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TRAINING NEEDS OF YOUTH WORKERSIN UKRAINE

NATIONAL RESEARCH

REPORT

KHARKIV IT CLUSTER

NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Country: Ukraine

Date of Focus Group: 12/05/2025

Location: online, ZOOM

Organized by: Kharkiv IT Cluster

Moderator(s):

- Alina Telnova — Educational Programs&Events Coordinator at Kharkiv IT Cluster,
- Olga Shapoval — Executive Director at Kharkiv IT Cluster

1. PARTICIPANTS OVERVIEW

List of participants

№	Full Name	Role/Position	Organization	Area of Expertise
1	Denys Grynov	Head of educational programs of EPAM Ukraine, vice-president for education of the IT Association of Ukraine	EPAM Ukraine, «IT Ukraine» Association	Representative of IT company Representative of cluster or association
2	Ihor Markevych	EIT Community Officer	Regional center of EIT community in Ukraine	Head/manager of incubation or acceleration program
3	Ivan Movchan	Founder and Director	Ukrainian Weight Company	Technological business representative A representative of a cluster or association
4	Margarita Chernyshova	Head of r Partnerships	YEP Accelerator	The head/manager of the incubation or acceleration program
5	Nadia Savynska	Executive Director	CO CF SpivDiia	Representative of charitable foundation working with youth
6	Olga Kravchuk	L&D Manager	Sigma Software	Representative of an IT company
7	Vera Druhova	Program manager of JA Ukraine, associate professor of the Department of Financial Technologies and Consulting of Ivan Franko Lviv National University	NGO JA Ukraine, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv	Representative of a public organization Teacher of formal education institutions
8	Anna Motrych	Project manager	Ukrainian Startup Fund	Government representative

9	Elizaveta Sokosyuk	Teacher work manager	Ukrainian Academy of Leaders	Representative of non-formal education
10	Ilona Ismailova	Project manager	CO CF «CodeIT4Life Ukraine»	Representative of charitable foundation working with youth
11	Julia Hvozdetska	Project manager	NGO «Me and my school»	Representative of a public organization
12	Karina Salyukova	School self-management coordinator	Honey Academy	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
13	Kateryna Kondratenko	Head of the youth organization	The youth organization of the NNI IT Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
14	Kateryna Stolnyk	Methodologist	Ukrainian Academy of Leadership	Representative of non-formal education
15	Kiril Gorbachev	Senator of the 3rd year of the faculty of IC	Student Senate of Kharkiv National University of Radioelectronics	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
16	Maria Zameta	Representative of the student magazine	Kharkiv National University of Radioelectronics, student magazine I.NURE	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
17	Mykhailo Stolyarenko	Head	Youth Council under the Kharkiv Mayor	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
18	Natalia Shmatko	Head of the Department of Management, director of the Spark startup center	National Technical University «Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute»	Teacher of formal education institutions
19	Nikita Sabelnikov	Head of the project department	CU «Kharkov Reform Office»	Government representative
20	Oksana Zakharchenko	Deputy dean	Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Ihor Sikorsky	Teacher of formal education institutions
21	Oleksandr Kolb	Chairman of the Board	CO CF «IT FOR LIFE»	Representative of charitable foundation working with youth
22	Oleksandr Suprun	Director of the KhNURE Media Center, associate professor of the MIRES department, project coordinator of the National Academy of Sciences	Kharkiv National University of Radioelectronics	Teacher of formal education institutions
23	Olena Dudnyk	Trainer, PhD of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor	Individual Entrepreneur	Representative of non-formal education

24	Olga Sanina	Soft skills teacher	Kharkiv College of Information Technology of Zhukovsky National Aerospace University «KhAI»	Teacher of formal education institutions
25	Olga Stepanchenko	SEO	Rivne IT Cluster	Representative of cluster or association
26	Pavlo Kozub	Docent	Kharkiv National University of Radioelectronics	Teacher of formal education institutions
27	Rimma Lizenko	Deputy head	Youth Council under the Kharkiv Mayor	Representative of youth organization, student self-government
28	Serhiy Zasyadvovk	Director of the Dnipro Youth Center	Municipal enterprise «Youth Center of Dnipro of the Dnipro City Council»	Representative of youth organization, student self-government
29	Sofia Kosyachuk	Head of the AIESEC branch in Kharkiv	NGO AIESEC	Representative of a public organization
30	Solomiya Loginska	Acting director of the Lviv Regional Youth Center	The Lviv Regional Youth Center Municipal Institution	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government
31	Tatiana Aleksandrova	Deputy director of the educational and scientific institute of computer sciences and information technologies for scientific work of NTU KhPI	National Technical University «Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute»	Teacher of formal education institutions
32	Uliana Shumei	Senior manager of the educational team	Kharkiv IT Cluster	Representative of public organization
33	Victoria Aksyonova	I belong to two categories, a programming teacher and a leader in an organization	Logika (programming school) and NGO AIESEC	Representative of non-formal education
34	Vladyslav Nikulin	Deputy head of student self-government	National University «Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic»	Representative of a youth organization, student self-government

Participant Analysis

The Ukrainian national focus group brought together **34 participants** representing diverse sectors engaged in youth development — including authorities, NGOs, universities, IT companies, and cluster organizations. This ensured a **balanced and multi-perspective discussion** on the training and mentoring needs of youth workers.

- ◆ **Professional background of participants:**

  - • **IT sector representatives** — 4 participants (EPAM, Sigma Software, Kharkiv IT Cluster, Rivne IT Cluster): shared **best practices in mentorship**, hands-on learning, and promoting startup culture in higher education institutions.

  - • **Incubator and accelerator leaders** — 2 participants (YEP Accelerator, EIT Hub): provided insights into **international startup support programs** and highlighted the **lack of quality early-stage initiatives**.

  - • **Government sector representatives** — 3 participants (Ukrainian Startup Fund, Kharkiv Reform Office, municipalities): emphasized the need for **localized youth support and ecosystem development**.

  - • **Educators** — 12 participants from leading universities and colleges: stressed the need for **training educators themselves**, updating curricula, and introducing project-based education.

  - • **NGOs and charitable foundations** — 8 participants (Junior Achievement, SpivDiia, AIESEC, etc.): focused on **supporting vulnerable youth groups**, developing **soft skills**, and maintaining **motivation**.

  - • **Student and youth self-government representatives** — 7 participants: brought the **first-hand youth perspective** on challenges, engagement, and effective formats.

- ◆ **Target youth audiences served by their organizations**

The focus group covered organizations of various sizes and types, from small teams to institutions with thousands of people. Participating organizations are primarily focused on working with young people across a wide range of categories. The largest segment of their target audience is students (35%), followed by schoolchildren (23%). Notably, a significant proportion (15%) of organizations also work with NEETs (those not in education, employment or training). Other groups represented include young people in employment (10%), vulnerable youth (8%) and internally displaced persons (8%). A smaller percentage (3%) work with other categories of youth. This diverse representation of organizations of different sizes and with different focus on youth demographics provides a rich perspective for the survey findings.

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- **Students** – 35%
- **Schoolchildren** – 23%
- **NEET youth** (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) – 15%
- **Young people from vulnerable groups** – 8%
- **Young professionals** – 10%
- **Internally displaced youth (IDPs)** – 8%
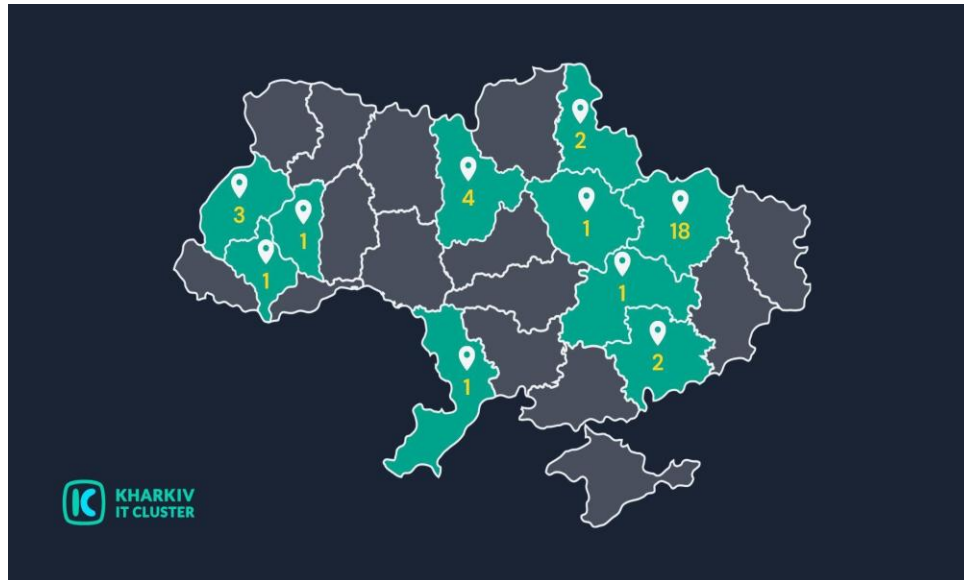- **Other youth categories** – 3%

Target youth audiences served by their organizations
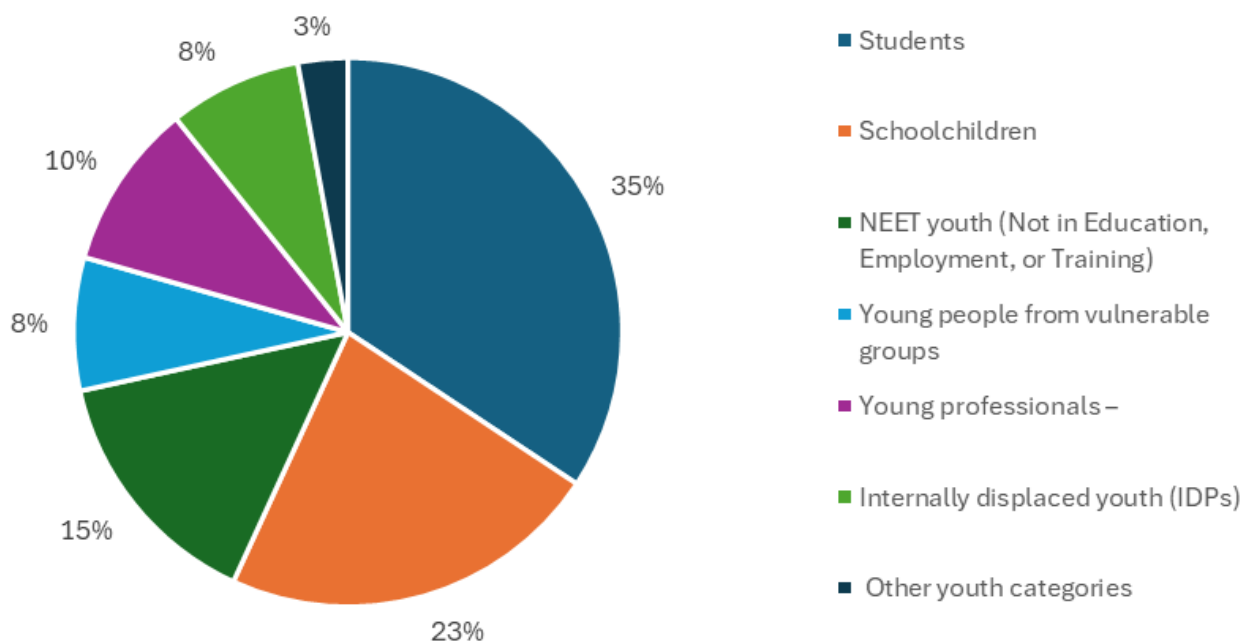
This segmentation highlights that most organizations focus on youth in formal education, but there is also significant engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.

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◆ **Geographical diversity:**

Participants represented both major cities (Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, Summy, Ternopil, Rivne, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zaporizhzhia) and smaller or less visible locations (e.g., Ternivka, Merefa, Berestyn, Chuhuyiv, Ochtyrka, Kremenchyk), which enabled the inclusion of **regional-specific needs and perspectives**.

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FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Duration of the meeting: 3 hours

Format: 3 hours meeting +2 hours of individual work

Methods used:

- Expert panel
- Open discussion
- Online voting (Mentimeter)
- Post-session survey

The focus group combined several qualitative methods to gather insights from youth workers and stakeholders.

Before the session, participants reviewed analytical materials (Annex 1) on youth in entrepreneurship to ensure a shared understanding, specifically:

- current levels of youth entrepreneurial activity, motivations, and barriers (e.g., lack of funding, confidence, skills);
- preferred sectors for youth-led businesses such as IT, trade, and tourism;
- overview of the InTechGrowth project goals and methods for supporting youth entrepreneurship;
- role and required competencies of youth workers in fostering entrepreneurial skills;
- national and international support programmes (mentoring, hackathons, incubators);
- good practices from Kharkiv IT Cluster in guiding youth along the tech-career path, from school to employment.

An expert panel with experts from startups, education, and business set the strategic context.

The session began with an expert panel featuring experts from startup ecosystems, educational institutions, and tech companies, who shared their perspectives on fostering youth entrepreneurship. **The focus group brought together over 30 distinguished participants from across Ukraine's innovation, education, civic, and startup ecosystems** — forming one of the country's most representative expert discussions on youth entrepreneurship to date.

Among the core speakers were:

- Denys Grynov, Head of Educational Programs at **EPAM Ukraine** and VP for Education at the **IT Association of Ukraine**. Representing both a global IT powerhouse and Ukraine's leading tech association, Grynov offers a unique dual-sector perspective on talent development.
- Ihor Markevych, **EIT Community** Officer in Ukraine, who connects young innovators to EU-level startup programs and cross-border acceleration opportunities through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.
- Ivan Movchan, Founder of the **Ukrainian Weight Company**, contributes the industrial entrepreneurship angle, bridging heavy industry and tech-driven innovation.

- Margarita Chernyshova, Head of Partnerships at **YEP Accelerator**, leads one of Ukraine's foremost platforms for incubating student startups and international cooperation.
- Nadia Savynska, Executive Director of CF **SpivDiia**, shares civil society insights from youth empowerment programs designed for post-crisis resilience and future employability.
- Olga Kravchuk, L&D Manager at **Sigma Software**, speaks for a major IT employer investing in scalable youth education via Sigma Software University.
- Vira Druhova, Program Manager at **JA Ukraine** and professor at **Ivan Franko Lviv National University**, integrates formal academic experience with NGO-led startup and financial literacy initiatives.

Beyond these experts, the focus group featured an exceptional lineup of representatives from Ukraine's leading innovation and youth development institutions. Among them was the **Ukrainian Startup Fund** — a state-backed organization that fuels the country's startup ecosystem with equity-free grants, mentorship, and investor connections. As Ukraine's largest public instrument for early-stage venture support, the Fund plays a pivotal role in driving entrepreneurial activity, even in times of crisis.

Participants from the **Ukrainian Leadership Academy** — a flagship national program for values-based, non-formal education — brought forward a youth-centered vision of leadership, responsibility, and civic engagement. The Academy has transformed over a thousand young changemakers, many of whom go on to launch their own ventures or lead social initiatives.

From the war-affected East, **CodeIT4Life** and **IT4Life** exemplified how the Ukrainian tech community mobilizes to support youth in de-occupied and vulnerable regions — opening education centers, offering digital upskilling, and using IT as a tool for resilience and empowerment.

The presence of **Kharkiv Reform Office** — a municipal innovation lab — and the **Youth Councils under the Kharkiv Mayor** showcased how local governance structures are institutionalizing youth participation in policymaking and urban innovation.

Top-tier universities were also actively involved. **KPI (Kyiv Polytechnic Institute)**, **KhPI (National Technical University Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute),** and **NURE (Kharkiv National University of Radio Electronics)** are Ukraine's most prestigious technical institutions, producing world-class STEM talent and operating incubators, startup competitions, and research hubs that integrate students directly into innovation ecosystems.

Participants from **AIESEC**, the world's largest youth-run organization, added an international layer — bringing experience in leadership development and global entrepreneurship exchange.

Regional **IT Clusters** such as those in **Rivne** and **Kharkiv** further amplified the national reach of the discussion, showcasing collaborative tech training models that unite business, education, and government to build future-ready youth across the country.

ЕКСПЕРТНА ГРУПА

УЧАСНИКИ ФОКУС-ГРУПИ

An open discussion enabled youth workers and stakeholders to share real-life challenges, needs, and best practices. Real-time online voting via Mentimeter and a post-session survey facilitated collective reflection and helped identify common concerns and priorities. Key topics included the lack of early entrepreneurial education, the need for mentoring and educator training, the importance of community-based initiatives, and the role of universities in fostering entrepreneurial thinking and startups among youth.

💬 **Important insights from experts**
«Entrepreneurship is not just about startups. It's about the ability to take responsibility and act, even when it's scary».

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & KEY FINDINGS

### Q1. What competencies should an effective youth worker have?

�֍ A striking fact

20% of all applications to the European EIT Jumpstarter program come from Ukraine. Yet most of them do not reach product stage.

During the focus group, a survey «What competencies should an effective youth worker have» was conducted using Mentimeter. The most popular responses were creativity, individual approach, discipline, systematic approach, flexibility, emotional intelligence, leadership skills, and coaching.

Others included stress tolerance, ability to adapt and learn, accept and provide feedback, enthusiasm, communication skills, conflict management and crisis psychology, critical thinking, curiosity, entrepreneurship, modernity, tolerance, and financial and digital literacy.

Original results are presented on the screenshot.
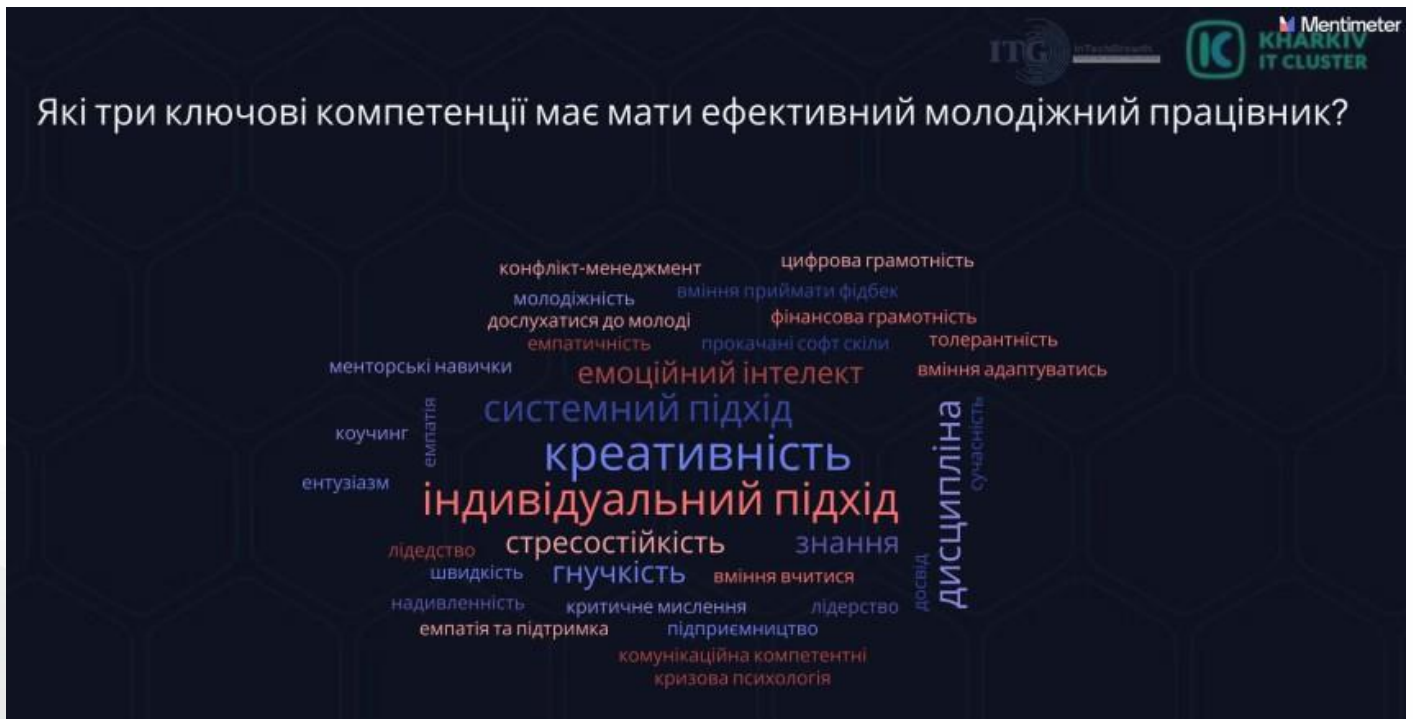
Here are the main points made by the participants.

1. Emotional intelligence and flexibility in communication

- **Empathy**, the ability to hear and understand young people, to work with their fear, instability, indecision.
- **Tolerance for mistakes**, lack of pressure — «not to impose, but to lead».

«Young people often do not believe in themselves, they are afraid to take a step. A youth worker should create a space where they are not afraid to try».

2. Facilitation, mentoring and development support skills

- It is not just about teaching — it is about **leading the way,** becoming an advisor, a facilitator of experience.
- The ability **to structure the development environment,** not just impart knowledge.

«You don't need to teach, you need to create a context where young people discover solutions themselves»

3. Basic entrepreneurial knowledge

- Understanding of **business logic**, startup approaches, and tools.
- Ability to explain what an MVP, business model, and idea presentation are.

«Not every youth worker should be an entrepreneur, but they should know how it works».

4. Communication and coordination skills

- Ability to **establish partnerships** with businesses, universities, and foundations.
- Work with parents, educators, and local administrations.
- Ability to organize communities, moderate events, and provide feedback.

5. Focus on youth and the current context

- Understanding of **generational differences**, Gen Z needs, and their communication channels.
- **Self-learning ability, flexible thinking**, adaptability to change.

«We need not a 'coach from the past' but a guide to the future who does not stop».

6. Digital literacy

- Confident use of online education tools and interactive platforms.
- Ability to adapt learning to mixed or fully remote formats.

«Young people have been in gadgets for a long time, and youth workers should be there too».

7. Working with vulnerable groups

• Competencies in crisis counseling, understanding the needs of IDPs, children of military personnel, and youth with mental or social barriers.
• Ability to create an **inclusive environmen**t that is sensitive to the experience of war.

As a result, the answers about the most demanded competencies of youth workers were divided as follows:
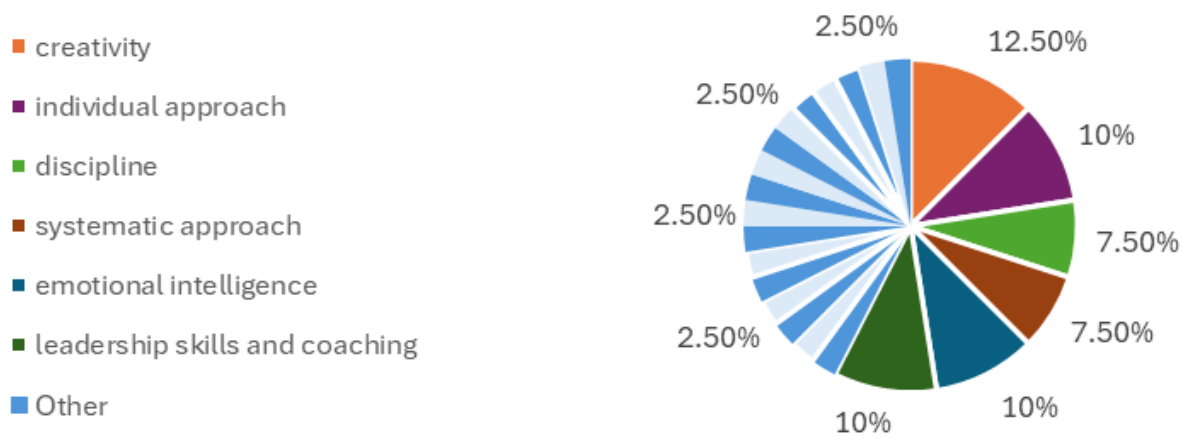

Q2. What competencies are most lacking among youth workers today?

Based on the outcomes of the focus group and expert panel, several key competency gaps were identified among youth workers. When asked what competencies youth workers lack the most, the focus group participants mentioned:

• practical psychology
• crisis communication
• constant updating of competencies
• the ability to connect with young people and go beyond
• a systematic approach and strategic thinking in creating projects and programs
• psycho-emotional competence
• the ability to create an environment of trust
• conflict resolution

- understanding of generational theory
- the ability to balance work and leisure
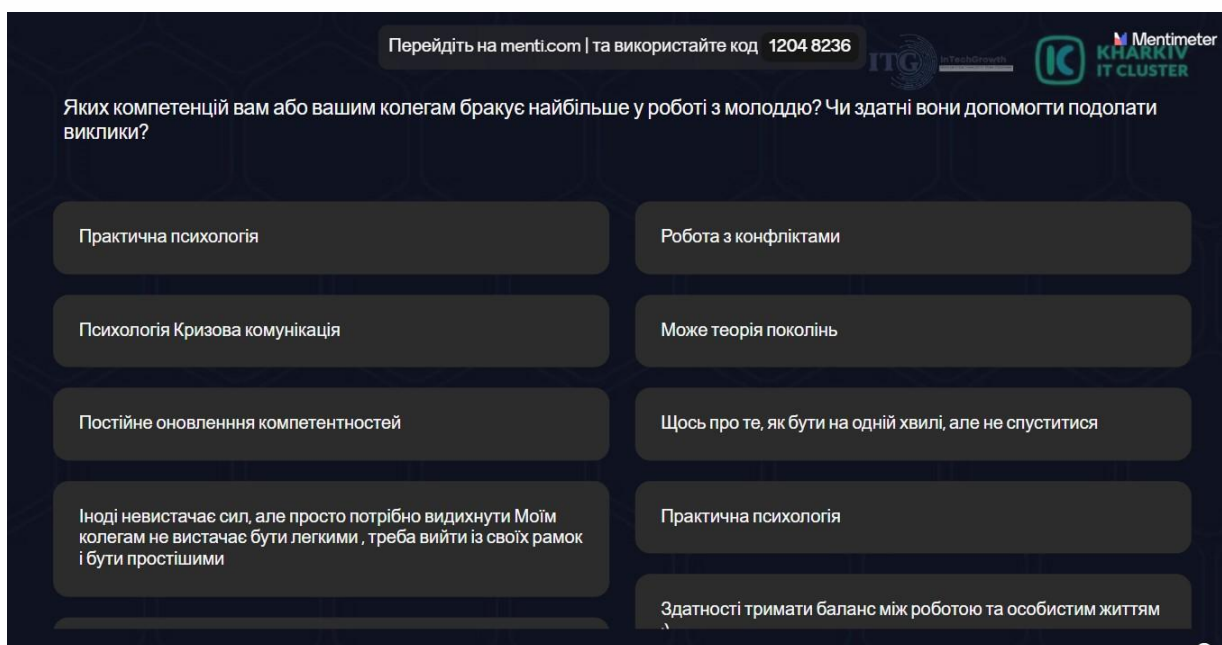
During the discussion, the participants shared that **the most noticeable gap is the lack of entrepreneurial thinking and practical business skills**. Many professionals are not fully equipped to guide young people through essential stages such as idea validation, product development, or early-stage growth.

The discussion also revealed a **shortage of mentoring and coaching competencies**, which are crucial for effectively supporting young entrepreneurs. In addition, youth workers often have limited knowledge of innovation ecosystems and available funding mechanisms, making it difficult to connect youth with real opportunities.

Participants highlighted the **need to strengthen digital and project-based education methods**, including simulation activities, experiential learning, and peer-to-peer formats. Furthermore, there is a lack of strategic thinking and ecosystem-building skills, which are essential for embedding youth work into broader regional development frameworks.

These findings underline the need for comprehensive upskilling programs for youth workers, focused on relevance, innovation, and practical application.

🔥 **Insights from the participants**

«The first person who hears a startup idea is often a teacher. But who teaches the teacher?»

The post-session survey provided participants with the opportunity to think about this question again and select competencies from among the options based on their answers during the live discussion. The final results
showed a high demand for such competencies as strategic planning and a systematic approach, as well as a focus on a self-development and self-reflection.

❗ **1. Emotional resilience and burnout management**

Youth workers often lack tools for **self-care** in difficult contexts (war, overload, lack of stable environment).

- Need for regular **supervision** and emotional hygiene.
- Low awareness of **boundaries of responsibility** and healthy professional balance.

❗ **2. Mentorship and facilitation skills**

There is a lack of understanding of how to **guide rather than instruct**, and how to build learner-centered environments.

- Insufficient knowledge of **peer-to-peer methods**, facilitation of group processes, and creation of psychologically safe learning spaces.
- A formal approach often prevails over personalized support.

❗ **3. Competence in working with vulnerable groups**

With more young people facing trauma, displacement, or other vulnerabilities, youth workers **often lack proper methods and training**.

- No prior training in **cultural sensitivity, crisis communication, or non-violent communication techniques**.

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❗ 4. Digital literacy

Some youth workers, especially from formal education or older generations, **lack sufficient proficiency with digital tools**.

- Limited ability to create **interactive, adaptive, and gamified learning experiences**. Difficulty using popular platforms among youth (e.g., **Discord, Telegram bots, Jamboard**).

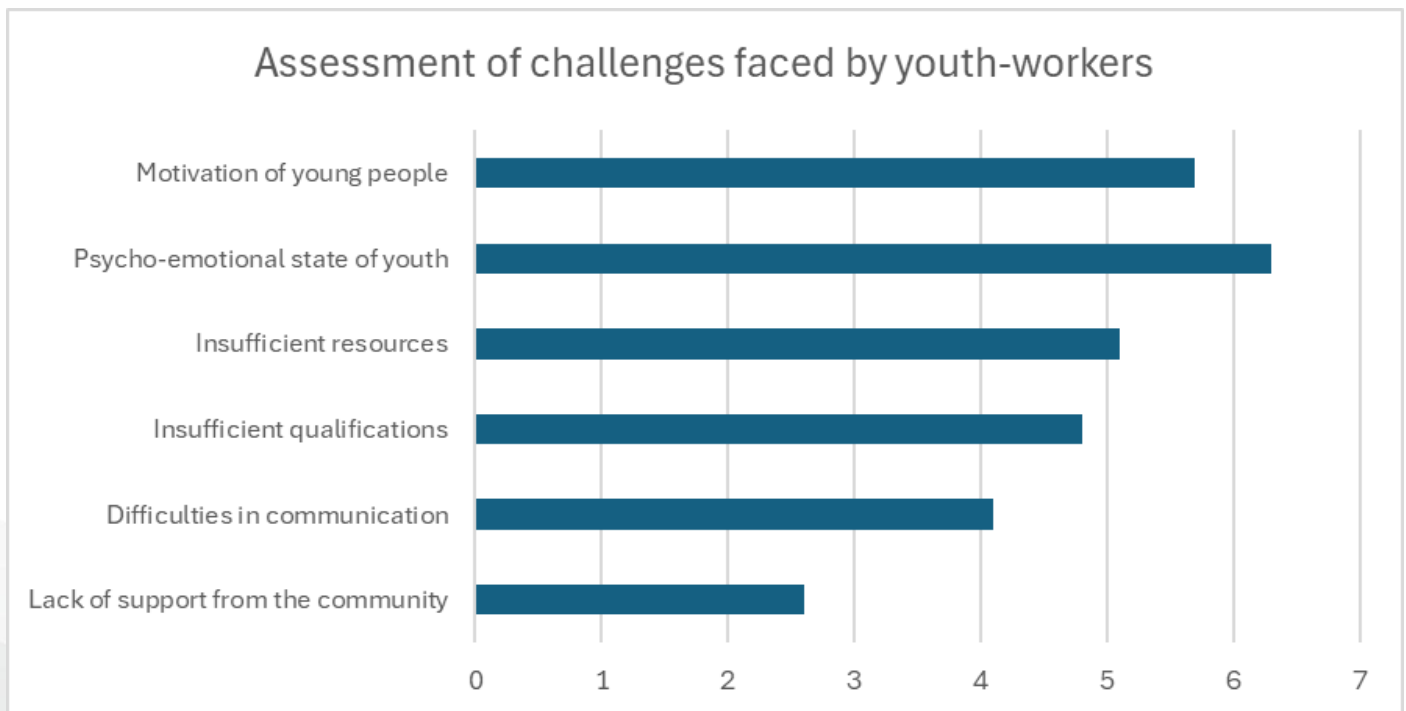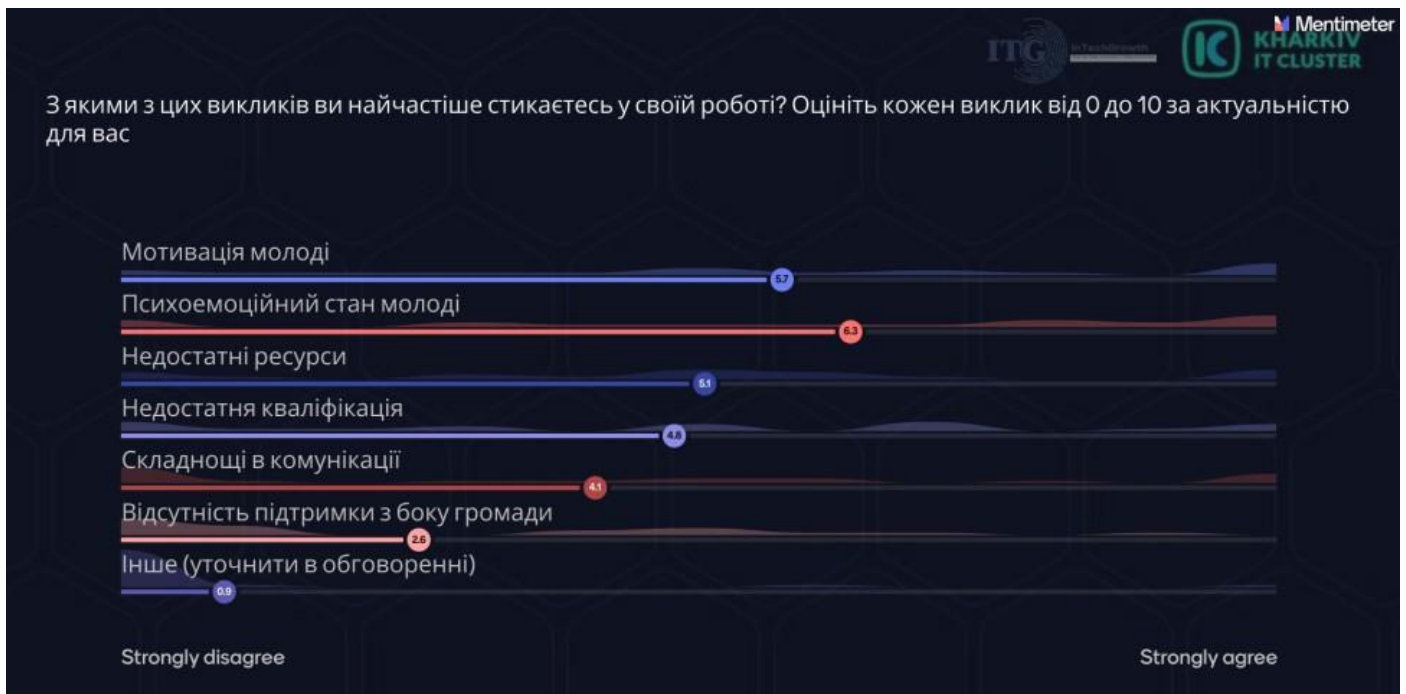What competencies are most lacking among youth workers today?
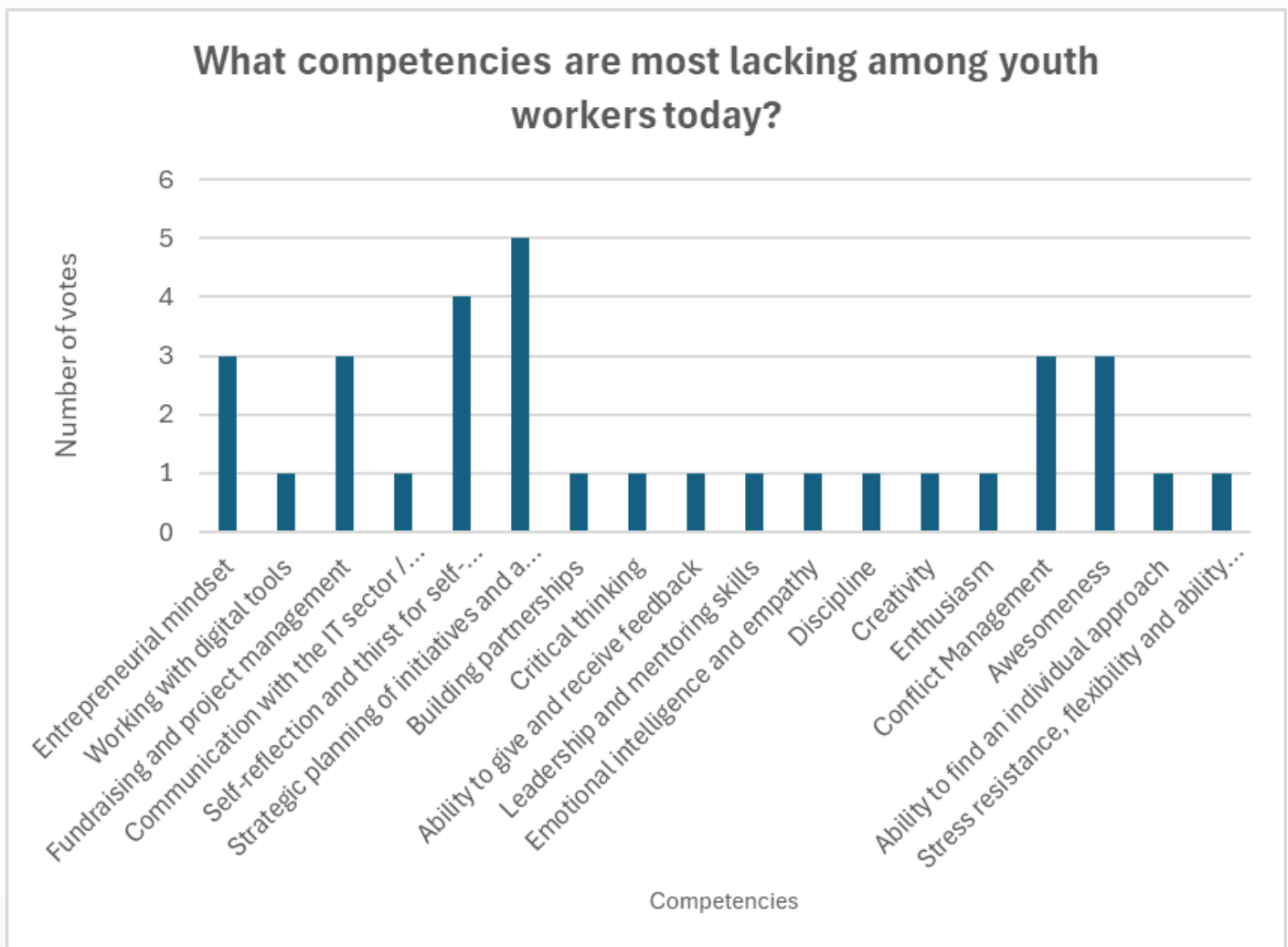
Q3. What problems or challenges do youth workers face in their work with young entrepreneurs?

Based on expert insights shared during the expert panel, youth workers face several key challenges in their work with young entrepreneurs:

1. **Lack of entrepreneurial background** — Many youth workers do not have direct experience with startups, making it difficult to provide relevant, practical guidance to young people seeking to launch their own ventures.
2. **Limited capacity to mentor** — Experts emphasized that youth workers often lack mentoring skills and the ability to accompany young entrepreneurs through the ups and downs of early-stage development.
3. **Gap between theory and practice** — There is a tendency to rely on theoretical knowledge rather than hands-on, project-based learning, which young entrepreneurs need to gain confidence and real experience.
4. **Outdated or rigid educational approaches** — Traditional methods used by some youth workers and educators are not aligned with the fast-changing needs of the innovation and startup ecosystem.
5. **Disconnection from innovation ecosystems** — Youth workers are often unaware of the broader support structures (incubators, grant programs, startup hubs), and therefore cannot help youth navigate or access these opportunities effectively.
6. **Insufficient collaboration with universities and business** — Experts highlighted the need for stronger ties between youth work, higher education, and industry to provide youth with a full spectrum of entrepreneurial support.

These challenges indicate a need for upskilling youth workers through targeted training in entrepreneurship, mentoring, and ecosystem navigation.

At the same time, during the focus group meeting, participants were asked to rate certain challenges on a ten-point scale. The results of the assessment are presented below.

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З якими з цих викликів ви найчастіше стикаєтесь у своїй роботі? Оцініть кожен виклик від 0 до 10 за актуальністю для вас

- Мотивація молоді — 5.7
- Психоемоційний стан молоді — 6.3
- Недостатні ресурси — 5.1
- Недостатня кваліфікація — 4.8
- Складнощі в комунікації — 4.1
- Відсутність підтримки з боку громади — 2.6
- Інше (уточнити в обговоренні) — 0.9

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

Assessment of challenges faced by youth-workers

The biggest challenge among the proposed ones was the psycho-emotional state of young people and their lack of motivation, which was previously noted by experts.

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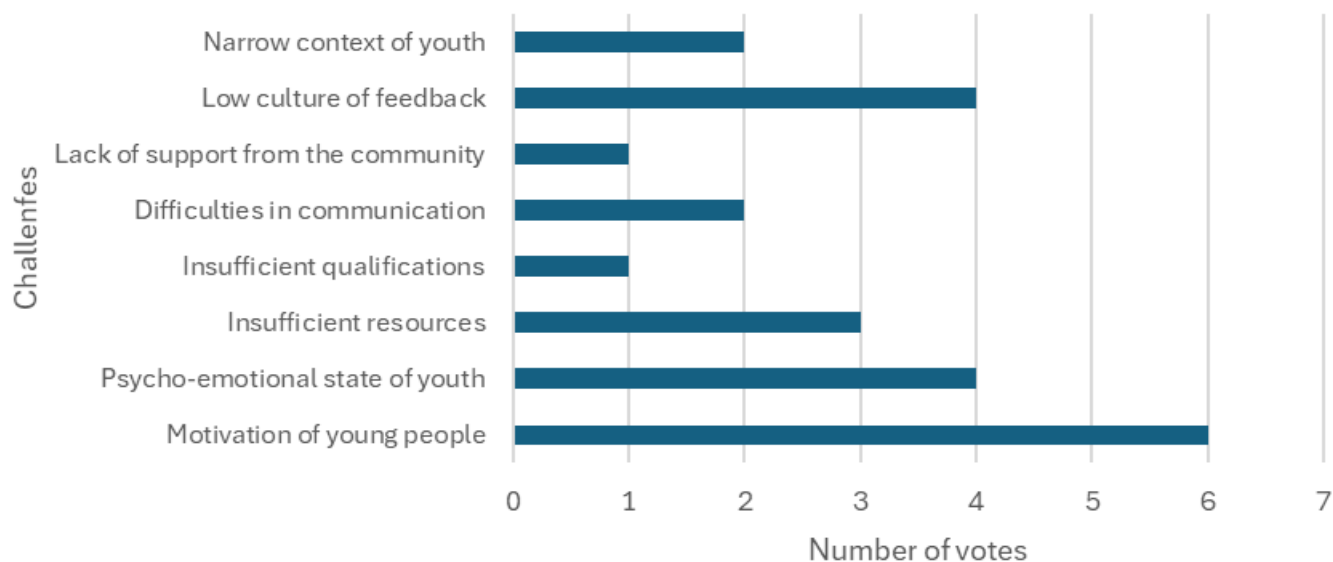**KHARKIV IT CLUSTER**

👥 **Insights from the experts**

«We often teach how to create a startup, but not how to survive the first failure».

Another problem faced by youth workers is the lack of basic knowledge among young people. After all, entrepreneurial skills should be built on general competencies, such as logic, critical thinking, and the ability to process information of varying complexity, which not all young people can do.

The focus group participants also added their own variants of challenges to the proposed ones: a low culture of feedback, which further depresses young people, and few opportunities for working youth who have already overcome the stage of studenthood — that is, youth is understood in a very narrow context, only 50% of the total age that can be called youth.

In the post-session survey, participants were asked to select one challenge they found most difficult or suggest their own. The results showed that the most pressing challenges remained the low motivation of young people and their psycho-emotional state. Low feedback culture was also identified as an additional key challenge.

Post-session survey: Challenges faced by youth workers

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Q4. Which of these challenges can be solved by training? What competencies should be developed?

Many of the challenges faced by youth workers in supporting young entrepreneurs can be addressed through well-structured training programs. Training can help develop entrepreneurial thinking, fill gaps in business knowledge, and empower both youth and those who work with them. Specifically, training can tackle issues such as the lack of entrepreneurial mindset, limited financial literacy, and weak practical business skills. It can also strengthen the capacity of youth workers and educators, enabling them to provide effective mentorship and guidance.

The key competencies that should be developed include:

- **Entrepreneurial mindset** (initiative, opportunity recognition, strategic thinking);

- **Financial literacy** (budgeting, revenue planning, investment readiness);

- **Project and product management** (business modeling, MVP creation, hypothesis testing);

- **Soft skills** (teamwork, communication, public speaking, emotional intelligence);

- **Digital and tech skills** (using digital tools for business, marketing, and prototyping);

- **Mentorship and facilitation skills** for youth workers (coaching, feedback, crisis support).

Developing these competencies will help create a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem and better prepare young people for starting and sustaining their own ventures.

Q5. List the three most relevant training topics for participants

The chart presents the results of a survey question: «*Select three topics that would be most useful for you in a training/educational format*».

Key Observations:

1. **Top Interest— Fundamentals of Mentorship and Coaching** received the highest number of selections **(60%)**. This indicates a strong demand for structured guidance training, suggesting that youth workers value skills in personal development support, mentoring frameworks, and coaching strategies.

2. **Moderate Interest (40% each)** indicating a secondary tier of relevance. These include:
   Design Thinking in Youth Work – Emphasizes creative problem-solving approaches and innovation in working with young people.
   Effective Communication and Facilitation – Highlights the importance of soft skills and group   engagement strategies.
   How to Help Youth Find Their Calling – Focuses on career orientation and identity development. **Career Counseling for Youth** – Suggests a demand for practical tools to support youth in planning their futures.
   Anti-Stress Practices for Youth Workers – Reflects a recognition of the emotional toll on youth workers and the need for self-care and mental resilience.

3. **Low Interest (20% each)**
   Topics like **Motivation and Engagement**, **Building Trust with Youth**, **Youth Leadership**, **Digital Skills and AI**, and **Feedback Culture** each received 20%. While not among the top priorities, these areas still indicate niche interests and could be considered in more specialized training tracks.

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Other topics suggested by participants include:

- How to test your idea for viability (Idea validation).
- Financial literacy and startup budget management.
- Basic legal aspects for startups in Ukraine.
- Crowdfunding, grants and other sources of funding.

The most useful topics for training / education of youth workers

- Fundamentals of Mentorship and Coaching
- Design Thinking in Youth Work
- Effective Communication and Facilitation
- Career Counseling for Youth
- Anti-Stress Practices for Youth Workers
- Motivation and Engagement
- Building Trust with Youth
- Youth Leadership
- Digital Skills and AI
- Feedback Culture
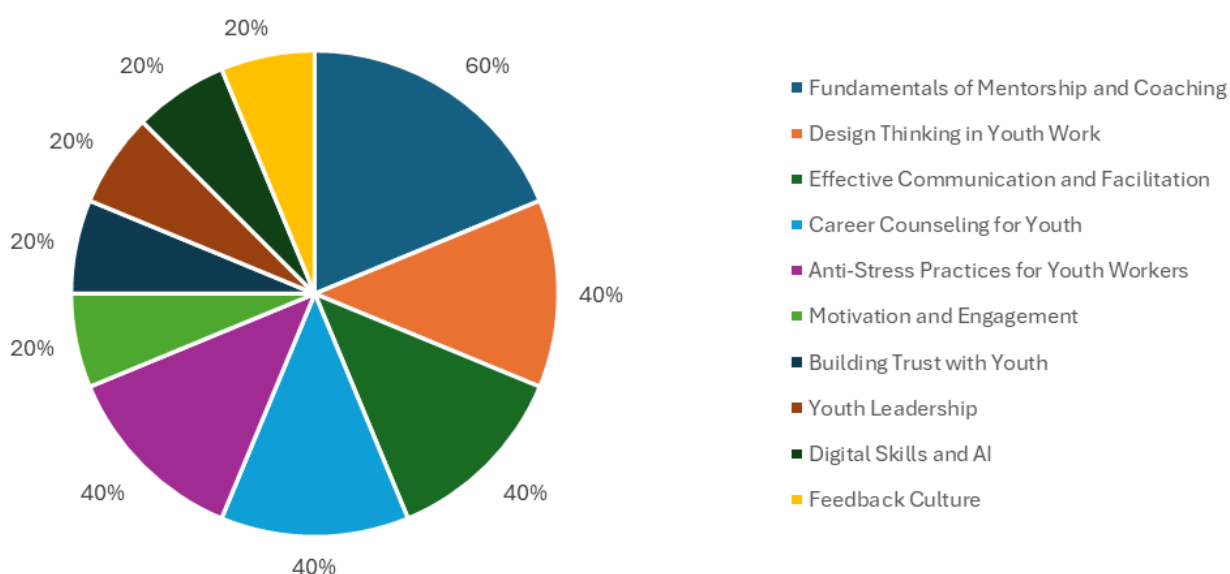
Q6. What should training look like to be effective and attractive to youth workers?

To be both **effective** and **attractive** for youth workers, training must be **practical, personalized, and delivered in diverse, engaging formats** that respond to their real needs and constraints.

💡 **A learning format idea**

«*Maybe we should form 'duos' — mentor-youth, entrepreneur-student. So that learning happens through connection, not lectures*».

Based on the combined data:

1. Format Preferences: Diverse and Experience-Based Learning

The chart reveals that the most lacking (and thus most needed) training formats include:

- **Offline trainings in local communities** (60%)
- **Mentorship/coaching formats** (60%)
- **Peer-to-peer exchanges and experience sharing** (60%)
- **Masterclasses with practical insights** (60%)
- **Case-based learning (real-life examples)** (60%)
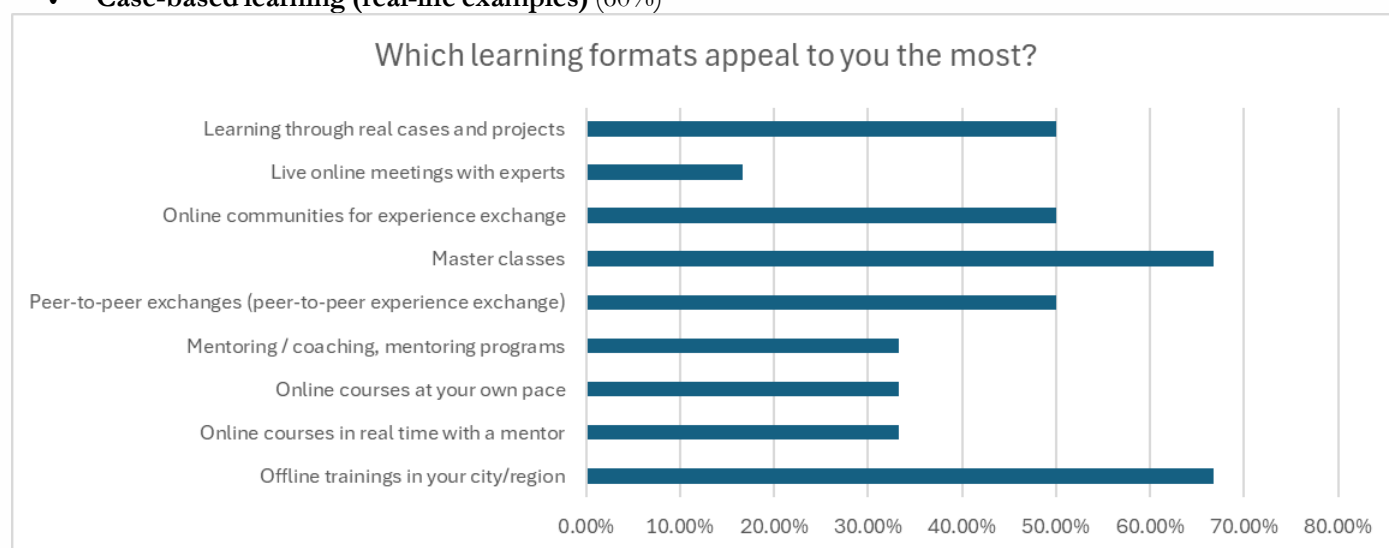
This indicates that youth workers highly value **human interaction, real-life application, and local relevance**.

Effective training should therefore include:

- **In-person workshops** and community-based learning to strengthen local networks
- **Mentorship and coaching components** to build long-term capacity
- **Peer exchange programs** to share best practices and boost motivation
- **Hands-on masterclasses** with field experts
- **Case study-based learning** for practical problem-solving

2. Content Focus: Skills Youth Workers Really Need

Referring to the first chart and background document, youth workers prioritize content such as:

- **Mentorship and coaching skills** (60%)
- **Design thinking and creative problem-solving** (40%)
- **Effective communication and facilitation** (40%)
- **Career counseling and youth empowerment tools**
- **Anti-stress and emotional resilience practices**

Thus, the curriculum should emphasize both **technical mentoring competencies** and **soft skills**, including emotional intelligence, innovation methods, and youth motivation strategies.

3. Flexibility and Accessibility

While in-person formats are important, **online flexibility** also matters:

- **Self-paced courses** (40%) and **real-time online sessions** (40%) were noted as lacking.
  This suggests a hybrid model is ideal: combining **online learning** for accessibility and **offline components** for deep engagement.

4. Community and Sustainability

Youth workers also need ongoing support—not just one-off trainings:

- **Online communities for exchange** (40%) can help maintain engagement.
- Trainings should lead to long-term **network-building** and access to **resources, mentoring, and follow-up**.

CONCLUSIONS

A powerful and productive focus group was conducted with a wide range of engaged experts — including practitioners in youth work, educators, startup mentors, business leaders, and young people themselves. This diverse and experienced group ensured that the discussion was rich, relevant, and strongly grounded in both practice and strategy. Their contributions provided a solid foundation for shaping future training programs.

✅ Key strength of the participant group — the combination of strategic business insights, educational experience, mentoring practices, and youth voices ensured comprehensive input and relevance for the future training program.

✅ Added value for the InTechGrowth project — the diverse roles of participants contributed to well-grounded
and actionable recommendations for training youth workers across multiple levels.

✅ The engagement of key experts in youth work, entrepreneurship, and innovation strengthened the quality of the recommendations and ensured alignment with both local needs and international best practices.

The discussion highlighted several important directions that shape the foundation for effective youth worker training and entrepreneurship education. Based on this, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Youth workers should act as flexible, empathetic facilitators, not just instructors. More training is needed in mentorship and emotional support skills.

- Entrepreneurship should be treated as a mindset, not only as business creation. Young people need to develop initiative, responsibility, and decision-making skills.

- The lack of relatable examples, case studies, and peer communities is a major barrier. It is essential to create (online and offline) environments where youth see peers actively engaged.

- Formal courses should be complemented with interactive formats: games, simulations, workshops, and mentorship sessions make learning more engaging and applicable.

- Educators also need support and upskilling — many lack knowledge of startups, modern technologies, and effective methods for working with youth.

- Digital tools must be a core skillset for youth workers, not an optional extra. Digital literacy and confidence in using modern platforms must be strengthened.

- Vulnerable youth (e.g., internally displaced or war-affected) require special sensitivity. Programs must include principles of emotional safety, inclusion, and adaptability.

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