



Tool A

Understanding Mobile Youth Work

This tool was developed within the Erasmus+ project “Mobile Youth Work – Engaging Youth and Communities”.

It provides an accessible introduction to the principles, practices, and benefits of Mobile Youth Work for youth workers, municipalities, organisations, and decision-makers.

Mobile Youth Work

Engaging Youth and Communities

Promoting the recognition of Mobile Youth Centre initiatives



Learn more about the project:

Scan the QR code to access additional resources and updates.

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What is Mobile Youth Centre Work?

This chapter introduces the concept of Mobile Youth Centre Work, outlining its purpose, core values and guiding principles. It explains how Mobile Youth Centres operate as inclusive, free and educational tools designed to reach young people where traditional services cannot. The chapter highlights the social, educational, and preventive role of Mobile Youth Work, its impact on youth wellbeing and community development, and the reasons why it represents a sustainable and effective response to contemporary challenges faced by young people.

1

What is Mobile Youth Centre Work?

A Mobile Youth Centre is a tool used by youth workers to provide youth services to young people “**where they are**”. Its main purpose is to reach young people in hard-to-reach or scattered areas, empowering and providing them with learning opportunities towards personal growth through guided socialising and non-formal and/or informal activities.

Mobile Youth Work should be:

Universal

Mobile Youth Centres have to be accessible to all young people. Independently from their physical and mental resources and barriers, they are able to use the offers of Mobile Youth Centres. Everyone has the right and deserves to be guided in education and growth. Both staff and facility must be prepared and ready to react in all circumstances.

Free

Mobile Youth Centres should not cost young people any money. They can use it without any obligations or condition of reciprocity. In that way all young people can be reached.

Educational

Young people can learn from each other or from youth workers. They learn both in given frames and outside of them. Mobile Youth Centres are the way to connect all of this. They provide experiences and activities that help young people develop new skills, support their transition to adulthood and contribute to their personal growth.

Sustainable

According to its educational role, Mobile Youth Centres have to be an example in sustainability. Showing off some innovative solutions for a sustainable environment is essential, even if perfection is not always achieved.

What is Mobile Youth Centre Work?

Welcoming

Young people feel that it is okay to “open the door” and step in. They feel taken seriously and can freely express their problems. Young people are using their leisure time to do constructive things / activities in the youth centre. The building and the staff behaviour are welcoming to / for young people. In this way, young people and youth workers can work together to overcome all kinds of problems.

Safe

Young people are protected from any harm by trained professionals. Mobile Youth Centres provide a space where young people can experiment, associate, meet peers and grow as individuals in a positive and supportive environment. The Mobile Youth Centre approach, together with community interventions, helps ensure the safety of youth workers, staff, and young people.

Social learning

Young people learn about each other and how to behave with others based on the situation. They learn about group interactions, cooperation and culture, to adapt their speech to different life situations and to different people.

Mindful of the environment

Mobile Youth Centres are designed for a specific territory. For example, the shape and structure are relevant for answering to the local/regional geography. Since the goal is to reach the young people where they are, they must be designed that way.

Mindful of the community

A Mobile Youth Centre is a temporary presence in an already established community. The staff should be mindful of community practices, (unspoken) rules and values and act accordingly. Ideally the Mobile Youth Centre will operate with the support of the community’s leaders, formal or informal.

What is Mobile Youth Centre Work?

What does it do?

- Brings youth work services to young people who cannot access youth centre programmes
- Provides safe and structured activities for young people outside their homes
- Contributes to the prevention of juvenile delinquency
- Promotes young people's safety and wellbeing
- Fosters civic engagement among young people
- Addresses mobility challenges related to limited public transport
- Complements formal education systems
- Reduces isolation and strengthens social skills

Whom and what is it for?

- Young people aged 12 to 19 (depending on various national legislation)
- Open to all young people, regardless of religion, cultural background, nationality, migration status, gender identity, or sexual orientation



2

Operating Mobile Youth Centres

This chapter explains how different urban and rural environments impact the operation of a Mobile Youth Centres. It highlights the importance of understanding local structures, infrastructure, and existing youth services to build networks and avoid overlaps. Key location-related factors such as accessibility, safety, and neighbourhood impact are explored. Finally, it outlines essential legal requirements, permits and regulatory obligations for lawful operation.

2

Operating Mobile Youth Centres Surroundings, Environment, and Legal Requirements

Different environments present different opportunities but also challenges, when working with a Mobile Youth Centre. It makes a difference whether the Mobile Youth Centre is located in a busy urban area or in a rural area with a smaller population and therefore less infrastructure.

However, regardless of the type of environment in which the Mobile Youth Centre operates, **it is crucial to familiarise yourself with existing structures.** This is important, firstly, to explore potential collaborations and build networks, and secondly, to avoid disrupting already established structures or creating duplicate offerings (for example, if there is weekly football training every Wednesday for young people in the village, it makes little sense to offer other activities at the same time).

Regardless of the setting, you should familiarise yourself with:

- Schools (primary and secondary schools)
- Local stakeholders such as neighbourhood management, local clubs, or privately organised associations
- Sports clubs, volunteer fire departments, and other club structures that regularly involve young people
- Infrastructure (supermarkets, snack bars, libraries, museums, etc.)
- (Informal) meeting places for young people
- Responsibilities and contact persons for permits and authorisations.

Aside from these general aspects, another important consideration is:

Is the location where the Mobile Youth Centre operates urban or rural?

Both spaces have different advantages and obstacles for daily work, and it can be helpful to familiarise yourself with the circumstances as early as possible in order to best design services and adapt them to people's needs.

Operating Mobile Youth Centres

Surroundings, Environment, and Legal Requirements

Urban environment

- Many people, including children and young people
- Family structures are often diverse, including two-parent households, single-parent families, young people living independently, and multigenerational households.
- Often a rather anonymous nature, it can take longer to connect with key stakeholders.
- Often characterised by diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds within a small area
- Well-developed infrastructure with many shopping options, public transport, roads, etc.
- In some cases, higher crime rates
- Often all types of schools are available (i.e., primary and secondary schools)
- Other youth centres probably already exist
- Economic conditions can vary between urban and rural areas, depending on the local context.
- Fast pace, often non-binding nature
- More solid surfaces (asphalt) than green spaces

Rural environment

- Small-housing areas are common (residents may be more sensitive to noise or gatherings of young people nearby)
- Family structures are often more homogeneous, with a higher prevalence of households consisting of parents and children.
- Generally fewer people than in urban areas
- Often there is only one elementary school, and secondary schools are located further away in urban areas (this results in longer journeys for older adolescents)
- Infrastructure is more manageable (fewer shops, etc.)
- Economic conditions should be assessed locally, as they can vary significantly between communities.
- Often there are central locations/meeting points (e.g., market square, village centre)
- Many young people are involved in club structures (sports clubs, fire department, etc.)
- Often there are no other youth centres
- Social interactions often follow a different dynamic (“everyone knows everyone”), which can make it easier to make contacts and form networks/collaborations but it also means that activities are more visible and subject to community observation
- Often closer contact with parents and families
- Proximity to nature offers different opportunities than in the city (forests, meadows, proximity to bodies of water, etc.)

Operating Mobile Youth Centres

Surroundings, Environment, and Legal Requirements

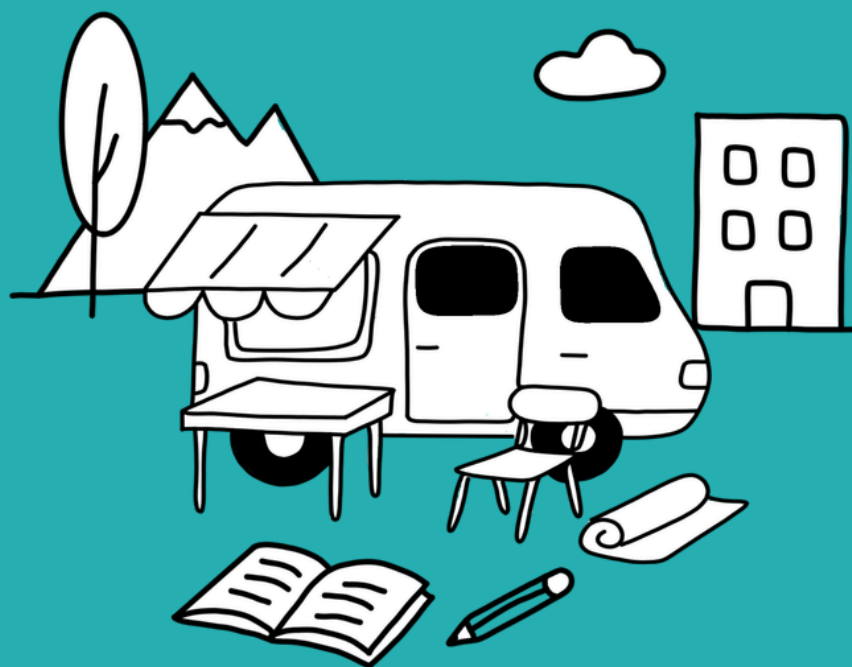
Aside from these characteristics, the **general condition** of the chosen (or assigned) location where the Mobile Youth Centre operates is **crucial for possible offerings and requires adaptation**, regardless of whether it is in an urban or rural area.

- Is the location paved or a green space?
- Is the location sheltered or located on a busy road?
- Is the location accessible for everyone?
- Are there restrooms nearby?
- Is the location public or privately owned?
- Are there residents in the immediate vicinity who might feel disturbed?

All of these aspects, and more, must be considered and require legal compliance. **Operating a Mobile Youth Centre without the appropriate permits is not advisable**; in the worst case, this could lead to lasting problems for future operations.

Legal aspects and permits

- General approval or contractual agreement to operate a Mobile Youth Centre (e.g. from the relevant youth authority)
- Certificates of good conduct for youth workers
- Required driving licences
- Compliance with the “Youth Protection Act”
- Permit to enter, drive to, and operate in the selected location
- Respect for the noise protection regulations
- Event registration with the police, where required



3

Activities and Programs

This chapter frames the Mobile Youth Centre as a flexible and educational environment that brings learning and participation directly to young people. It outlines how activities are planned, adapted to different contexts, and grounded in real local needs. Key aspects such as logistics, materials, voluntary participation, safety, and educational presence are explained. A strong emphasis is placed on data protection, image rights, and ethical standards in all activities.

3

Activities and Programs Organising a Mobile Activity

A Mobile Youth Centre is not simply a “travelling container of activities”. First and foremost, **it is an educational space that moves to where young people are**, operating in school courtyards, neighbourhood streets, squares, rural areas and villages, parking spaces and residential courtyards.

From urban settings to the most remote rural contexts, **what all Mobile Youth Centres have in common is their ambition and ability to identify real needs and transform them into concrete opportunities** for relationship-building, learning and participation.

The activities offered are **diverse**: sports, cooking, visual arts, music, cinema, cooperative games, counselling, street work, creative workshops, and civic participation. What defines them as part of a Mobile Youth Centre, however, is not the activity itself, but the way it is designed, implemented and facilitated.

This chapter provides a general framework. The individual activities, with their specific technical details, can be found on the project’s online platform (youthcentres.eu). This booklet offers a practical and reflective guide for those who design, plan and deliver mobile educational interventions.

Organising a mobile activity: what really needs to be taken into account

The context before the activity

Every successful activity begins with a careful understanding of the local context. Whether the activity takes place in an urban neighbourhood, at a school, in a rural area, or in an informal gathering space, it is essential to understand the following:

- Who are the young people who use that space?
- What are their daily routines?
- Which networks (schools, families, institutions and associations) are already present?
- Which needs are explicit, and which emerge more informally?

In many cases, entering a territory requires a **process of negotiation** with school principals, municipalities, reception centres or local organisations. Experience clearly shows that **the key to success is to present oneself not as a bearer of demands, but as an educational resource** that enriches the everyday life of the community.

Activities and Programs

Organising a Mobile Activity

●) Logistics and materials: functional simplicity

Most Mobile Youth Centre activities are based on simple, portable and adaptable materials: balls, foldable nets, creative tools, board games, photo printers, a mobile kitchen, artistic materials. The guiding rule is as follows: **everything one offers must be able to adapt to the space**, the weather and the variable number of participants.

It is essential to plan for:

- Power sources (batteries, generators, sockets)
- Alternatives in case of bad weather
- Spare materials
- Realistic timing for set-up, implementation and dismantling

A well-functioning mobile activity is not necessarily the most complex one, but the one that still works when something changes at the last minute.

●) The group: voluntariness, safety and educational presence

A recurring principle across all experiences is **voluntary participation**. Young people are not forced to join; they are invited, involved and made curious. This builds trust and prevents forced group dynamics.

Educational presence should always be:

- Visible and recognisable (often through identifiable clothing)
- Non-invasive
- Focused on relationships rather than performance

Safety, both physical and emotional, must be ensured through clear rules, constant supervision, attention to age, gender and vulnerability, preventive risk management (allergies, tools, spaces).

Activities and Programs

Organising a Mobile Activity

●) Data protection and image rights: a non-negotiable principle

Data protection is treated with great seriousness in all experiences. The shared principles are clear:

- Only strictly necessary data is collected
- Anonymisation whenever possible
- Use of informed consent forms
- Possibility to participate without providing personal contacts
- Immediate deletion of photos from personal devices after use
- No publication without explicit authorisation
- Full compliance with GDPR

In many cases, especially in school and street contexts, photos and videos are often not taken at all. The image of a minor is not a promotional tool, but a right that **must be protected**. This approach builds trust not only with young people, but also with families and institutions.



4

Benefits of supporting Mobile Youth Work

This section provides recommendations on how Mobile Youth Work can be implemented, recognised, and supported.

4

Benefits of supporting Mobile Youth Work Opportunities

Mobile Youth Centres bring the benefits of youth work directly to young people wherever they are. In this way, they reach those who usually do not visit youth centres and who often lack structured social learning opportunities or support outside their families. Mobile Youth Centres offer youth work services that help young people develop their competencies, strengthen positive daily routines, and lower barriers to participation for young people who may be hesitant to approach formal institutions.

They create a safe and supportive environment in public spaces and offer activities through which young people can express themselves, be creative, engage in physical activities, and connect with peers. **The presence of professional youth workers** also helps to de-escalate conflicts, reduce vandalism, and contribute to cleaner and safer public spaces. Young people gain access to social life, strengthen peer relationships, and receive early support when problems such as school difficulties, mental health issues or conflicts arise. **Mobile Youth Centres also act as a bridge to other support systems**, such as stationary youth centres, counselling services, schools or health services.

Over time, **these activities support community-building and foster a sense of ownership among young people over their neighbourhood.** This increased engagement helps young people become active contributors to their surroundings, encourages democratic behaviours, and leads to greater acceptance of youth by neighbours and the wider community. The regular presence of youth workers in public spaces also provides municipalities with direct feedback on local developments and the needs of young people.

From an economic perspective, **Mobile Youth Centres activate underused public spaces, reduce costs related to vandalism, and strengthen local businesses and communities**, including through participation in programmes such as Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps. By promoting healthy lifestyles and supporting educational pathways, Mobile Youth Centres contribute to reduced healthcare costs, lower risks of long-term unemployment, and increased employability and future tax revenue.

Politically, **Mobile Youth Centres increase the visibility of youth services** and help reduce social tensions, which supports a more positive perception of decision-makers.

Benefits of supporting Mobile Youth Work Opportunities

Over the medium term, **they strengthen trust in local institutions and improve cooperation between sectors** such as education, social services and community organisations. In the long term, they foster sustained political participation and democratic engagement of young people into adulthood, while also contributing to the prevention of social exclusion and radicalisation.

By bringing publicly funded resources directly to young people, Mobile Youth Centres ensure accessibility, visibility and effective use. **They create vibrant, inclusive public spaces and support young people in becoming active, healthy, engaged, and responsible members of their communities.**

	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching young people where they are; • lowering barriers to participation; • offering meaningful activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening peer relationships; • providing access to social learning, education and counselling; • early detection and support for problems; • bridging to other support systems (youth centres, counselling, schools, health services). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger community building and neighbourhood cohesion; • increased youth engagement and ownership of public spaces; • improved mental health and reduced social exclusion; greater acceptance of young people by neighbours.
Public space and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating safe and secure environments; • conflict de-escalation; • reducing vandalism; contributing to cleaner and safer public spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilising young people's presence in public spaces; • promoting constructive group norms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained positive use of spaces; • shared responsibility and long-term improvement of public areas.

Benefits of supporting Mobile Youth Work Opportunities

	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activating underused public spaces; • directly supporting local businesses and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling cooperation through programmes such as Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps; • supporting educational pathways and school retention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting healthier lifestyles and reducing public health expenditure; • increasing competencies and employability; • reducing long-term welfare dependency; • increasing future tax revenue; • enhancing urban attractiveness.
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing visibility of youth services; • reducing social tensions; • improving the perception of decision-makers; providing municipalities with immediate feedback on youth needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening trust in local decision-makers; • improving cross-sector cooperation (education, health, social services). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term political participation and democratic engagement of young people; • preventing radicalisation; • establishing sustainable youth participation structures.
Resource use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing publicly funded resources directly to young people; • enabling accessible and effective use. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring sustainable, inclusive and efficient use of community resources.

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