning.
- Türkiye – Expert in inclusion and education for refugees and marginalized communities.
- Romania – Focuses on youth participation, civic engagement, and democratic education.
- Cyprus – Promotes outdoor experiential learning and sustainable living practices.
- Spain – Works in the fields of sport, creativity, and inclusion through non-formal education.
- Bulgaria – Combines digital innovation with social entrepreneurship and youth empowerment.

Together, the partners demonstrated that European cooperation is most effective when diversity is embraced and each voice is valued.

ANNEX II. GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- Competence – The combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable effective performance in a given context.
- Non-formal education – Structured learning that takes place outside formal institutions, emphasizing participation, experience, and reflection.
- Experiential learning – A process of learning through experience, reflection, and application.
- Youthpass – A European recognition tool for non-formal and informal learning within youth work.
- Intercultural learning – The process of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity through dialogue and shared experience.
- Lifelong learning – The continuous process of acquiring and developing competences throughout life.
- Reflection – The act of examining one's actions and experiences to gain understanding and improve future practice.

ANNEX III. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT

- The partnership expresses deep appreciation to all participants, trainers, and supporters who contributed their time, creativity, and enthusiasm. Their commitment made BeCompetent not only a successful project but also a meaningful journey of shared learning and growth.

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Building a Skilled Youth Workforce: A Competence Model Based Training for Youth Workers

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