

Report on the result of a poll on the needs and challenges of youth centres and youth spaces in Ukraine

The research was held within the framework of the project "Unlocking Youth Potential: Systemic Strengthening of Youth Services," implemented by ISAR Ednannia in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine and the All-Ukrainian Youth Centre, with the support of UNICEF in Ukraine and financial support from BMZ through KfW.

2025 year

The aim of this poll is to gather an honest, up-to-date and vivid picture of how youth centres and youth spaces in Ukraine actually function: what is already working well, where there are difficulties, what resources are available, and what is noticeably lacking.

The results of this study will form the basis for the creation of a new training programme for youth centres/spaces called **«MIST» (Youth Infrastructure Created by You)**. We want this programme to be practical and effective — one that truly helps teams in their daily work, rather than remaining merely on paper.

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INTRODUCTION

The study involved **213** youth centres and youth spaces from different regions of Ukraine, almost half of which (**45.5%**) are new and have been operating for 1 to 3 years, which indicates a positive trend in the development of the network of youth centres/spaces: every year, new spaces appear, which gradually build up systematic work, integrate into community life and transform into sustainable institutions.

Most of the poll participants represent **municipal institutions and establishments** – **182** (86% of all respondents). A significantly smaller share is represented by private centres – **5** (2%) and public sector organisations – **13** (6%) and a space at a charitable organisation – **2** (1%). In addition, there are examples of centres operating as structural units within other institutions (libraries, schools, colleges, cultural institutions – **4** (2%)), as well as spaces created by initiative groups – **2** (1%). Some of the youth centres/spaces operate without official registration – **5** (2%). This indicates the diversity of models, but at the same time the predominance of communal ownership.

23 regional youth centres took part in the survey, accounting for **10.8%** of all respondents. The majority were **190 local centres and spaces**, accounting for **89.2%** of respondents.

According to the poll results, most youth centres and youth spaces have their own premises for holding events. Specifically, 158 respondents (**74.2%**) answered 'yes', while 55 centres (**25.8%**) indicated that they did not have their own space. Among municipal youth centres/spaces, approximately 78% have their own premises for working with young people. This confirms that municipal centres are more likely than others to have a stable infrastructure base. Among centres/spaces created by civil society organisations, this figure reaches 69%. This indicates that although infrastructure provision is fairly widespread overall, a significant number of centres still operate with limited access to their own space.

In terms of geographical location, the centres are mostly located in **small towns with a population of up to 50,000 (59 responses)** and in **rural communities (54 responses)**. There is also a significant proportion of centres in **villages (34)** and **medium-sized towns (50,000–250,000 inhabitants, 28 responses)**. Regional centres are represented in 23 cases, and **large cities with a population of over 250,000 — in only 4**. Separate cases of online work or activities in occupied territories were recorded.

Therefore, the majority of respondents are from small towns and rural areas, which highlights the importance of youth infrastructure in communities outside large cities.

BLOCK 1: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH CENTRES/SPACES

The 'General Information' section of the poll outlines the context in which youth centres/spaces operate throughout Ukraine. Below are the key trends and characteristics of these centres' activities based on the survey results.

Organizational features

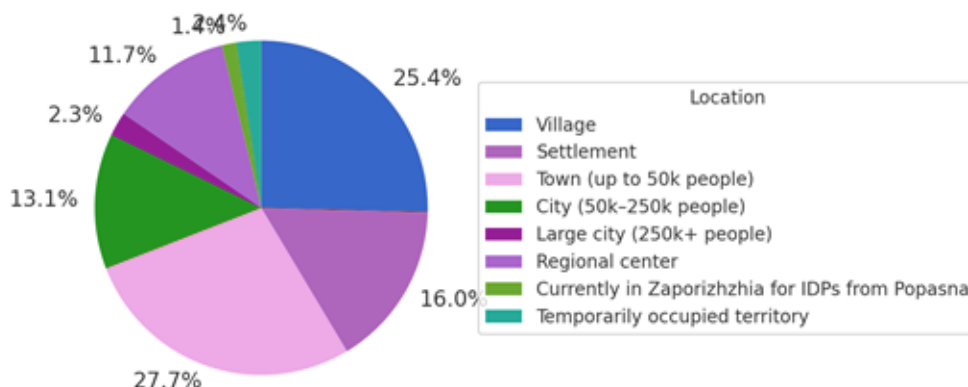
The vast majority of youth centres/spaces in Ukraine are established by local authorities (municipal institutions) – **182 units (86%)**. Only a small proportion of the centres surveyed have a different form of ownership (private initiatives, public organisations, etc.). The lion's share of these institutions are relatively new – **97 (45.5%)** have been operating for 1-3 years, **45 (21.1%)** for more than 5 years, **31 (14.6%)** for 3-5 years, and **40 (18.8%)** of those surveyed have been operating for less than 1 year. This indicates that the network of youth centres has been actively developing in recent years.

Geography and scope of activities

Youth centres/spaces are present in both urban and rural areas, but a significant proportion of them operate in smaller settlements. In particular, **60 (28%)** centres and spaces are located in small towns (up to 50,000 inhabitants), **55 (26%)** in villages, **34 (16%)** in settlements, **28 (13%)** in towns with a population of 50-250 thousand inhabitants, while only a few examples of such centres/spaces operate in large cities **7 (3%)**. **27 (12%)** of those surveyed are located in regional centres (large cities – administrative centres). In terms of coverage, the vast majority (**89.2%**) of centres focus on the local level (their community), and only about one in ten (10.8%) centres operate on a regional scale. Thus, the network of youth centres/spaces covers different regions and types of communities, but is mainly focused on local work. Also **2 (1%)** operate online.

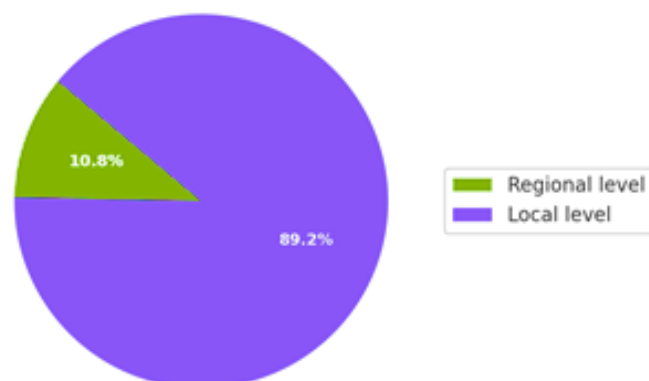
5. Where is your youth center/space located?

213 responses



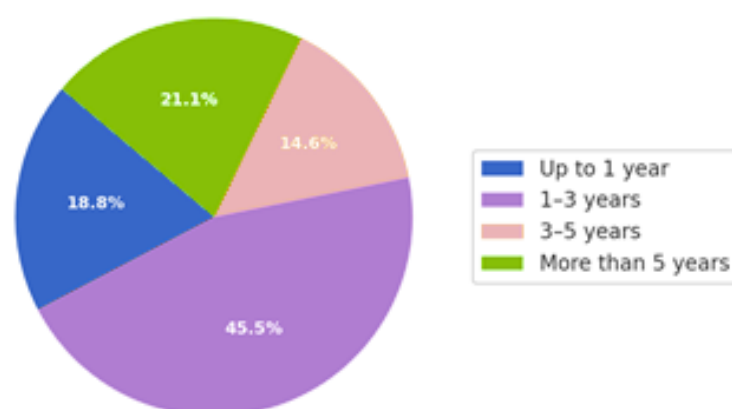
6. Level of activity of the youth center/space?

213 responses



7. How many years your center/space existed?

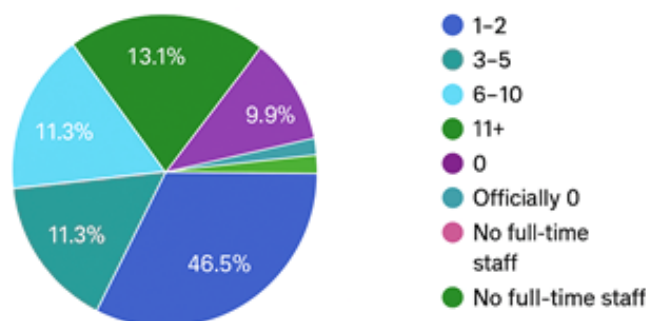
213 responses



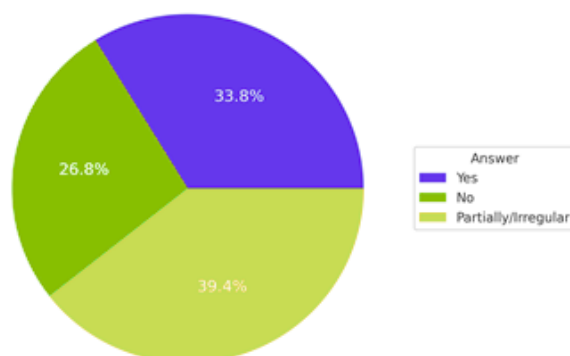
Human resources potential and volunteers

The human resources of youth centres/spaces are limited. Almost half (45.5%) of centres operate with a minimum staff (1–2 employees), while 11.3% of centres and spaces have 3–5 full-time employees. Sometimes there are no full-time employees at all, and only 13.1% of youth centres and spaces can boast a large team (more than 10 people). Volunteer support partially compensates for the lack of staff: about a third of centres (33.3%) involve volunteers on a permanent basis, a significant proportion (39.4%) do so occasionally, and 26.8% have no volunteers at all. Thus, the activities of many centres/spaces are sustained by a limited staff with the additional involvement of volunteers, with volunteer participation often being irregular.

8. How many full-time staff members work in your center/space? 213 responses



9. Does your center/space have volunteer support? 213 responses



Priority areas of activity

Youth centres/spaces cover a wide range of areas of work with young people, from education and culture to personal and civic development. Respondents were not limited in the number of answers they could give, so the results reflect a comprehensive list of priorities rather than a choice of just one area.

Most often, respondents cited cultural and artistic events (84%) and educational training and programmes (80.3%) as priorities. This confirms that these areas remain fundamental for most centres and spaces, defining their key content and functions.

Somewhat less frequently, but still quite often, areas related to social activism and youth support are mentioned: volunteering (58.2%), psychological support (56.8%), sports and healthy lifestyles (55.9%), and the affirmation of Ukrainian national and civic identity (54.5%). This indicates the centres' desire to combine cultural and educational activities with the formation of values, support for psychological health and the development of volunteer practices.

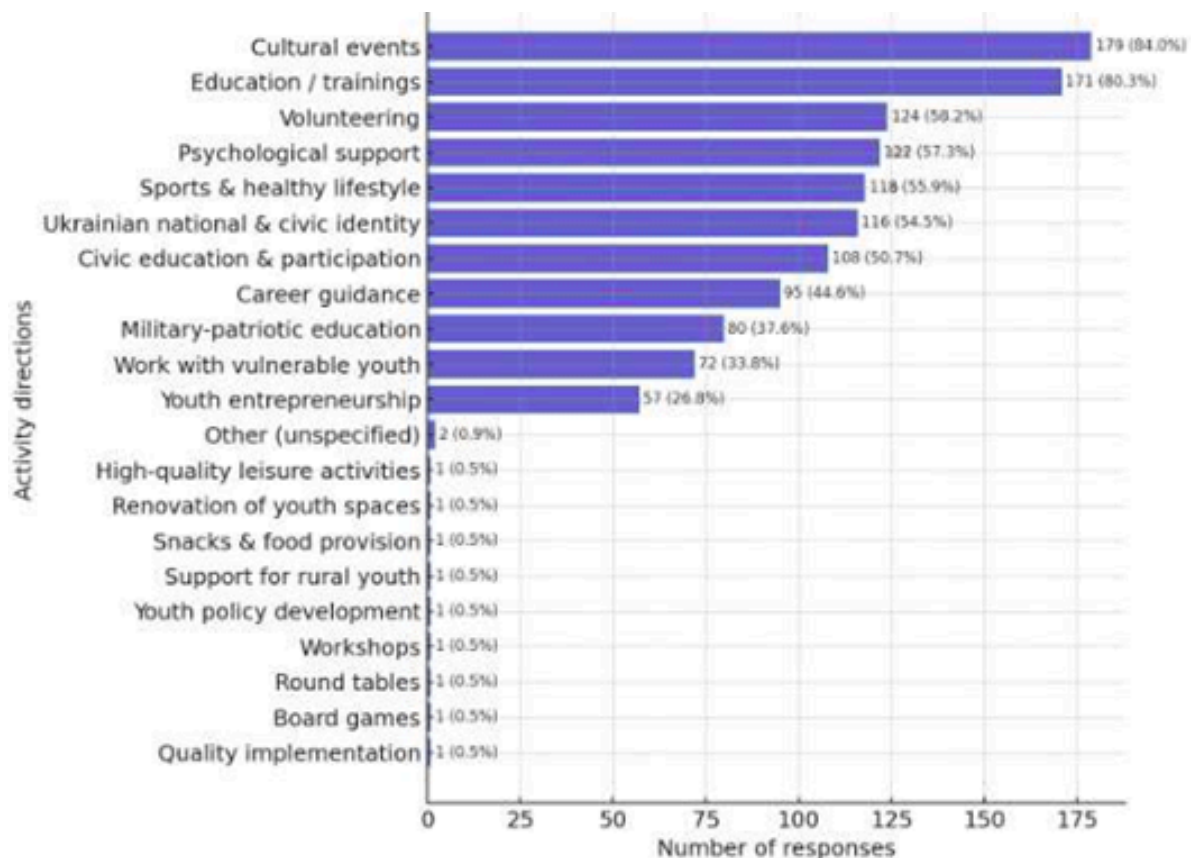
About half of the respondents identified civic education and youth involvement in community life (50.7%) as priorities, as well as career guidance and career development (44.6%).

This result demonstrates the growing demand among young people for practical knowledge and tools to build their own professional future.

A smaller but still significant proportion of centres listed military-patriotic education (37.6%), work with vulnerable youth (33.8%) and youth entrepreneurship (26.8%) among their priorities. These areas reflect the response to the current challenges of war and economic instability, while also demonstrating the willingness of some centres to work with groups that require special attention.

Therefore, in terms of the priorities of youth centres/spaces, there is a balance between cultural and educational work and current social demands, which shapes the multifunctional nature of these centres and spaces.

Priority activity areas of youth centers/spaces

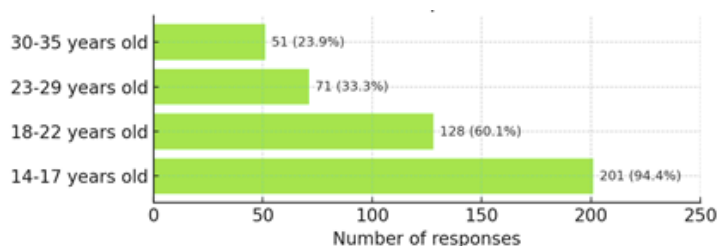


Target audience

The vast majority of youth centres/spaces focus on teenagers and young adults. Almost all respondents (94.4%) noted that they most often work with young people aged 14–17; at the same time, a significant proportion (60.1%) of centres are equally active in involving young people aged 18–22. Much less frequently (33.3%), centres define their main audience as exclusively older youth (aged 23–35). On the other hand, many institutions (23.9%) work with all age subgroups of young people under 35. Thus, the core target audience of most centres/spaces consists of older teenagers and students, although many centres try to cover the entire official 'youth' age range with their programmes.

11. Which age group does your centers/spaces mostly work with?

213 responses



Funding

Financial stability is one of the priority conditions for the effective operation of youth centres and spaces. In the context of war and general uncertainty, it is particularly important that more than 40% (42.3%) of youth centres and spaces already have stable funding. This funding comes mainly from state and local budgets, which is a significant shift compared to the pre-war period, when most centres operated mainly on grant funding. This trend indicates the growing recognition of youth centres and spaces by the authorities and their gradual establishment as permanent institutions in communities.

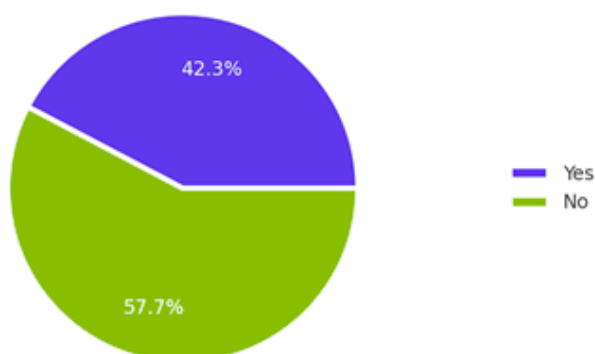
The main source of funding for the vast majority remains the local budget (65.3%). This shows that local authorities are increasingly integrating youth centres/spaces into the community development structure and are willing to take responsibility for their support. A significantly smaller proportion of centres receive funding from regional budgets (11.3%), but this support is an important additional resource.

At the same time, grant programmes from international organisations and donors remain an important tool, used by 48.4% of centres. This demonstrates flexibility and the ability to seek alternative sources of development funding. Additional income is provided by contributions from participants (17.4%), support from partners (17.4%), fundraising (16.9%), and in rare cases through paid services (5.6%) or entrepreneurial activities (4.7%).

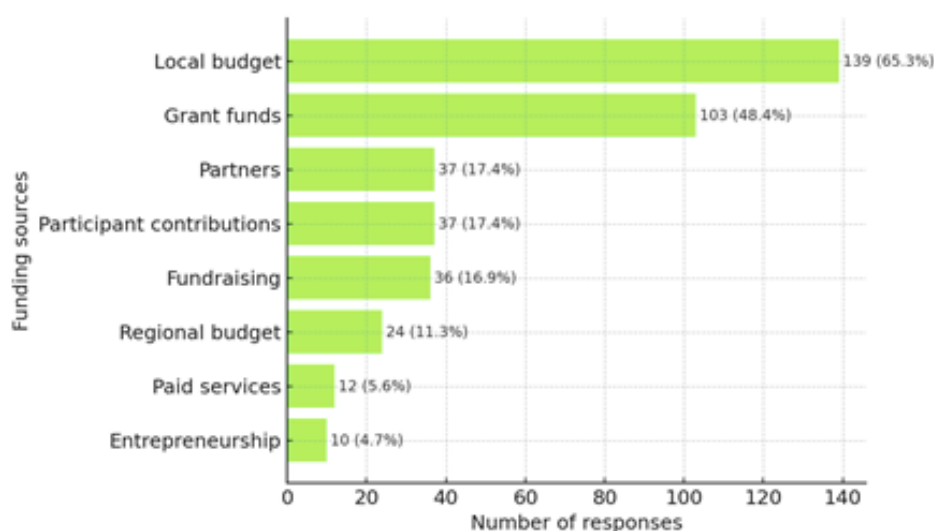
Thus, the current picture of youth centre and youth space funding is characterised by a combination of systematic budgetary support from the state and communities and additional flexibility thanks to grants and own efforts to raise funds. This indicates a gradual increase in the institutional stability of the network, which is finding ways to develop even in the difficult conditions of wartime.

11. Does your youth centers/spaces have stable financing?

213 responses



Funding of youth centers/spaces (213 responses)



Partnership

An analysis of respondents' answers shows that cooperation between youth centres and youth spaces is predominantly local in nature. The most common partner is local government, which was mentioned by 186 centres (87.3%). This indicates that local government bodies remain the main institutional stakeholder for youth infrastructure.

In second place are non-governmental organisations, with which 149 centres (70.0%) work, and educational institutions, which were mentioned by 147 centres (69.0%). This emphasises that schools, universities and the public sector are key partners in working with young people.

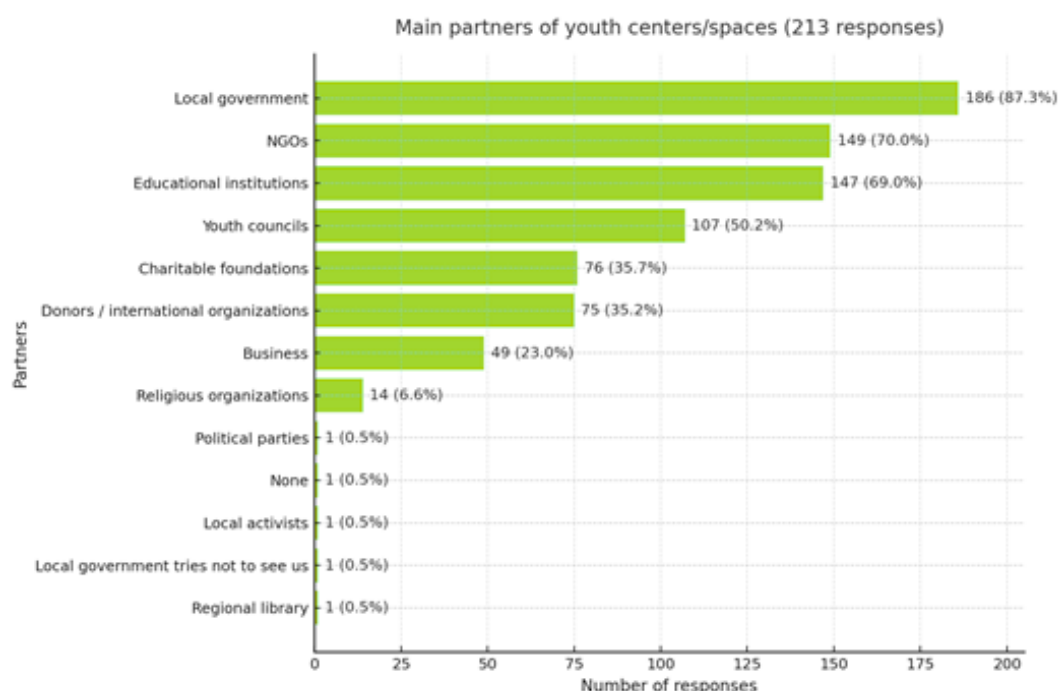
An important area of focus is cooperation with youth councils: almost every second centre (107 responses, 50.2%) has established ties with these youth representative bodies. At the same time, charitable foundations (76 responses, 35.7%) and donors or international organisations (75 responses, 35.2%) are an additional source of partnership resources.

A noticeable, albeit smaller, role belongs to cooperation with business (49 centres, 23.0%), which indicates a gradual establishment of relations between the youth sector and the private sector. On the other hand, religious organisations are partners for only a few – only 14 centres (6.6%).

Individual responses included references to libraries, activists, political parties, and in some cases it was noted that the centre had no partners at all.

Overall, the picture shows that most centres/spaces are integrated into the local context and work closely with the authorities, schools, and civil society organisations. International partners and businesses remain important but are additional partners, and cooperation with other sectors is still limited.

Main partners of youth centers/spaces (213 responses)



Infrastructure

According to the survey results, most youth centres and youth spaces have their own premises for holding events. Specifically, 158 respondents (74.2%) answered 'yes', while 55 centres (25.8%) indicated that they did not have their own space.

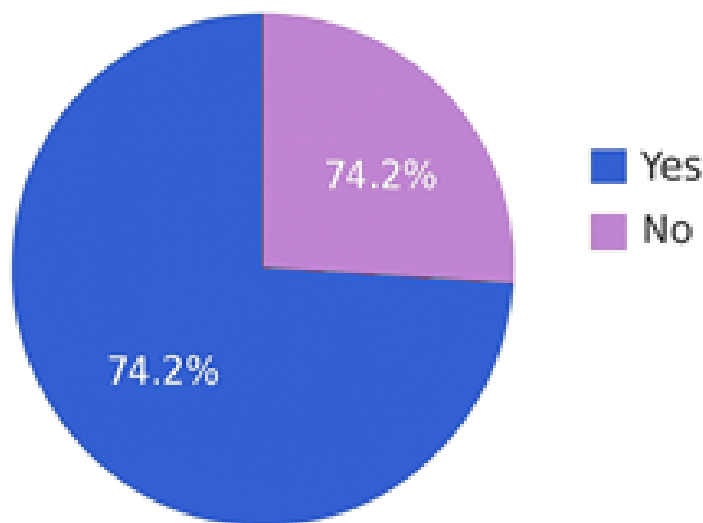
These data show that almost three-quarters of the centres surveyed operate in more stable conditions, having access to their own premises. At the same time, about a quarter of the participants remain dependent on premises rented or provided by other institutions, which may limit the sustainability of their activities and the possibility of long-term planning.

Among municipal youth centres/spaces, approximately 78% have their own premises for working with young people. This confirms that municipal centres are more likely than others to have a stable infrastructure base.

Private initiatives also mostly have premises (80%), but their number among the respondents' answers is very small (5).

Among the centres/spaces created by civil society organisations, 9 out of 13 (69%) have their own premises. At the same time, the others do not have their own premises, meaning they are forced to hold events in rented or temporarily provided venues or to work on the road. This indicates that although infrastructure provision is fairly widespread overall, a significant number of centres still operate with limited access to their own space.

8. Does your center/space have its own premises for youth events?
213 responses



Conclusions of the first block:

In general, youth centres/spaces in Ukraine operate under similar conditions: they are mainly municipal centres at the local level, many of which have been established over the past few years. They operate throughout the country, including in small communities, but almost always focus on local work with their target audience. A typical centre has limited staff and relies on irregular volunteer support, which results in low staffing capacity. At the same time, such institutions take on a wide range of tasks and services for young people – from education and culture to health promotion, volunteering and civic engagement, etc. Despite significant activity, financial conditions remain challenging: stable funding is available to less than half of the centres, with local budgets and grant programmes being the main donors. Partnership support compensates for these challenges to a certain extent, especially through cooperation with authorities, educational institutions and civil society organisations, but involvement of businesses or religious structures is rare. Overall, the conditions in which youth centres and youth spaces operate in Ukraine are characterised by significant dependence on local support and external grants, as well as staffing and infrastructure constraints. At the same time, these centres and spaces are characterised by their broad reach among young people and their diverse activities aimed at developing youth potential.

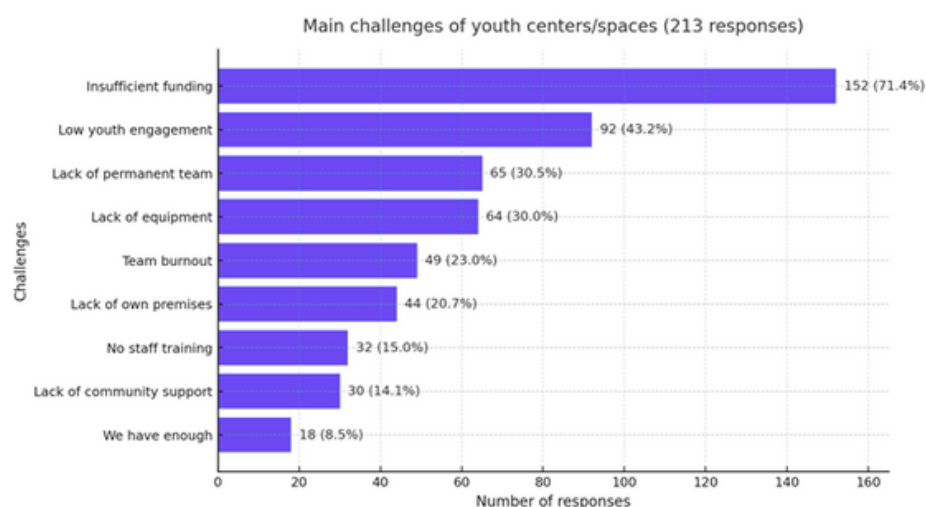
Block 2: Needs and challenges of youth centre/space teams

This section is devoted to what goes on 'behind the scenes' of the daily work of youth centre and youth space managers — what is most difficult, what is lacking, what hinders development. The questions in this section are designed to identify the real needs of teams: from resources to knowledge, from organisational difficulties to emotional burnout.

The main challenges facing youth centres/spaces today

The survey highlights the key challenges faced by youth centre/space teams today. These are often structural in nature and explain why certain training needs arise. Respondents cited the following as the most common difficulties:

Main challenges of youth centers/spaces (213 responses)



Despite positive developments, the most common problem cited by respondents is insufficient funding, which was noted by 152 centres (71.4%). This indicates that financial instability remains a systemic challenge for most youth centres/spaces. The financial instability of youth centres/spaces forces teams to constantly seek additional resources instead of focusing on the quality of their programmes, which leads to other problems such as staff burnout and turnover.

The second most common and one of the most pressing issues was the decline in youth activity – 92 centres (43.2%) pointed to this problem, especially in communities far from large cities. Teams note that traditional event formats are no longer working – young people are less likely to attend clubs or training sessions, and it is more difficult to hold their attention. Today's teenagers and young people are spending more and more time online, and it is difficult to compete for their interest. Some responses point to the 'dispersion' of young people: some have left, some have withdrawn into themselves due to stress, and others are overwhelmed by their studies or work. This is a challenge for the centres and spaces to find relevant formats for their work. It is important to bear in mind that the needs of the younger generation are changing rapidly, and teams lack the skills to constantly monitor these changes and adapt to them. In fact, there is a structural problem of mismatch between what the centres offer and the evolving demands of young people: if this is not addressed, even adequate funding will not guarantee the effectiveness of the centres/spaces.

The third position is occupied by the lack of a permanent team (65 centres, 30.5%), which directly affects the stability of the centres' and spaces' work. Respondents directly point to the problem of not having a permanent team, that they lack human resources – there aren't enough staff or volunteers to make all their ideas happen. Often, a few people perform an excessive amount of work, which leads to overload and burnout, loss of motivation. Thus, forming sustainable teams is a challenge that requires both proper internal work (team building, leadership, role distribution) and external support (recognition and encouragement of youth work at the community level).

A very similar issue is the lack of equipment (64 centres, 30.0%), which limits the ability to conduct activities at the appropriate level.

An equally significant problem is professional burnout among staff, which was acknowledged by respondents (49 centres, 23.0%). This indicates excessive workloads for staff and insufficient personnel support.

Other challenges include the lack of premises (44 centres, 20.7%), lack of training for staff (32 centres, 15.0%) and limited community support (30 centres, 14.1%).

The full-scale war in Ukraine has significantly affected the activities of youth centres/spaces. Among the challenges mentioned is the migration of young people (moving abroad or to larger cities), which undermines the audience of local spaces. Centres in frontline or affected regions face issues of security, infrastructure destruction and psychological trauma among young people. Respondents emphasise that training programmes must take into account the current realities of war and post-war reconstruction, as working with young people in conditions of constant stress and uncertainty is a particularly difficult task. Another challenge is that many existing methodologies are not adapted to crisis conditions: teams are forced to improvise, lacking algorithms for how to act during evacuation, loss of contact with young people, etc. This creates a demand for adaptability and stress resistance – qualities that must be developed in both staff and centre programmes.

At the same time, 18 respondents (8.5%) said that their centres had 'everything they needed,' meaning they didn't face any major challenges. This shows that there's a big difference in how well-equipped and developed youth spaces are in different communities.

These challenges are closely linked to the identified needs. In essence, training needs are a response to existing difficulties. Youth centre/space teams are aware of their vulnerabilities – lack of funds, knowledge, people, support – and openly articulate what exactly they need help with. These difficulties are not individual but typical for many centres/spaces, indicating that the problem is systemic. Therefore, the solution requires a comprehensive approach: not only training staff but also strengthening the youth work system as a whole.

What knowledge and skills does the team lack?

The poll results show that the greatest need for youth centre teams remains finding funding and writing grant applications – this gap was noted by 110 respondents, or **51.6%**. Slightly less significant, but still very important, is the need for fundraising and grant activities – 81 responses (38.0%). This indicates that financial stability and the ability to attract resources are identified by teams as the main challenge.

In third place among the skills gaps was the issue of **engaging young people in the activities of the centres** – this was selected by **70 respondents (32.9%)**. This is an important signal: although working with young people is the main mission of the centres, some teams acknowledge that they do not have sufficient knowledge and approaches for effective communication and engagement.

Managers of centres/spaces note that it is becoming increasingly difficult to engage young people using traditional methods. New tools are needed for motivation, gamification, social media marketing (SMM) and creating attractive content. The topic of analysing the needs of young people and involving them in the co-management of the space is particularly relevant: teams want to learn how to research the needs of their target audience and actively involve young people in decision-making. In the context of migration and the dispersion of young people (due to war and other factors),

methods for returning and integrating young people into community life are also needed. Overall, centres and spaces need innovative approaches to working with young people so that their programmes remain interesting and useful for the new generation.

Respondents also paid considerable attention to **strategic planning (65 responses, 30.5%)**, as well as **legal issues (62 responses, 29.1%)** and **communication, SMM and PR (62 responses, 29.1%)**. This indicates a need not only for practical tools for working with young people, but also for developing long-term strategies, competent documentation management and high-quality promotion of the centres'/spaces' activities.

To a lesser extent, but still significantly, teams feel a lack of competence in **working with vulnerable groups of young people (53, 24.9%)**, **the basics of youth centre management (45, 21.1%)**, **working with partners (37, 17.4%)** and **organising events (37, 17.4%)**. The least frequently mentioned area was project evaluation (25, 11.7%), but even this competence is important for almost one in nine centres.

Overall, the picture shows that youth centre teams most often lack financial, managerial and communication skills, while direct work with young people or organising events, although challenging, is perceived as less problematic.

Therefore, the needs of youth centre and youth space teams cover both specific professional competencies (financial management, project management, communications) and broader organisational issues (team support, inclusion, updating programmes to reflect current realities). These requests form the basis for the development of new educational programmes designed to fill the identified gaps.

Conclusions of the second block:

An analysis of the needs and challenges faced by youth centre teams and youth spaces shows that the problems are systemic in nature and relate not only to resources but also to approaches to work. The most acute challenge remains financial instability: most teams are forced to focus on fundraising, which distracts them from programme development and increases the risk of staff burnout. At the same time, the survey results show that the issue of youth engagement, which is at the heart of the centres'/spaces' activities, is less of a priority than funding or management issues. This creates a risk of a disconnect between the centres' mission and their actual work: even with resources, they may not be effective if they are unable to develop modern, interesting and relevant formats for interacting with young people.

The issue of team stability is also important: a small number of permanent employees, overload and burnout hinder development. Teams seek more support in strategic planning, communications and fundraising, but these plans and tools will only become truly effective when they are built around the needs of the younger generation. The war adds a separate dimension of difficulty — from youth migration to psychological trauma and infrastructure destruction. This requires centres to be adaptable, stress-resistant and equipped with new methods of working in crisis conditions.

Overall, the picture shows that teams are well aware of their weaknesses — financial, organisational and personnel — and openly articulate the need for training. At the same time, a particularly valuable signal is the recognition of the need to update the tools for attracting young people: this will determine whether the centres can remain alive, relevant and useful to their communities.

Block 3: How to make a youth centre/space more accessible and appealing to young people

This set of questions aims to find out what, in the opinion of managers, would make a youth centre or youth space more attractive, accessible and interesting for young people.

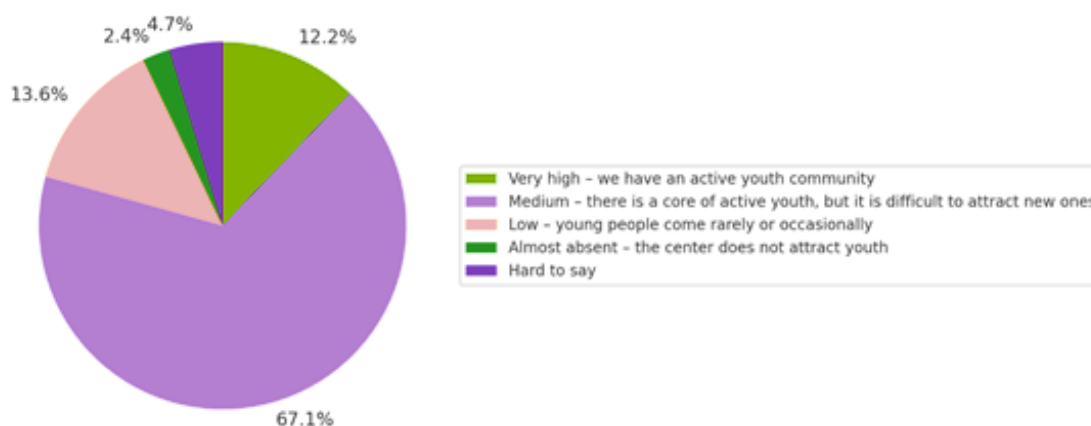
Assessment of the level of youth involvement in centres/spaces as of now

Most respondents rated the level of engagement as average, indicating potential for growth. Some centres report stable activity and the presence of a core youth community, but the recruitment of new members is slower. The diagram shows:

- The average level of activity prevails (67.1%).
- There is a significant percentage of those who consider the level of involvement to be low (13.6%), which indicates a lack of systematic work on promotion.
- 12.2% of respondents said they have a very high level of youth involvement and an active youth community.

Youth centres/spaces have a established circle of active participants, but their development depends on the constant search for new formats and channels of communication with young people.

How do you assess the current level of youth involvement in your center/space? 213 responses



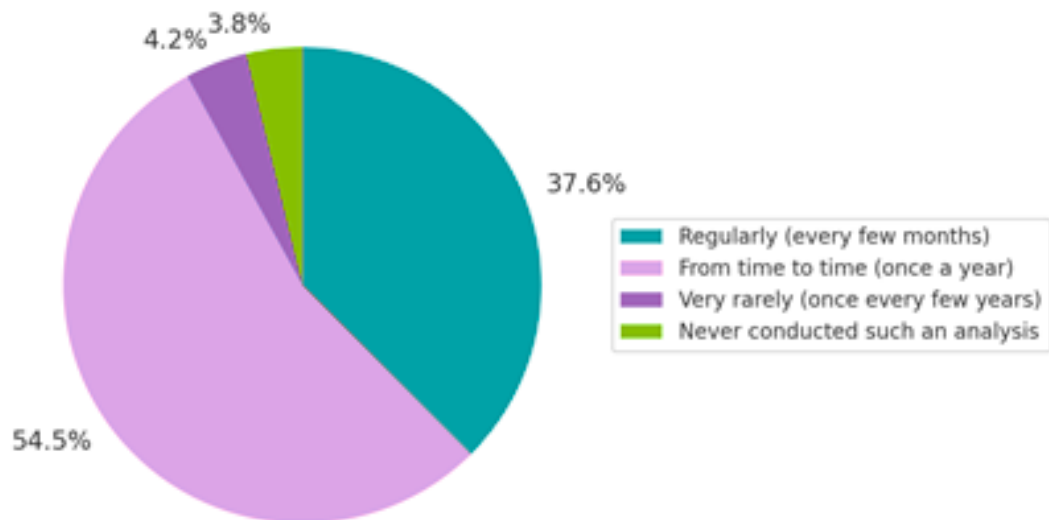
How often is an analysis of young people's needs carried out?

The data showed that most (54.5%) centres and spaces conduct such analysis irregularly: sporadically or only when specific projects are available. 37.6% of respondents indicate a systematic approach (quarterly or semi-annually).

Centres do not yet have a consistent practice of studying the needs of young people, which reduces the effectiveness of programmes. It is important to introduce regular monitoring to ensure that activities meet current needs.

How often do you analyze the needs of youth in your community? (surveys, focus groups, consultations)

213 responses



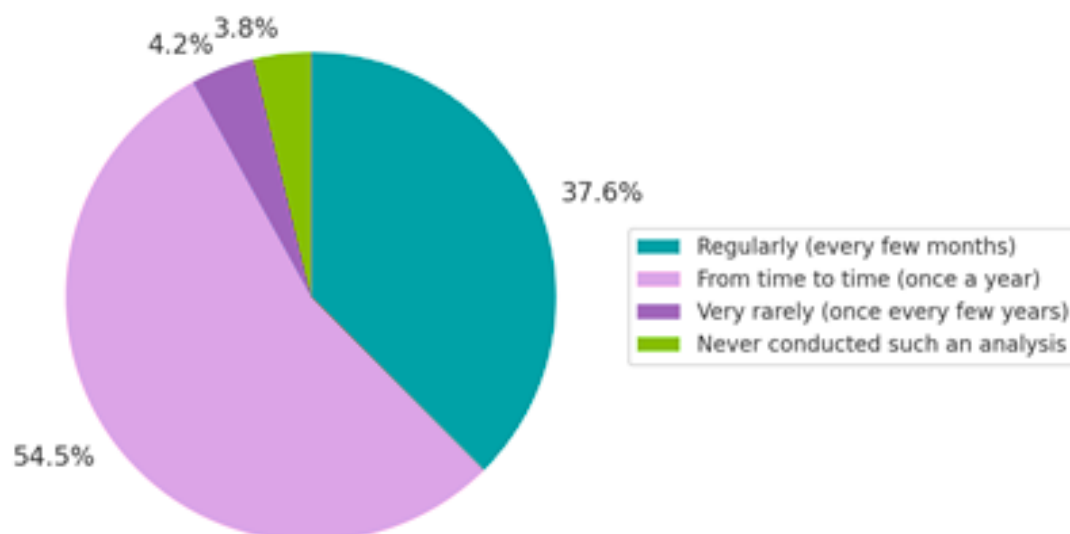
Methods of obtaining feedback from young people

The analysis showed that the most common methods of feedback are:

- oral surveys and communication during events (37.1%). This indicates the advantage of direct, informal contact with young people;
- online surveys (Google forms, social networks) (25.4%). These have become an important tool, given the activity of young people in the digital environment.
- Questionnaires after events (20.7%). This method allows for more structured data to be obtained, but is used less frequently than verbal communication.
- A few respondents mentioned the following options: focus groups in communities, phone calls after events, use of guest books or anonymous online forms, comments on social networks, etc. However, each of these accounted for less than 1%.
- 8.9% of respondents openly admitted that they do not have regular practices for collecting feedback.

Respondents' answers show that feedback channels are mostly informal and situational. There is no comprehensive system for collecting and analysing data. This creates the risk that not all young people's opinions are taken into account in planning.

3. What methods do you usually use to get feedback from young people on the quality of events and activities of your center?



Reasons why young people are not actively involved in the activities of youth centres and youth spaces

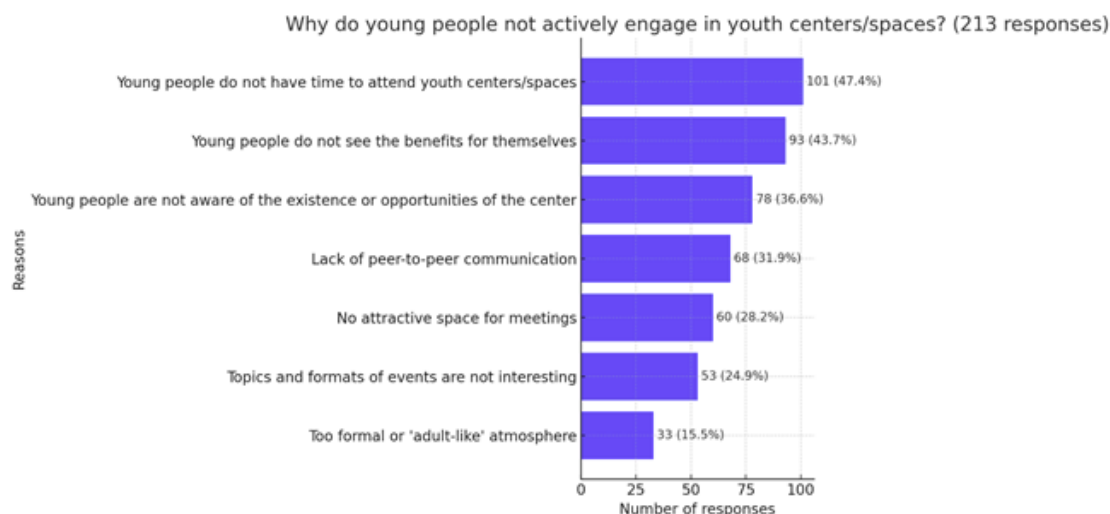
The main reasons most frequently mentioned were:

- Lack of time among young people is the most common reason cited by **101 centres (47.4%)**. Young people often prioritise their educational, work or personal responsibilities, leaving less time to attend events.
- The lack of tangible benefits** came in second place, cited by **93 respondents (43.7%)**. Young people do not always see the value in what the centres offer, or do not associate these activities with their personal development.
- Lack of information about the existence or capabilities of the centres was cited by **78 respondents (36.6%)**. The problem of communication and low visibility of the centres' activities remains critical.
- Insufficient peer-to-peer communication** was cited by **68 respondents (31.9%)**. Young people expect more informality and reciprocity in communication.
- Lack of attractive space – 60 respondents (28.2%)** emphasised that young people do not come because the premises are not modern, comfortable or attractive to visit.

Less common reasons included: lack of charismatic mentors and leaders among young people, security barriers, the feeling that the centres are 'cliques for their own' or that events are paid for, and problems with inclusivity (accessibility of premises, amenities, etc.). Each of these reasons was mentioned only a few times (**less than 1%**).

The results show that the main problems are time constraints among young people, **a lack of perceived value in visiting the centres, and low awareness of their activities**. At the same time, the quality of communication and the physical attractiveness of the spaces play an important role. This confirms that in order to increase youth engagement, youth centres/spaces need to work in several areas simultaneously: improving information, creating modern and attractive spaces, developing communication on an equal footing, and offering activities that young people consider useful for themselves.

Why do young people not actively engage in youth centers/spaces? 213 responses



Support or partnerships that youth centres and youth spaces lack in order to work better with young people

The survey results show that stable financial support is what youth centres/spaces lack most in order to operate effectively. This was noted by more than two-thirds of respondents (153 centres, 71.8%), which once again confirms the main challenge – dependence on project-based or one-off sources of funding.

In second place in terms of the number of responses was access to trainers, specialists and experts (104 responses, 48.8%). Centres lack professional trainers, mentors, facilitators and consultants capable of conducting high-quality educational, motivational or specialised events. This indicates the need to develop human resources as one of the main conditions for improving performance.

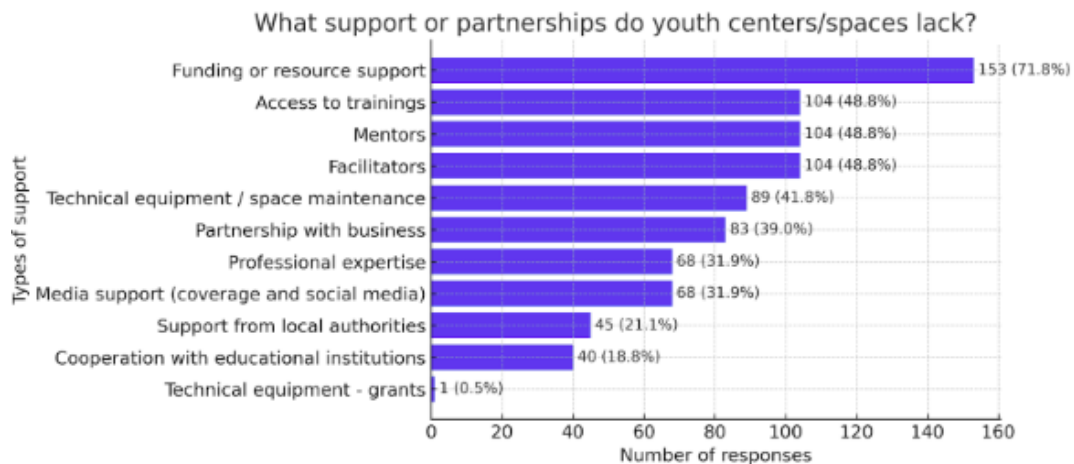
89 centres (41.8%) highlighted the lack of technical equipment and facilities. This includes basic furniture and repairs, as well as modern technology (laptops, projectors, cameras, high-speed internet). This shows that the quality of infrastructure remains an important factor in attracting young people.

A significant proportion of respondents (83 centres, 39.0%) see potential in developing partnerships with businesses. Such cooperation would allow for the creation of sustainable financial and resource models that do not depend solely on budgetary or donor funds.

Additional but important areas include media support and promotion of activities (68 responses, 31.9%), increased attention from local authorities (45 responses, 21.1%) and cooperation with educational institutions (40 responses, 18.8%).

Thus, youth centres and youth spaces lack stable funding, personnel and technical support the most. At the same time, more and more attention is being paid to building partnerships with business, government, educational institutions and the media. This demonstrates the centres' desire to move towards creating systemic development models that ensure sustainability and improve the quality of youth work.

Why do young people not actively engage in youth centers/spaces? 213 responses



Desired image of a youth centre/space

When asked, “If young people were to describe your centre in three words, what would you want those words to be?”, the answers revealed clear trends:

Friendliness and support. The most common words were ‘friendly’, ‘accessible’, ‘supportive’, ‘warm’, and ‘cosy’. This indicates a desire for youth spaces to be associated with a safe and comfortable environment where young people feel accepted.

Modernity and creativity. Most respondents indicate that the centre should be ‘modern’, ‘innovative’, ‘creative’, and ‘digital’. In other words, there is a demand for updated formats of work, technological sophistication, and relevance of activities.

Development and opportunities. The repeated words ‘useful’, ‘development’, ‘opportunities’, ‘learning’, and ‘self-realisation’ emphasise that centres want to be associated not only with recreation, but also with a place where one can gain new knowledge, skills, and resources for one’s own projects.

Safety and trust. The characteristics ‘safe’, ‘reliable’, ‘comfortable’, and ‘trust’ are often mentioned. This indicates that creating a psychologically safe space is a basic guideline for teams.

Emotional aspect: energy and drive. Many want the centre to be described with words such as ‘cool’, ‘exciting’, ‘energetic’, ‘vibrant’, and ‘interesting’. In other words, it is not only practical benefits that are important, but also an atmosphere of enthusiasm, youth movement, and inspiration.

Therefore, youth centres strive to combine three key qualities: a safe and friendly space, a place of modernity and creativity, and a platform for the development and realisation of young people’s potential. At the same time, the emotional component is important for the teams — they want the centres to be associated with positive energy, drive and inspiration, and not just formal events. Overall, the responses show a desire for a balance between ‘useful’ and ‘interesting’: centres should provide knowledge and opportunities, but do so in an atmosphere that young people enjoy and that motivates them to return again and again.

Formats and activities that we would like to implement but lack the resources for

- Most often, respondents mentioned **educational courses/training** (series of training sessions, schools, workshops) — **71 mentions, 33.3%**. The dominance of requests for courses/training indicates that centres are seeking to move from one-off events to systematic training products.
- The demand for **coworking/space arrangement, renovation, and creation of a full-fledged hub** was mentioned **27 times, or 12.7%**. Typical formats: coworking area with equipment, cinema hall, furnished hall, shelter, furniture. This confirms that material equipment and modern spaces directly affect the ability of centres to launch relevant formats.
- **Cultural events and large events** (forums, festivals, film screenings) — **24 mentions, 11.3%**.
- **Makerspaces and technical laboratories** (VR/AR, 3D printing, robotics, technical studios) — **20 mentions, 9.4%**.
- **Psychological support/mental health** (psychologist's office, art therapy, group sessions) — **19 mentions, 8.9%**. Almost one in ten centres wants to work systematically with mental health: from a staff psychologist to themed camps/support rooms. This is in line with the trend we see in other areas of the survey (increased demand for safe, supportive formats).
- **Sports and active recreation** (tournaments, races, outdoor activities) — **18 mentions, 8.5%**.
- **Volunteering and community activism** (volunteer schools, mentoring programmes) — **17 mentions, 8.0%**.
- **Soft skills/personal development** — **13 mentions, 6.1%**.
- **Social entrepreneurship/youth business** (coffee shops, hostels, incubators) — **13 mentions, 6.1%**.
- **Media studios and content** (video/audio studios, podcasts, photo labs) — **13 mentions, 6.1%**.
- **Career guidance/career** (career counselling, internships) — **11 mentions, 5.2%**.
- **SMM/English/digital skills** — **10 mentions, 4.7%**.
- **International/national exchanges** — **10 mentions, 4.7%**.
- **Gaming spaces/board games/esports** — **8 mentions, 3.8%**.
- **Security/first aid/drones** — **2 mentions, 0.9%**.

About **29.6% of responses (63 out of 213)** were highly individualised or complex in wording (combining many ideas at once), so they did not fit clearly into one category. This is an important sign of the diversity of local requests.

Successful practices for engaging young people

In response to this open-ended question, approximately half of the respondents (≈42%) provided highly individualised responses or several ideas at once. Therefore, the description is based on a generalisation of all the responses provided and is organised according to the most frequently mentioned approaches, so the figures are approximate.

According to the survey results, the most effective practices for engaging young people that yield real results, in the opinion of respondents, are:

Informal events. Most often, respondents noted (approximately 27%) that informal events — film screenings, game nights, quizzes, master classes, music/themed meetings, quests — create a friendly atmosphere, remove the barrier of 'formality' and attract new visitors. These formats work well both in the summer (open-air events) and as regular weekly activities.

Practical training courses (22%) (soft skills, career navigation, financial literacy, project management, IT/media skills) are in demand and effective, especially when the knowledge is immediately applicable (micro-projects, internships, portfolios). Career guidance forums and 'trying out' professions in practice significantly increase motivation.

Involvement in volunteer and social initiatives (13.6% of respondents) (fundraising/aid, eco-actions, local projects) increases the subjective sense of influence and significance, which directly correlates with young people returning to other events.

Outreach formats (about 7%) (schools/lyceums, remote villages), joint events with libraries, universities, NGOs, and participation in donor programmes were considered effective. Partnerships expand the audience and add resources/expertise.

Active social networks, Telegram channels, short videos, personal invitations, referral mechanisms ('bring a friend'), small incentives (certificates, prizes, treats) work as converters of interest into participation, especially at the start (7%).

Involving young people in planning and conducting activities also yields sustainable results (however, only about 6% of respondents give this answer): youth councils, ambassadors, facilitators from among teenagers/students, youth initiative competitions, microgrants, UPSHIFT-like programmes. When young people are not just participants but co-authors of events, both responsibility and return on events increase.

Peer-to-peer practices (youth leaders, interest clubs, mentoring by older peers) work better than top-down approaches. Open, non-hierarchical, 'on the same wavelength' communication is a key factor in building trust.

Group/individual sessions with a psychologist, art therapy, 'mental health rooms,' and retreats create a sense of security and care and keep young people engaged in the long term. (6%)

Open space, the ability to simply come in at any time (2%) (co-working, board games, social area), accessible shelter and basic infrastructure create a 'place where you want to come and just be.' This is what some centres call their biggest draw.

Conclusions of the third block:

Thus, the survey results show that youth centres and youth spaces already have a certain level of youth engagement, but their development is hampered by several key factors. On the one hand, young people highly value an atmosphere of friendship, safety and modernity, expecting centres to provide space for self-realisation, psychological support and skills development. On the other hand, they are hampered by a lack of resources, irregular needs assessment, weak communication channels and a lack of sustainable funding.

Interactive formats and a "youth for youth" approach have proven to be successful tools, creating a sense of involvement and shared responsibility. At the same time, the responses clearly show a demand for new innovative formats (VR/AR, makerspace, social entrepreneurship) and for broader partnerships with educational institutions, business, and international organizations.

Thus, the third block indicates a double demand: internal — for higher-quality programs and modern formats, and external — for institutional support from the state and partners.

General conclusions:

The survey showed that the network of youth centers in Ukraine is actively developing even in the difficult conditions of war: almost half of them (45.5%) were established in recent years, which indicates high potential and dynamic development. The centers already play a key role in communities as spaces for safety, development, and support for young people. They have important starting advantages: integration into communities, their own or provided premises, small but motivated teams, and experience of cooperation with grant programs and local authorities, which is a good foundation for sustainable development. Despite limited resources, the teams demonstrate dedication and initiative, as well as a willingness to learn and grow professionally.

At the same time, the survey results revealed a number of challenges. Youth centers often focus on internal organizational issues (unstable funding, small staff, need for knowledge of financial management, fundraising, legal aspects), while youth engagement does not always come to the fore. This is reflected in the low level of awareness among young people (according to a youth survey conducted in collaboration with the U-Report platform, 60% of respondents had not heard of youth centers/spaces and did not know where they were located), as well as in the fact that a significant proportion of programs seem “uninteresting” or “unuseful” to them (38% of respondents gave this answer). Feedback from young people is mostly collected irregularly, which reduces the systematic consideration of their needs.

At the same time, young people clearly express their expectations: they are most interested in educational, cultural, and innovative formats, including soft skills development, psychological support, digital technologies, creative pursuits, and entrepreneurship. Interactive formats, informal events, and a “youth for youth” approach are recognized as effective methods of engagement.

Youth centers already perform an important social function, and their further development directly depends on the ability to combine internal strengthening (resources, personnel, professional development of teams) with a focus on the real needs of young people. Systematic state support and updated practical training programs can be the key to ensuring that centers not only survive but also become increasingly modern, attractive, and useful for young people and their communities.