



UPLIFT – Urban PoLicy Innovation to address inequality with and for Future generaTions

Deliverable 4.7

Co-creation with young people in Tallinn

Research approach and Reflexive Policy Agenda

February 2023



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870898.

Project title	UPLIFT – Urban PoLicy Innovation to address inequality with and for Future generaTions
Grant Agreement No.	870898
Project duration	January 2020-June 2023
Project website	http://uplift-youth.eu
Project coordinator	Metropolitan Research Institute
WP 4	Policy co-creation
WP duration	January 2020-March 2023
Deliverable title	Policy co-creation with young people in Tallinn
Lead partner of the WP	TU Delft
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Date of submission	February 2023
Dissemination level	Public

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1 Introduction

The target group of co-creation in Tallinn is **NEETs, i.e. young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment or training**. NEET youth often face both economic and social exclusion and their life chances tend to be more limited than that of the other young age groups.

The report aims to outline **the course of action of the co-creation process of improving NEETs policy in Tallinn**. As such, it supports researchers as well as policymakers who wish to gain more knowledge of the objectives, strategies and methods pertaining to the development of a Reflexive Policy Agenda (RPA). The Reflexive Policy Agenda will provide **methodological guidance for the co-creation process**, as well as pinpoints specific policy areas where further interventions are needed with regard to the NEETs policy, with **specific policy recommendations** that arose from the UPLIFT research findings and co-creation process.

After briefly describing the situation and root problems, which are likely to cause young people to fall into the NEET status, the report provides an overview of the institutional and policy context related to the NEETs, strategies and methods as regards stakeholders' role and cooperation in the co-creation process, the recruitment of young people and the functioning as well as management of the Youth Board. Thereafter, the generic approach to the policy co-creation in Tallinn is presented, and the last part of the report focuses on the Reflexive Policy Agenda with recommendations on how to effectively carry out the co-creation process in the field of NEETs policy. Moreover, the last section also presents proposals for further interventions, which would support lifting life opportunities for vulnerable young people in the NEET status (including those which would help to prevent the young person to fall into the NEET status).

The document reports the course of actions and results of work package (WP) 4 (co-creation process with young people) but is also linked to the research results of WP1, WP2 and WP3 of the UPLIFT project.

2 Research context and problem statement

2.1 Definition of the target group and their problems

The target group of co-creation in Tallinn is NEETs, i.e. young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment or training. According to Statistics Estonia NEET youth made up 11,2% of all youngsters of the same age group (15-29 years of age) (Statistics Estonia, 2022). As a long-term trend, the share of NEETs from the total youth population has decreased since 2010 (when the rate was as high as 18%) but compared to the two earlier years (2018-2019) the share has slightly increased. Gender disparities among the NEETs are significant with men being overrepresented. About one third of all NEET-youth in Estonia live in Tallinn (accounting ten percent of the population there). Russian-language background and lower education (primary educations) or absence of vocational or higher education tend to be the main risk factors related to the NEET status.

The life opportunities (i.e. job possibilities, education choices) to participate in society tend to be more limited for NEETs compared to the other young age groups (Statistikaamet, 2020). Low skills and poor social-economic situation are the main reasons for this. Though Tallinn is not the most problematic region in Estonia as regards the share and situation of the NEET youth due to its better economic position and lower unemployment levels compared to other regions in Estonia, the NEET problems in Tallinn still relate to difficulties finding long-term job for less educated young people and especially those coming from difficult family backgrounds. Another risk factor of the NEET status relates to the recent move to Tallinn from socio-economically less wealthy regions of Estonia. Often young people expect to find better job and life opportunities in Tallinn, but the risk to fail in finding a job is high especially if their educational path has been interrupted and supportive social networks in Tallinn are missing (e.g. Helemäe, 2018). Also, housing is less affordable in the capital city compared to other Estonian regions adding another layer of difficulties restricting life chances for young people (if they do not have their family living in Tallinn or financially supporting them in covering housing expenses). Starting an independent housing career in Tallinn is very challenging in case of NEET youth (Beilmann et al., 2023).

The reasons for falling into the NEET status vary – the lack of material opportunities for young people and his or her family, which may be due to the unemployment of the youth/ or parents, relying on low-wage jobs, which in turn has been driven by the lower levels of education (or lack of specialized education) (Ministry of Education and Research 2020). Based on the data of Estonian NEET-youth program 'Prop-Up' statistics (Kasearu and Trumm 2018), it can be concluded that the most important risk factors leading to NEET status relate to the incomplete education and living in less economically developed rural areas (Reiska 2018). Long-lasting mental health problems add a further risk factor to those already mentioned (WP3 report).

The reasons for lower educational attainment lie largely in the family background: problematic relationships, parental divorce, alcoholism and poverty (usually these factors reinforce each other). Domestic problems have led to early school leaving because the home environment has not facilitated learning and achieving adequate learning outcomes (Reiska 2018).

Youth unemployment is an important factor to cause the risk of economic and social exclusion. Unemployed young people are more likely to become poor in income and are at greater risk of living in economically and socially deprived households. Unemployment and insecurity in employment also tend to have negative impacts on participating in social life (affecting relationships with family and friends) (Unt and Gebel 2018). The Estonian Youth Monitoring Yearbook (Noorteseire aastaraamat 2017–2018) highlights that special attention should be paid to supporting inactive young people to return to education or working life. Youth unemployment can have long-term and far-reaching personal and socio-economic consequences.

During the last decade, the socio-economic situation in Estonia has improved, including a decrease in youth unemployment, and the number of young people receiving subsistence benefits has greatly diminished. Also, the share of long-term unemployed among young people has decreased in recent years. The unemployment rate of young people (15-24 years old) has shrunk into one-third during the last decade in Estonia (from 33% in 2010 to 11% in 2019).

The risk of exclusion is higher in those local governments where the share of Russian-speaking population is higher. One of the factors is the lower socio-economic status of these families as compared to the Estonian-background families. In the case of Tallinn, language issues play an important role in lifting the risk of becoming NEET. In the domain of education, the core form of youth inequalities in the FUA of Tallinn run along the linguistic line – there is a separation of Estonian and Russian language schools (students of Russian-language schools form about one fourth of total young population). A parallel Russian-language education system to the existing Estonian-language has remained in place till today (Lindemann, 2011). Graduating from Estonian-language schools usually provides many resources for social mobility and advancement in the labour market for minority children.

According to Helemäe (2018), the most vulnerable are those young people who have left their parents' home at a very young age, i.e. the early independents. At this age, they are generally unable to cope with work and study or the reconciliation of work/ study and family responsibilities: education is interrupted early, and later attempts to study often fail. Due to the low level of education, the choice of possible jobs is limited. The timing of the beginning of independence is crucial – starting independent life too early and without the not yet developed abilities to live independently. Unfortunately, the social assistance for their independence is also the scarcest (Helemäe 2018).

The focus area of the policy co-creation is the NEET youth policy in Tallinn that closely relates to improving the accessibility to education, training and employment for the NEETs. Obtaining

vocational or higher education creates advantages to achieve a better position in the labour market, and labour market position influences to great extent the housing market outcomes. Therefore, the co-creation focuses on improving the services related to improving educational attainment and outcomes and access to labour market.

2.2 Institutional and policy context

Two ministries - the Ministry of Social Affairs (social work, employment) and the Ministry of Education and Research (formal education, youth field) - are responsible for NEET policies in Estonia. More detailed objectives and activities are agreed in the Youth Guarantee Estonia Action Plan 2022-2027. The Youth Guarantee initiative intends to help young people under the age of 15 to 29 years to return to work when they become unemployed by providing individual and group counselling, services of job-related training, job search workshops, and job practice.

Mainly two laws are regulating the field of NEET policy, i.e. the Social welfare Act and the Youth work Act. Three strategies – the Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023, the Education Strategy 2021-2023 and the Youth Strategy 2021-2035 – are providing the frame and objectives for the development of the NEETs' policy.

In addition, the state level vision for developing services and cooperation for young people in NEET status was developed in 2021 in a joint ministerial collaboration, highlighting the way forward, how to support young people at risk of NEET and in NEET status. The vision, or so called 'model' demonstrates the ways how to effectively and the smoothest possible way to tackle the problems of the NEETs (from the perspective of the target group) in cooperation between different actors – youth work, social services, education, health, internal security, employment and careers, and support service providers in different fields – at the level of local authorities.

Before the renewed Youth Guarantee initiative, three main governmental initiatives targeted the NEETs' issues – Youth Prop Up programme, Hoog Sisse and STEP-programme in Tallinn, in addition to the Youth Guarantee Support System on the national level. Since 2022, the main actions are included into the Youth Guarantee Support System.

The Youth Prop Up programme (2015-2022) and Hoog Sisse (2019–2022) aimed to support young people aged 15 to 26 years in the NEETs status. The activities within the programme included: identification of the NEET youths, establishing a trusting contact, developing practical knowledge and skills of the NEETs, facilitating their entry into labour market, and keeping on regular contact with the participants in the programme for at least six months after their exit from the programme for the follow up support and assistance if required (for an extended overview of Estonian policies targeting NEETs, see Paabort and Beilmann 2021).

The Youth Guarantee Support System is a tool for the local government to learn about young people in the NEET status in their area and, if necessary, provide them with support for continuing their education and reaching the labour market (www.tooelu.ee).

3 Objectives of the co-creation process

The objectives of the activities in WP4 are related to (a) societal aspects (improving life chances, empower vulnerable young people), (b) institutional aspects (creating sustainable institutional structures), (c) policy creation (creating more tailor made local policies), and (d) academic aspects (generating novel research findings and methodologies).

The overarching goal of the Tallinn co-creation process is **to re-design services facilitating better accessibility and flexibility to support NEET-youth in the field of access to education and labour market** in order to improve life chances for those young people and empower them. For achieving the goal, the most up-to-date research results and methodologies are being used in the process.

3.1 Societal objectives

The aim of the co-creation is to increase awareness of existing measures among the NEET youth, while also opening up opportunities for young people to participate in the policy creation process; to improve services for NEET youth in order to better match the needs of the target groups. The following instruments and activities that were pre-defined by the project partners were planned to be integrated into the co-creation process (and in most part already implemented) which aim to improve the situation of NEET youth and to enhance the capabilities of the NEET youth target group:

- Training materials have been prepared and organized into the training modules that are targeted to specialists working with young people;
- The development of virtual (digital) youth centre/platform to improve access to services for young people in vulnerable situations;
- The logbook development (that contains detailed information about the NEET youth and services provided).

3.2 Institutional objectives

The main institutional objectives of the co-creation relate to establishing an institutional network of actors for improving the sectoral cooperation (cooperation framework) to effectively re-design services targeted to the improvement of life chances for the NEET youth. For this purpose, institutional stakeholders have been brought together and common interests and aims were identified. The division of roles and responsibilities has been agreed to enhance the cross-sectoral cooperation.

3.3 Policy-oriented objectives

The following initiatives were carried out (see Figure 1):

Initiatives	Basis for development
1. Training materials prepared and organized that are targeted to specialists working with young people with an aim to enhance the capabilities of the NEET youth target group.	Developing the training materials was based on the needs identified and suggestions made by different groups of young people in the co-creative meetings.
2. The development of a virtual youth centre/platform carried out to improve access to services for young people (the digital means are being set-up that would facilitate the access to the NEET, and that will give a better insight into their needs) – an outreach tool (so called Chat) to enhance mobile youth-work.	The development of the chat was based on the perceived needs of the youth groups in the co-creative meetings and on interviews with professionals and target groups.
3. The database developed with analytical and visualization tools to enhance evidence-based decision making (the database contains data on the NEET youth) (the database helps to improve knowledge about the situation of the youth, including locational differences and area-specific problems).	The development of the job descriptor tool was based on the interviews with professionals and the factors/characteristics expressed in the co-creative meetings of the youth groups, which made it possible to understand which knowledge in the implementation of youth interventions/activities supports the development of services from a urban perspective.

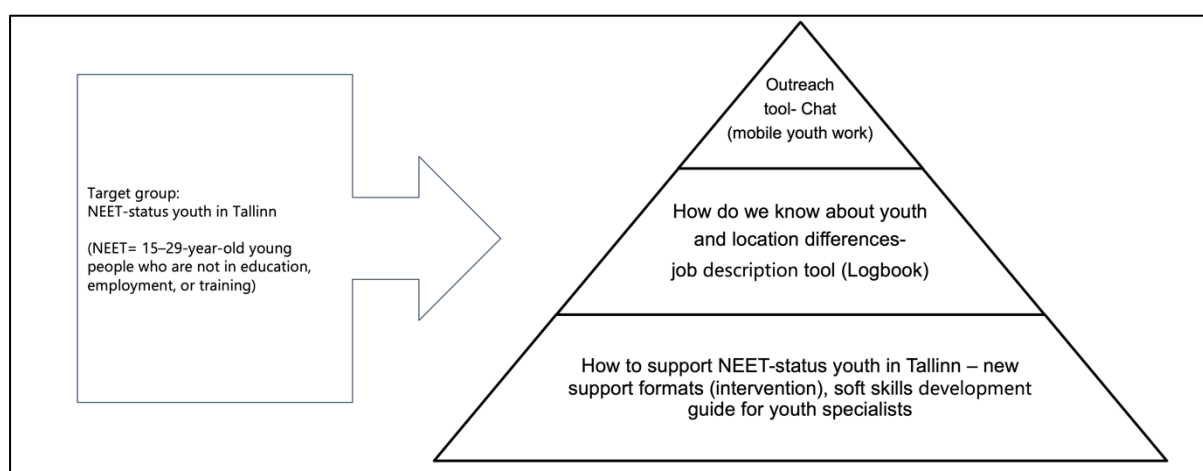


Figure 1. The planned policy instruments to enhance NEET-youth policy (the planned NEET-youth support services)

3.4 Academic objectives

The co-creation process has the following academic objectives:

- Enhancing the scientific research and dissemination of the results on the topic of NEET youth, including the dynamics of the group, processes related to, drivers of the NEET youth status, methods of intervention, process and methods of policy co-creation, improving the high school curricula and specialists' training programs on the topic;
- When providing professional training universities will be more capable transferring the specific expertise on the NEETs as a target group to the professional teaching of youth workers (improving training programs and university curriculums in this regard).

4 Institutional framework for the co-creation process

One of the main objectives of WP4 is the creation of a durable institutional framework that enhances the life chances of young people at the implementation site. In this framework, academic partners, NGOs and the public authorities have collaborated with the target group of young people in the co-creation process.

4.1 The main stakeholders in the co-creation process

The policy co-creation process has brought together different stakeholders (Table 1) who have collaborated with the established youth board.

The **Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC)** is a nationwide umbrella organisation of youth centres in Estonia and a key player in NEETs policy and implementation (AEYC has been engaged in partnerships with national and local level stakeholders, and is involved in national and international projects in the field). AEYC cooperates with the state and local governments, youth organizations in Estonia and abroad, and other institutions involved in the youth work.

AEYC has expertise on implementing programs targeted to the NEETs, and it has an in-depth knowledge on the youth work. This background has enabled AEYC to facilitate the process and being a partner to the UPLIFT project, act as a local implementer. AEYC is the receiver of the process output, by understanding and positioning the youth work role in the whole support process for NEETs in general. AEYC has been involved in initiating and coordinating the co-creation process, as well as in management of the youth board activities in the project. AEYC has reached out to, and mobilized, NEET youth involving them in the policy co-creation process in a participatory and empowering way. All the outputs produced through the co-creation process will be linked to the subsequent work of the community, allowing for an even better support for young people.

University of Tartu (UT), research partner in the UPLIFT project, has provided the scientific guidance for the process and is responsible for the scientific dissemination of its methodology and results.

Other stakeholders involved in the policy co-creation:

- **Tallinn City Government** has been in charge of developing policies related to NEETs at the local level, and implementation of these policies. Tallinn city government is the main institutional partner involved in the co-creation process. It acts as a receiver and potential implementer of the policy ideas that result from this process.
- **The Education and Youth Board** is the main national level partner involved in the project. It works work under the Ministry of Education and Research (www.harno.ee). This board works on the re-design of services related to NEETs, virtual platform

development, and the development of a guidebook for organizations that provide services to NEETs.

- **Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium** has been the main educational institution involved in the project. This school is a general education school where students who have interrupted their day school studies for some reason can acquire basic education and secondary education in grades 10-12. The acquisition of education takes place in a non-stationary form of education. This school has served as one of the central contact points for recruiting young people with a vulnerable background (including NEETs) in the project.

Several other stakeholders have been involved during the process, providing input for the redesign of services to NEETs and/or the co-creation of new policies regarding NEETs – youth organizations that represent young people (e.g. the Tallinn region group of the Estonian National Youth Council), service providers, educational institutions, youth work institutions, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Table 1. Stakeholders in the Tallinn co-creation process and their roles

Partner	Role	Role description
University of Tartu (UT)	Task leader and academic/knowledge partner	Responsible for conducting the scientific guidance of the co-creation process, as well as for analysing and reporting the results.
Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC)	Implementation partner	Sets up the stakeholder structure for the WP4 co-creation process. Recruits youngsters for co-creation activities. Collects input from different stakeholders for re-design of services. Organizes activities for, and provides direct support to the NEET youth.
Tallinn City Government (TCG)	Main partner in the Tallinn co-creation process	In charge of the creation and implementation of local policies related to NEETs. The main local level institutional partner involved in the co-creation process. Receiver and potential implementer of the policy ideas that result from this process. Implements youth policy in Tallinn, provides local services for the NEET-youth in Tallinn.
The Education and Youth Board, youth organizations (the Tallinn region group of the Estonian National Youth Council), service providers,	Additional implementation partners	Take part in the co-creation process. Involved in the re-design of services related to NEETs.

educational institutions, youth work institutions, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Social Affairs, Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium

Act as potential receivers and implementers of the policy ideas that result from the co-creation process.
Recruit young people with a vulnerable background for the project.
Responsible for the virtual tool development process.

4.2 Institutional coordination of the co-creation process

AEYC and UT as the original UPLIFT partners (implementer partner and academic partner) have been initiating the process and facilitated institutional networking during the project. The co-creation process in Tallinn has been coordinated by the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC).

During the process, meetings were held with various local stakeholders in Tallinn and also on the state level. The 'personas' that were co-created with the youth board (see upcoming chapters for more information) were discussed with different stakeholders and further input was gained. In the initial stage of the project, the common understanding of the importance of defining NEET young people as a target group was set in focus.

Setting up this kind of institutional network of national and local actors, including the target group, and agreeing upon the problems, challenges and needs of the target group as well as co-creating policy interventions has contributed to a common understanding of the NEETs' situation, as well as of policy objectives. Such a common understanding helps to implement the policies in the long-run, i.e. willingness of the institutional actors and policy makers to implement policies related to NEETs.

5 The Youth Board

The development of new services and support measures for NEETs has taken place in close collaboration with the young people, and the youth board that was set up.

5.1 Recruitment and commitment strategy

5.1.1 Recruitment

In the beginning of the project, the plan was to closely cooperate with the **Tallinn youth council**^{1 2} in recruiting the youth board. According to the Estonian Youth Work Act (2010) a youth council can be established at a city council. The objective of youth council shall be the discussion of issues concerning young people, which are in the competence of the city and the making of proposals to the city council or city government in connection therewith proceeding from the needs and interests of young people. Youth councils can be established at a rural municipality but also in cities. Upon the request of the youth council the city council shall forward the drafts agendas and draft legislations regarding young people to the youth council before the city council hearings take place. The updated Statute of the Tallinn Youth Council was adopted as a regulation in the Tallinn City Council at 3th June 2021, decision no 11. The city youth council became reorganized during 2020-2021 (because a new Statute came into force and new members were elected), and the activity of the council was suspended until 2022. Therefore, the youth board members were also recruited by using different channels.

In order to find young people to represent young people in NEET status, we collaborated with youth centres and youth workers who work directly with young people in NEET status. Through these gatekeepers we were able to recruit young people for the Youth Board. In addition, a few young people were also recruited directly by the project team members. Additionally, some participants were recruited based on the active youth groups operating under city district governments of Tallinn (Tallinn is divided into eight administrative districts).

¹ By the law (Youth Work Act (2010)) a youth board/youth councils can be established at a rural municipality or city council. The objective of youth council is the discussion of issues concerning young people, which are in the competence of the municipality and the making of proposals to the local government related to the needs and interests of young people. Youth councils are elected democratically by the young people.

² The Tallinn youth council is youth representative body of the Tallinn City Council as the higher decision-making institution of the Tallinn municipality. The aim of the council is to represent the city youth and stand for their rights and interests. The council monitors the existing municipal policies. Moreover, it can lobby and submit suggestions for the possible improvements of these policies. The council consists of 21 young persons aged 14-26, who are democratically elected and stay on for a year. Within the council, there are three electoral segments that each have 7 elected members: pupils, students and clients of youth NGO-s (among which there are the NEET youth). All youth council members are volunteers that are not paid for their activities.

Since 2022 the Tallinn youth council was re-established to represent young people with various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds from different city districts. Including this body in the framework of co-creation process was found especially useful. Particularly because of the more permanent character of the institution (not project – based) which means that the ideas can be implemented over a longer time span. Eventually, the city youth council representatives became also part of the youth board for the policy co-creation.

Based on these different recruitment methods the youth board for policy co-creation was established, involving young people with different backgrounds and socio-economic status – some with the NEET status, but also Russian-language students in secondary schools, young people with a low education who had recently moved to Tallinn (i.e. without local support-networks), etc.

The youth centres, city district youth groups, and the Tallinn city council were supportive to find new substitutes in case any participant was to fall out.

5.1.2 Commitment strategy

The participation of young people in the work of the youth board was not related to external motivators (e.g. remuneration or rewards). The participation was based on their own motivation, based on a voluntary contribution. A trusting environment was created for young people, where they felt like experts based on their own life situations. The organizers always created a supportive and comfortable meeting space. Some kind of snack was always offered to make sure that the participants' well-being was taken care of.

The youth board meetings were conducted by professionals with experience in youth work, who had good skills on methods of working with young people. This made it possible for young people to feel that they are needed, that they are good experts of their own lives, and that their contribution was necessary for the policy co-creation process. A positive, safe and supportive atmosphere also ensured the functioning of the meetings and the participation of young people. In every meeting one youth worker and two experts were present as well who helped to create a safe environment for group works and discussions. The youth worker was rather a supportive person, not a moderator. The two experts performed the moderator role.

5.2 Composition and size of the Youth Board

In total, 18 young people took part in the work of the board. The main board team (ten members) included three youth with NEET-experiences aged 16-20, three young persons with NEET-experiences aged 21-26, two Tallinn schools' students (with a Russian background), and two young persons who also participated in Tallinn city council. In addition, eight young persons participated occasionally, based on their time available and depending on the topic.

Altogether four youth from the main board team were young people who spoke Russian as their home language. Four youth from the main board team were male and six were female participants.

While some meetings were organized as joint meetings for the Youth Board then also the subgroup meetings were organized to better facilitate the group dynamics (subgroups were formed on the basis of already existing contacts between young people – for example the district level group members formed one subgroup, young people who already knew each other from before). In this way participants were more likely to speak and discuss when the groups were smaller.

5.3 Inclusiveness and gender sensitivity

The most sensitive target group was formed by six young people (from 18 members) who experienced or had experienced the position of the NEET status by themselves. Their participation in the meetings and the co-creation process in general was supported by applying specific supportive measures and special care (i.e. arrival to the meetings was supported, food was offered and the youth worker always supported them, offering also language support for the Russian language speaking youngsters). It had to be considered that for those young people participation in meetings and discussions, or visits to institutions, was not usual, and they had to be prepared for the events beforehand.

Gender equality was also the goal of recruiting the group. Both females and males were represented – 60% were females and 40% were male participants. During the discussions it was ensured that both genders would have an equal possibility to express their ideas and get feedback, and we also made sure that no male or female representatives were feeling anyhow suppressed.

6 The co-creation process

This chapter provides a detailed account of the co-creation process with young people that took place in Tallinn.

6.1 Generic approach

As a result of the co-creation process, consensual solutions have been found – a process which allows all parties to create new practices compared to the past (McBride et al. 2019, see also Paabort, 2022 for the methodology of the implemented approach). In co-creation the common creation and responsibility of different parties supported to notice and use the different assets in the community, and helped to keep different parties in a common information field.

In addition to co-creation, co-production as a continuous development approach was applied where appropriate as the basic principle of re-designing services – it is a joint production of the service provider and the service recipient, which develops the services precisely based on the needs of the person using it (Osborn 2018). While the co-creative approach focuses on the creation of 'activities', co-production is more about the ongoing development of what is created, so that it continues to meet the needs of young people in a changing environment.

Applying the McKinsey 7s model (MindTools 2020) helped to analyse the current situation of NEET youth in Tallinn, it also proposed a vision about how the situation could develop in the future, and it helped to identify gaps and inconsistencies between the current reality and the future vision. McKinsey 7s model is based on 7 different aspects, it is more detailed and specific than the generally used SWOT analysis. This model gave us the possibility to discuss about the values, staff, structure etc. around the youngsters in Tallinn.

Policy interventions that were planned were based on the findings during the co-creation process, as well as the findings from the research (WP 2 and WP 3) (Figure 2).

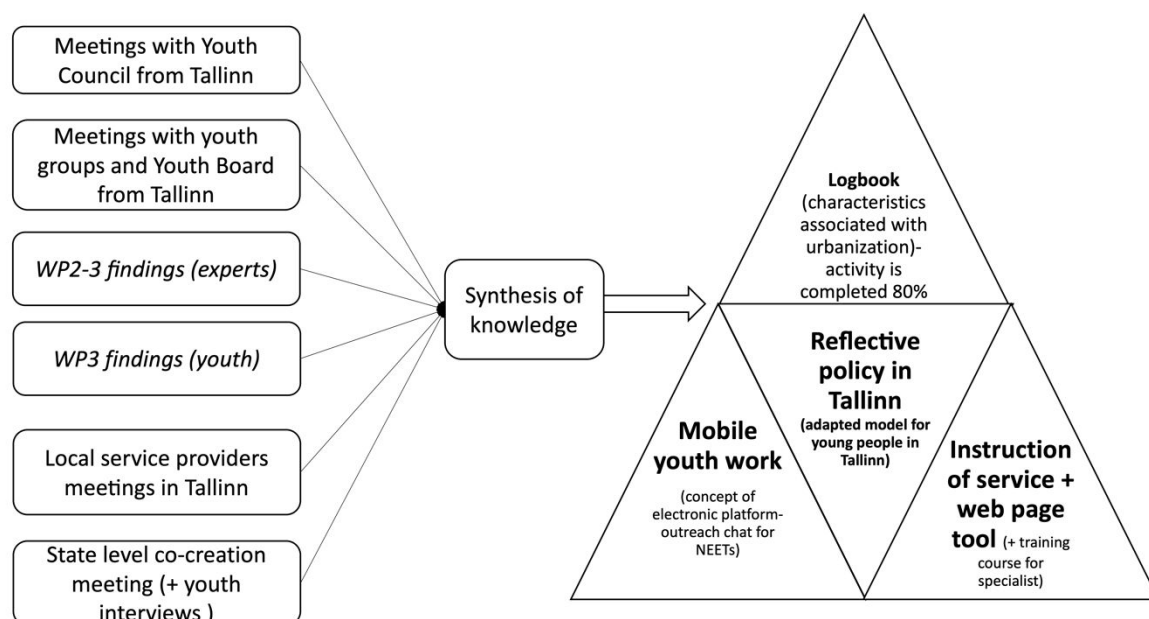


Figure 2. Input and outcomes of the co-creation process within the framework of UPLIFT

The co-creation process was conducted in three stages:

- 1) First, the situation was assessed and problems³ were mapped by involving vulnerable youth groups in different city districts, meetings with youngsters were also held in one of the youth centres. The problem was defined, goals were set and the further co-creation process was organized;
- 2) Thereafter, the co-creation process was continued with the youth board (several meetings took place). During the meetings, 'personas'⁴ were designed based on the information that revealed during the mapping process, and relying on the experiences of the young people. Each persona had its own path with solution ideas to design services⁵;
- 3) Meetings were held with various stakeholders in Tallinn and also on the state level. The 'personas' were discussed with these stakeholders and further input was gained. In this

³ Like regional differences, transport, economic conditions, school relations, relations with parents, school spirit, etc.

⁴ A persona is a composite portrait of a young person based on generalizations. It is created in order to better understand the target group, in order to plan services or solutions based on their needs.

⁵ For example, reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities through open youth work, where together with a youth worker, young people's strengths are mapped and they are guided towards areas of interest, which gives them the confidence to find the right pathway to education or the labour market (1), or an information campaign on public transport for young people who have moved to a big city, which informs them about their opportunities for support (2).

phase, the Tallinn Youth Council was involved as well (which involved the student council in Tallinn).

The Youth Board has been actively involved in the co-creation (Figure 3), together with other stakeholders. Based on the process of creation of activities/services, the final outputs (chat, job description tool Logbook, soft skills training, etc.) were created. During the creation of service phase, a series of meetings were held with different stakeholders to validate possible solutions with policy makers.

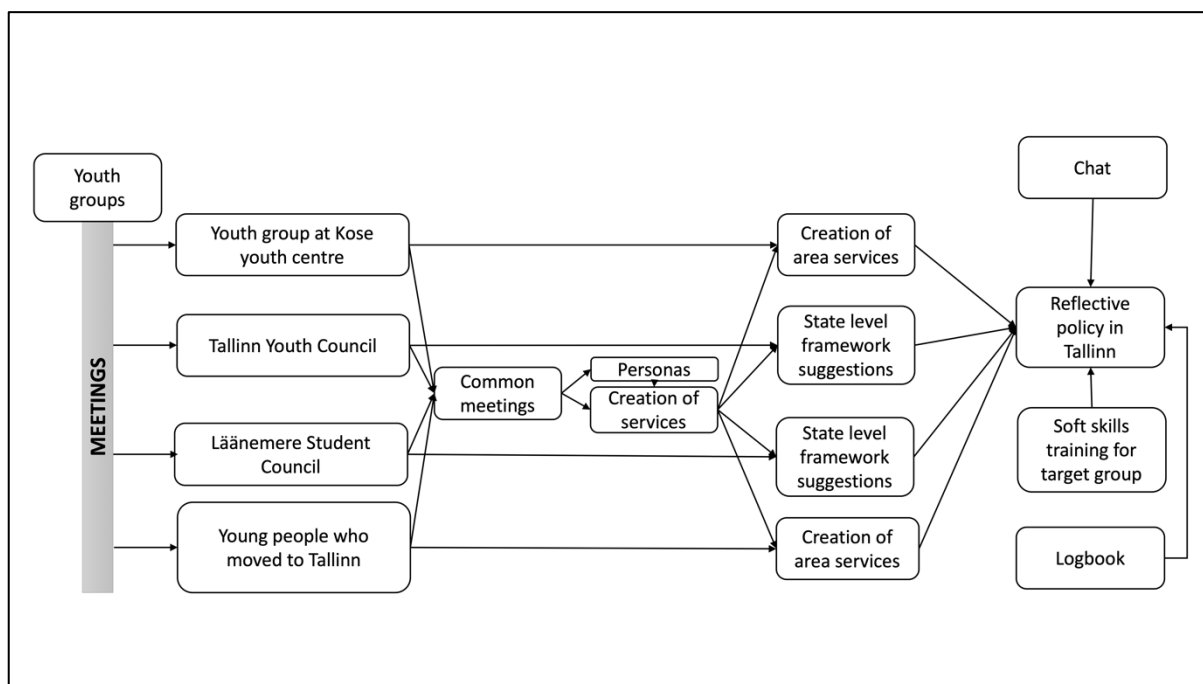


Figure 3. Role of the Youth Board in the co-creation process.

All the activities where the Youth Board provided their input (i.e., the design and functioning of the 'chat', a soft skills training program, and the 'log book') will remain in use after the official end of the UPLIFT project.

6.2 Overview of all research activities/meetings

Meetings were held as online group meetings and physical group meetings. An overview of all activities and meetings that took place during the WP4 co-creation process with the youth board is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Activities and meetings during the WP4 co-creation process (related to the Youth Board activities)

Type of meeting	Number of meetings	Purpose of the meeting	Participants	Outcome
Youth Board: youth centres youth (non-organised youth view)	5	The main challenges and needs of young people in Tallinn, creating personas, design of solution needs, inputs to create a chat and training plan	7	Inputs for creating chat, training plan and reflective policy
Youth Board: young people who moved to Tallinn (view of a young person who has moved in)	3	The main challenges and needs of young people who moved to Tallinn, creating personas, design of solution needs, inputs to create a chat and training plan	5	Inputs for creating chat, training plan and reflective policy
Youth Board: Tallinn youth council (organised young people view)	4	The main challenges and needs of young people in Tallinn, creating personas, design of solution needs, inputs to create a chat, training plan and Logbook	12	Inputs for development or creation of chat, training plan, work analysis tool Logbook and reflective policy
Youth Board: Läänemere student council (education view)	2	The main challenges and needs of young people in Tallinn, creating personas, design of solution needs, inputs to create a chat and training plan	2	Inputs for creating chat, training plan and reflective policy

In addition, two meetings with vulnerable youth groups from Tallinn neighbourhoods – first meeting youth group from Mustamäe district and second meeting with youth group from Lasnamäe district took place. These youth were recruited by the support of the district government. These (online) workshops helped to map problems (a problem map was created), and possible solutions were discussed and mapped.

6.3 Capacity building and enhancing creativity through-out the co-creation process

The co-creation approach has been in use in the Estonian public sector for at least the last five years (e.g. Aps and Pedanik 2019, Pedanik et al 2021, Haridus- ja Noorteamet, Sotsiaalkindlustusamet 2021). Several instructional materials have been created for this purpose, the instructions of which were also used for this project. The main instruction for our work was related to the document created for municipalities, which states the following (Development of public services in the co-creation of municipalities and civic associations 2019):

To sum up the co-creation approach as regards capacity building and enhancing creativity during the process the next points can be listed:

- 1) It supports grassroots discussions and bottom-up solutions;
- 2) It encourages the plurality of opinions and allows reaching a consensus despite differences of opinion;
- 3) It enables the effective implementation of cooperation processes with several parties and creates constructive relations between the parties;
- 4) It helps the project team and partners achieve better results, as it enables mutual learning during the entire process.

6.3.1 Capacity building

Capacity building requires psychological safety, which can be created through various methods. Since it was a youth-centred approach, the principles of youth work and co-creation were considered when choosing methods. For this reason, non-formal methods were used to ensure a cooperative relationship and positive safety with young people.

In Estonia, it is considered that non-formal learning is learning which takes place outside of formal education and is undertaken consciously with the aim of self-development. Non-formal learning can take place in a wide variety of settings where teaching and learning may not be the sole or primary purpose. Non-formal education is also targeted but voluntary. The facilitators can be both professional youth workers and trainers, as well as, for example, volunteers or people of their own age. For this reason, we also involved the young people themselves (mainly members of the Tallinn youth council) in the implementation of the activities (mitteformaalne.ee).

In various stages, group dynamics were also taken into account when choosing methods. A lot of emphasis was placed on getting to know the young people in the team, which helped create a safe environment and helped avoid conflicts. The participation of a youth worker who is familiar to the young people themselves was a key to assure and create safe environment and support participation of all group members.

A database of educational materials has been created in Estonia, which helped to choose thematic tools and "games" (<https://mitteformaalne.ee/opimeetodid/>). In particular, methods of familiarisation and mapping young people's problems were used.

The meetings for young people consisted of the use of design thinking, where the young people could first map out problems, create a persona and, based on this, create the necessary service, which in turn included a description of the journey of supporting the young person.

6.3.2 Enhancing creativity

Group dynamics that were used could be divided into five stages - getting to know each other, finding your role, building trust in the team, developing joint responsibility for achieving the goal, and taking action.

Our meetings were structured mainly as follows:

- 1) the purpose of the meeting,
- 2) getting to know each other,
- 3) topic discussions in smaller groups,
- 4) presentation of results,
- 5) setting up the next steps.

If necessary, the steps between the meetings were also discussed.

Various methods were used, such as a world cafe, personas creation workshops⁶, round table discussions and small group work. Between meetings, homework was rather given to the representatives of the Tallinn Youth Council and student councils, such as studying national documents aimed at young people and making proposals. A common google drive folder was used so that the comments were immediately available to everyone.

Interactive methods, group discussions and mind maps, were applied that facilitated the creativity during the events (see pictures below).

⁶ A persona is a composite figure from which to create the necessary strategy for service delivery.



Picture 1. Meetings with the youth board



Picture 2. Interactive tools applied during the meetings

An important part of creating and maintaining cooperative relations with young people has been the involvement of the youth worker of the youth centre at every stage. His presence (trusting relationship with young people) has helped to reach young people faster and also ensured the necessary interpretation related to the topic.

6.4 Interaction of the Youth Board with the institutional stakeholders

At several phases in the co-creation process, there has been interaction between the Youth Board and the institutional stakeholders. This particularly applies to the last stage of the process when the ideas of the youth board are discussed with the institutional stakeholders. On the positive side, the involvement of young people who already had previous experience of interacting with policymakers helped to create a working atmosphere. They were also a good role model and support for those who had not had similar experience before.

The project process with young people has taken place in stages, first by mapping the situation and needs among the youth, and second, together with the representatives of the city government. Then, the received inputs were presented to the Tallinn youth council, discussed with them together with the city government, the youth centres, researchers, social and educational experts. Jointly the possible support paths (services) were designed. City government employees and field experts also participated in some of the youth meetings.

Proposals and development needs created during the design of support paths have been presented to various stakeholders through various meetings. The project team has made an effort to ensure that the ideas and needs arising from the discussions of the various parties reach the appropriate institutions involved. The problems and solutions proposed by young people were presented to stakeholders together with the scientific results of this project.

The following is a list of activities according to the different stakeholders:

With Tallinn City Government there is an ongoing partnership as part of the co-creation. The ideas discussed with young people (Youth Board) have been introduced to the Education and Youth Authority in Tallinn, and there have been discussions about the information application (chat) development. Meetings with the Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Social Affairs, Unemployment Insurance Fund, with the participation of related NGOs, took place in September and in December 2022 (14th September and 14th December). Young people were not present in those meetings but the project partners (AEYC, UT) introduced the ideas of the Youth Board.

Since different institutions operate in their own rhythm, it has been difficult to get them all to one event at the same time. Thus, the activities have been divided into different periods of activity and not with the simultaneous participation of all. The same is true for young people and their opportunities for participation.

6.5 Role of the Youth Board in the implementation and evaluation process

According to the principles of reflexive policy, the Youth Board is not only supposed to be active in the formulation phase of the co-creation process, but also in the subsequent phases of policy implementation and evaluation. Although in most sites, little implementation will have taken place so far, it is good to anticipate on what the potential role of the Youth Board in these phases could be.

At the level of the city, the implementation of the results would be more sustainable if the ideas and solutions will be further dealt with by an officially formulated Tallinn youth council (see above for references). Due to the legal basis of the activity of Tallinn youth council, they have the right to regularly analyse the activities of the city government, give inputs and represent the needs of young people. Members of the Tallinn youth council who participated in the co-creation acted as the mediators - with their help it was possible to bring inputs into the desk of the youth council from the point of view of young people with NEET status. Therefore, the co-creation activities carried out with the project-based Youth Board were further scaled-up by the representatives of the Tallinn youth council. It can also be considered highly positive that the co-creation process enabled to establish further bridges between the Tallinn youth council and young people in the NEET status who were members of the project's Youth Board – these contacts will be valuable in the next steps, where the council members can further involve the young people in their work.

Based on Tallinn co-creation practice, it can be considered as the best to move forward with the established network of partners – the Tallinn youth council, Tallinn City Government, and the project's Youth Board as additional experts on the youth issues.

6.6 Ethics requirements

Since an important part of co-creation is an evidence-based, experimental and practical approach, it has been necessary to consider the relevant topics related to ethics in advance.

Since the generic approach of youth work has mainly been used in the project, which assumes that the youngsters participate in the activities voluntarily – it means that the participation of young people in project activities did not need to be coordinated with their parents. At the same time, a youth worker known to the young people was involved to ensure the necessary psychological security. Within the framework of UPLIFT project the ethics rules according to the national and EU legislations were followed and necessary permissions from the ethics committee (set up by the UPLIFT project) were obtained in the beginning of the project.

In Estonia, the ethics of youth workers have been established, which was also observed in the case of this project. The following main principles were monitored (Noorsootötaja kutse eetika 2022):

- A youth worker is honest and open about the goals and methods of youth work.

- Any youth worker treats young people equally, treats young people's opinions and worldview with respect and tolerance.
- The youth worker works based on the principle of equal partnership with the young person, the principles of youth work and its organization.
- A youth worker bases his work on the young person, taking into account his opinion, ideas, world view.
- The environment in which youth work is carried out is acceptable to the young person and promotes informal learning.
- The implementation and environment of youth work is safe, high-quality, diverse, innovative and aimed at creating new (additional) values.

6.7 Risk management including the influence of the Corona crisis

The methodology of the process carries risks if the research participants come from the same neighbourhood, from the same community, from the same social background, that may result in limited variability with regard to the relationship between individuals and institutions. In order to avoid that a wide range of gatekeepers should have been contacted to provide access to different vulnerable groups.

The social institutions (municipalities, NGOs) were strongly occupied by handling the immediate effects of the coronavirus pandemic, which is why it was not easy to involve them into the project process that may not bring in tangible benefits for them on the short run. A step by step involvement of the organisations was followed, starting with the most committed ones.

During the coronavirus pandemic the group events were organised under proper health safety provisions – social distancing, using masks, if necessary. This unusual situation also enforced and encourage the participants to use innovative methodologies that helped creating an inspiring environment.

Much of the work was done virtually during the COVID-19 period. Different virtual solutions were applied to keep the project activities going. The situation was handled well during the pandemic. This is due to the fact that in the field of youth work, different virtual environments were already in use before the COVID-19 period.

The following risk factors were also considered besides the Corona pandemic:

- Change of specialists (it was realized to some extent but knowing the network of experts well enabled to overcome the issue);
- Change of priority of the topics;
- Political changes in the country;
- Local elections;

- Directions of youth guarantee development work may not be favourable for the youth field;
- Change of institutional structure in Tallinn City Government (reorganizing the structures). This became a problem for us – during the first year of the project the institutional structure changed; we had to find new partners in the city government and make them familiar with the project; the further problem was related to the issue that the activities of the Tallinn youth council were suspended for a limited time;
- Lack of cross-sectoral cooperation in Tallinn;
- Bureaucracy and paperwork (long decision-making process).

7 Evaluation of the co-creation process

7.1 Evaluation methods

A qualitative approach has been used in the evaluation process. After each meeting, reflective feedback was provided, where each participant was able to express his/her opinion, feeling and experience of the process. Questions that participants have been asked:

- What was meaningful to you about the experience?
- What do you personally take away from here?
- What was most important to you?

In addition, the WP4 project team has also made a continuous analysis of the entire process through discussions.

7.2 Lessons learnt

It was helpful in the process that we had thought through the selection process of theoretical models in advance (e.g. discussion of the situation based on the McKinsey 7S model and the design thinking process). We had a concrete structure of what kind of themes to discuss and where the need for changes is the most important (staff, structure, skills etc.). In the discovery process, young people were widely involved, and we made mappings with active groups in different city districts, and meetings were held in the youth centre.

Together with young people and youth workers, the structure of the virtual youth centre was also designed, during which all collected inputs were also taken into account. We also had discussions with stakeholders about our problem mapping.

Important input from the WP2 and WP3 results was gained (for example, in understanding the challenges with Russian-speaking community members). Based on these results we also invited the following young people to the youth board: persons who had moved to Tallinn from other regions of Estonia, both Russian-speaking young people from Eastern Estonia and young people from Southern Estonia. All these activities helped us to define the problem, set goals and organise meaningful processes. Then we continued the design process with the Youth Board, where various meetings took place. During the meetings, we designed the personas for the co-creation design process based on the information revealed during the mapping process and relying on the experiences of the young people. Each persona had its own path with solution ideas. During the process, meetings were also held with various stakeholders, who also discussed about valuable input into the paths created together with the young people. All this process was successful because it was based on theoretical models and the discussions were structured.

Completing the Youth Board was not as smooth process as expected because the officially accepted youth council in Tallinn was undergoing restructuring in the period 2020-2021.

During this period, we had to find solutions without a youth council representative. We did not consider it justified to form a completely separate new Youth Board if a youth council exists in the municipality (it would have harmed the long-term sustainability of the existing board). We also turned to the city council, but we didn't get a good recommendation from them either. The best solution was to wait for the modification and composition of the new Tallinn youth council. Once that had happened, we could move on more strategically with a stronger representation of young people in our Youth Board. In our opinion, we were successful in creating a diverse group of young people's according to background, gender and nationality.

The success of the whole process can be attributed to the fact that both the leaders of the process and the important contact persons were youth workers, who know the specifics of working with young people and are aware of what is happening in young people's lives in order to schedule meetings and discussions in a way suitable for young people.

This project was effective in its activities, it added the topic of youth with NEET status among the topics discussed by the Tallinn youth council.

Due to the tight schedules, it was difficult to involve different stakeholders in the same meetings at the same time. Therefore, meetings and presentations of results also took place through various meetings. This situation would have been made easier if the project team had specifically included a stable group member from the Tallinn City Government (different representatives from the municipality showed up). However, such an effort was not successful during the project. This is mainly due to the high workload of officials.

In the context of an international project, the point of learning is that local specificities must be taken into account when designing and implementing projects. For example, in the case of Estonia, the creation of a Youth Board is regulated by the Youth Work Act and under the responsibility of local governments according to specific regulations. The creation of additional thematic youth boards should be done in accordance with this process. In this way, the discussions that take place and the solutions that are worked out have a greater impact. The official youth council is also a channel for communicating and co-creation with decision makers. Therefore, in the case of Tallinn, the creation of an additional youth board, with whom the officials are obliged to meet, could have been unclear. The solutions created by young people, decision-makers, researchers and youth workers in this project are aimed at implementation through the official youth council.

8 A Reflexive Policy Agenda

8.1 Towards a Reflexive Policy Agenda

The work within the co-creation process has been somewhat delayed for two main reasons as compared to the original Tallinn action plan. The Covid-19 pandemic related restrictions made it more difficult to engage young people, and especially those with a more vulnerable background (whose participation was less effective via the zoom meetings). The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions did not allow many face-to-face meetings, and several meetings were postponed. The online meetings had a lower number of participants than planned, and in different meetings there was an overrepresentation of more 'active' youth who may not be the ideal spokespersons for NEETs. Setting up the Youth Board for the policy co-creation took longer time than expected (explained earlier).

The analysis of the WP2 revealed that the NEET policy creation mostly takes place at the national level. Therefore, even though we mainly work at the local level, we have transcended the results of our co-creation process to the national level in order to achieve a wider impact (negotiations with the ministries).

During the process we encountered the following problems:

- The activity of developing a 'Chat' (the virtual tool) has not been fully completed as a result of legal restrictions (GDPR)⁷;
- Motivating young people to participate in meetings and co-creation activities was complicated;
- Although young people with a Russian background have often studied in an immersion class, their everyday communication has taken place in a predominantly Russian-speaking environment and therefore their ability to speak the local language (Estonian) is often low. Consequently, the language barrier has had some effect on their input at meetings (we have learned from our experiences, and in the future meetings we plan to let Russian-speakers to express themselves in their own language).

8.2 Policy agenda for the field of NEET youth policy

In this Section, we attempt to bring together the views of the vulnerable young people, practitioners working with young people and other stakeholders in order to outline some of the issues in young people's lives in Tallinn that need to be addressed by youth, other sectoral or cross-sectoral policies. First of all, it is important to emphasise that there was no major contradiction between the young people's and expert's views on what the most important problems are that limit access to services and increase vulnerability among the youngsters, and that would need systemic solutions at the organisational, local or national level. In the

⁷ Who owns the chat.

Reflexive Policy Agenda (RPA) wider problem areas are pointed out that relate to tackling the causes of the NEET status, and the NEET policy. This implies that we do not only focus on those specific goals that we had set for the policy co-creation outcomes (these goals are already discussed extensively in the previous chapters).

Tackling problems related to early school leaving

One of the core problems often leading to the NEET status relates to the educational system and **early school leaving**.

Lack of early detection of young people's problems seems to be one of the major shortcomings in Tallinn schools that leads to early school leaving. Young people spoke in our interviews and during meetings about schools insufficiently addressing (or even ignoring) their learning difficulties, mental and physical, school bullying cases and other serious issues that do not allow young people to thrive in school. The practitioners working with young people, as well as policy makers, were equally concerned that the schools do not have enough personnel to treat each student as an individual and detect students' problems early enough to prevent the growth of chronic mental health issues, with different addictions, maltreatment, bullying and early school leaving as a result (see also Beilmann *et al.* 2022). The lack of support specialists in schools (psychologists, social pedagogues, social workers, etc.) is a problem well recognised by all parties. Unfortunately, there can be no quick solutions as this problem needs systemic solutions at the national level (incl., **increasing the number of school psychologists and other specialists** being trained by the universities and providing motivating salaries for specialists). A somewhat faster solution is to **provide easily accessible training/study materials, programs, and trainings to teachers and other specialists in schools** on students' special needs and on school bullying (e.g., How to recognise that some student has special needs? How to intervene? To whom to turn for help?). That could lead to provision of more individualised learning programs and more flexible learning paths. However, it is also important to recognise that teachers need support for providing such flexibility. **Decreasing the number of students in the classroom (or to hire more assistant teachers) could help to mitigate the problems.** It is not possible to expect from one teacher to provide an individualised program for 24 students in the classroom.

Increasing awareness of career choices and increasing young peoples' ability to choose the speciality (and school)

Another problem, which was prevalent in interviews with young people as well as in workshops and during meetings with the youth board and the target group, was the lack of awareness of different career choices and inability to choose the school and speciality after graduating from the basic school (aged 7-16). Only a small number of vocational education centres in Estonia offer young people, who have failed to continue their studies in regular vocational education programs, an opportunity to take part in such a yearlong program, which provides them information about the different specialities and career choices and, furthermore, through short term practice placements, they can also find out how a certain speciality and work environment

suits them. **Therefore, there is a need for more programs that would support vulnerable young people in tackling the gaps in their previous education and figure out what kind of vocation would be suitable for them.** Of course, such a solution is rather expensive and it probably cannot be offered to very large groups of young people.

A somewhat cheaper solution may be to **enhance career counselling in schools** (particularly in basic schools). Our expert interviews revealed that the career counselling is of rather unstable quality in Tallinn FUA schools (see also Beilmann *et al.* 2022). According to the interviewed specialists, it depends on school administration how much and whether at all career counselling is provided to students. They were concerned that it may often lead to situations, where young people, who would need the counselling the most (e.g., young people from families, who are unwilling or unable to discuss their career choices or teach them how to write a proper CV, for example), are the ones, who miss the professional career counselling. **Youth work specialists suggest gathering different services for young people (incl. career counselling) under one roof into so-called youth houses**, where young person can get a professional and friendly advice (s)he needs without a fear of stigmatisation (see also Beilmann *et al.*, 2022).

Increasing awareness of young people about the existing services and educational choices

The concern that the vulnerable young people may be rather poorly informed about their opportunities in formal and informal education (but also in the labour market) is well illustrated by the fact that young people who were participants in the Youth Board and in the interviews as well as those who took part of the workshops were unaware of the services targeted exactly to people like them. The Estonian youth work sector provides very varied services, activities, projects and programs to young people (many of those are specially focused on vulnerable young people and NEETs in particular), but the young people hardly mentioned any such youth work activities or programs. Therefore, it is crucial to provide young people in vulnerable life situations with information about the different opportunities offered to them by the youth work sector because these services may somewhat compensate the support and attention that they have not received in school and/or at home. The next proposals were made by the youth board and discussed and agreed by other stakeholders to improve the information availability:

- **QR code to the bus station and bus stops to guide young people to important infopages about living, studying and working in Tallinn;**
- The design of a **virtual tool (Chat) in the way that the information can be obtained easily;**
- **Special ‘Tallinn-focused packages’ could developed in different languages (Estonian, Russian, English)** (e.g., funded by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund);

- **Digital commercial signs in public areas for youth about the information on services in Tallinn and about youth work** could be better integrated in mobile youth work.
- **Poster and social media campaigns could be organized by youth workers** so that young people would know about the services and youth work in general.
- **Youth trustees and youth ambassadors** could be set-up in every district who convey information to young people.

For the purpose of developing the virtual tool (Chat)⁸ the following suggestions were made:

- Robotchat should **direct the young person to real human contact as soon as possible to avoid the usual hopeless maze of robot** responses that could cause the young person to give up (max 2-3 clicks or no / yes multiple choice max).
- Young people's **slang words** in their letter as well as obscene expressions must be taken into account, the young person's self-expression may not always be immediately clear and understandable.
- As can be seen from the questions, there are still site-specific questions, so it is necessary to think about the **possibility of choosing a person's place of residence** when making contact.
- The request may be in another language, or the help of **google translate** may be used and this may lead to an **incorrect definition** of the issue.
- **Perform word** analysis with psychologists, i.e. which words should be used to react **sensitively to the system** (e.g. scissors: self-harm or craft? - There may be different approaches).

The above recommendations have already been taken into account when developing the virtual tool.

Improve Estonian language skills for Russian-speaking kids

The vulnerability of Russian-speaking students is a well-known problem in the Estonian education system that was also raised in the WP2 and WP3 results as well as the co-creation process. As this issue needs systemic state-level solutions, we only remark here, that the transition to the Estonian language in Russian-language schools was hotly debated in Estonia in the autumn 2022 and there is a clear political will to make an end to the situation, where young people leave the school without being able to express themselves in the official language of the country.

⁸ A robot that supports young people in NEET status or at risk to find help.

Improving accessibility to the housing market

Concerning the functioning of the housing market and the issues related to young people's difficulties to afford independent housing in Tallinn, housing accessibility issues for young people should be taken more seriously in the political agenda. Many young people referred to the unaffordability issues concerning renting or buying an independent home and starting their housing career. Rental housing below the market rent (i.e., social or municipal housing) offered by local governments is very limited in Tallinn (and no NGO-s are active in providing such service provision). However, **eligibility criteria for such housing should also consider young people with vulnerabilities as target groups**. Today, by national legislation, social housing should be targeted to orphans, disabled people or those with special needs (young people among other groups), but local governments rarely allocate social housing based on socio-economic or age criteria alone (Kährik and Kõre 2013). New municipal housing development programs initiated by the city government of Tallinn and partly financed from the state budget, also considered young specialists as target groups but not those without specialization (*ibid.*). Young people without higher education do also not benefit from the state support programs that help to grant the housing loans to young people – these grants are targeted to specialists with higher education only. In the co-creation process the clear suggestion was to develop **temporary supportive measures for young people who have no living place in Tallinn**.

Local governments should also be more aware of the consequences of allocating tenants of social housing to social housing residential complexes with high concentration of residents with accumulated vulnerabilities. Tenants could be better screened prior to their allocation in order to make sure that young people are not sent to live in an environment that damages their opportunities for accomplishment and development (for example, when a former drug addict is sent back to the social housing apartment-building where (s)he became an addict in the first place, (s)he may be unable to escape the vicious cycle of segregation). This issue relates to the policy objectives of developing and allocating social housing – although it is good and recommended that local governments provide housing below the market rent for certain groups, it is, however, recommended **to review the current strategies when implementing the new programs and selling off social housing units which are located in mixed ownership buildings**. Social housing is recommended to provide the space for step-by-step integration to the society for its customers, who are often in vulnerable situations, without putting more stigma on them or further adding factors leading to the accumulation of disadvantage.

Other suggestions from the co-creation process

- Special programs could be developed by the **mental health association with the aim of increasing emotional well-being**.
- **Increase flexibility of citizen registration in Tallinn** to support access to health services for young people who have recently moved to Tallinn.

- **Special targeted social programs** could be developed by the youth centres, including social skills training programmes.

Some of the input given above is likely to be include in the new Youth Guarantee Estonia action plan.

8.3 Policy agenda to give the youth a permanent voice in policy-making

The setting up of youth councils is regulated by the Youth Work Act in Estonia and the implementation is the responsibility of local governments according to specific regulations. As the local youth councils already have a set legal framework for functioning and as these are long-term bodies in the governance system the Youth Board activities should be aligned with the local youth council activities. In this way, the discussions that take place and the solutions that are worked out have a potential to have a greater impact. The officially set-up youth council is also a channel for communication and co-creation with decision makers. The solutions created by young people, decision-makers, researchers and youth workers in this co-creation process could be further elaborated and negotiated by the Tallinn youth council (with the help of some kind of 'advisory group' of young people should there be a need to involve more specific groups of young people in the discussions and co-creation).

9 Implementation and follow-up of the co-creation process

The implementation of the co-creation process and the Reflexive Policy Agenda is partially manifested in different activities and elaboration of documents and tools as the following table summarises:

Table 3. Tangible results of the co-creation process

Activity	Connections or remarks	Main influence
Creating a virtual chat for young people.	The development of the virtual tool – chat – has been related to the Youth Work Strategy 2035 (Ministry of Education and Research 2021) and the Children and Youth Program implemented by the Education and Youth Board.	The co-creative process made it possible to learn from young people and professionals what are the necessary questions that must be answered through the chat (including the positioning of areas that support young people) and how to create an environment that young people might be interested in using.
Concept and plan of the soft skills training program for young people.	The soft skills training program for young people will be forwarded to the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, which is currently creating virtual training for young people who need a little push to start building their careers. In addition, this activity will be included in the training program of the Association of Estonian Open centres, for which they are trying to find additional funding in order to actually implement it.	The co-creative process made it possible to find out from young people and professionals what are the necessary topics that young people from different backgrounds might need in order to learn more about themselves as well as to learn about educational and work opportunities.
Development of the monitoring tool (Logbook).	All Estonian youth centres can use the Logbook together with the new developments that were added during the project free of charge. The city of Tallinn has made an application for its continued use. At the moment, negotiations are underway as to whether this part can be used by all institutions that work with young people in a NEET situation.	The co-creative process made it possible to learn from young people as well as professionals what are the factors/characteristics, the more informed description and subsequent analysis of which will enable more effective support for young people in the urban area (including developing the service accordingly or taking it into account when supporting).
Reflective policy creation (specific personas and solutions).	Inputs influenced the Youth Guarantee Estonian action plan 2023-2027 coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Research. The input has been used in the	The co-creative process made it possible to learn from young people as well as professionals about the activities and possible

Proposals reaching national strategies that support the subsequent creation or development of activity opportunities for the NEET youth in Tallinn.	creation of a guidelines related to one measure for young people in NEET situation (Cross-sectoral cooperation model of support and services for local authorities in NEET situation).	channels through which to reach the young people or the goals.
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The following outputs have been created so far:

- **Guidance material** (manual and social skills training programme) has been developed for the providers of services to NEETs. The aim of this material is to improve the provision of individualized services and to better coordinate the services (so that they are more in line with the needs and challenges of the NEETs). For this purpose, a so-called 'Guidebook' on the NEETs support system has been created (an electronic tool is created based on the guide)⁹;
- **A Logbook** has been further developed, including better analytical tools and visualization possibilities (to enable the application of a more individualized case management approach). The database includes opinions of young people from Tallinn about the shortcomings/ perceptions of the existing support mechanisms;
- **The electronic platform for mobile youth work** has been prepared (Chat), while its implementation is still ongoing. This platform will be used to reach NEETs and other vulnerable youth. Inputs from the co-creation process (interviews and group sessions) have been very useful when building up this platform. Above all, it provided knowledge of what kind of environment young people are willing to join, how data exchange between specialists and young people could be possible, and which topics should be referred to a specialist immediately instead of the planned response robot.

The policy co-creation within the UPLIFT project has also given important input to the reorganization of the national services for NEETs. A new service model - "Cross-sectoral NEET-status youth support and cooperation model of services for local governments. Description of the future model" – has been tested and validated by the youth. Facilitated by the engagement in the UPLIFT project, the municipality of Tallinn became a central partner in this national level service design process. Hence, the results of local policy co-creation (voices of young people in the Tallinn region) will have a national impact on policy creation and implementation.

⁹ Training materials and the manual for NEET-youth service has been developed. Soft skills training modules developed: 1) communication skills, 2) social competence, 3) self-determination competence. Each module consists of the aim, the outcomes, the technical conditions and the methods list (incl. homework, reflection, follow up activities).

During the process the project team made effort to make sure the young people's voices and ideas have been translated into the policy co-creation, and to secure their involvement in the process. The interviews and group discussions well pinpointed to the current bottlenecks of the system, as well as indicated the possible solutions.

The plan is to move forward with the established network of partners – the Tallinn youth council, Tallinn City Government and other relevant stakeholders, and the project's Youth Board as additional experts on the youth issues. During the co-creation process, the awareness about the work of the Tallinn youth council did increase among the Youth Board, and it is possible that some participants of the Youth Board will also find their way to the youth council themselves. Youth workers can be important contacts here after the end of the project.

10 Recommendations for a successful co-creation process with young people

Based on the experiences during the Tallinn co-creation process, this chapter presents our recommendations for a successful co-creation process with young people. We start with some general recommendation, after which we provide more specific recommendations for the different steps in the co-creation process.

10.1 General recommendations

Background of co-creation:

- **Co-creation begins in the moment when some kind of problem is perceived and when all parties are on an equal footing in finding solutions.**
- Co-creation as collective problem solving is **an organized and guided process** where different parties solve common problems and design new solutions that rely, despite differences, on finding a consensus in jointly undertaken activities. In other words, co-creation is a process involving parties related to a specific need and empowering the people participating in co-creation (Aps and Pedanik 2019).
- Creation needs **joint responsibility** of different parties, which help to notice and use the assets in the community.
- Co-creation is an experimental, practical and time-consuming process, where there is a **horizontal cooperation** between the parties related to the problem that needs to be solved in order to achieve the agreed goal.
- The co-creative process helps to keep different parties **in a common information field and reinforce each other.**
- As a result of the process, it was observed that once a consensual solution was found, the practice of it allowed all parties to **create new practices** compared to the past.
- In addition to co-creation, **co-production was taken into account** as the basic principle of service provision. Co-production is a joint creation of the service provider and the service recipient, which develops the service precisely based on the needs of the person using the service (Osborn 2018).

General suggestions:

- Know your young people who have been invited to think along. Show gratitude!
- Articulate your needs!
- Think in which direction you are moving and what solution you are looking for!
- Put the first thought on paper and think about whether it is feasible!
- If possible, test (experiment or talk about it e.g. with your circle of friends) it and make the necessary corrections!
- Test again and gather feedback from participants!

10.2 Preparation of the co-creation process

General suggestions:

- **Shared responsibility** and a **sense of ownership is important**, which promotes smoother implementation of visions.
- Make it clear to yourself **what are the principles of co-creation** and what must be taken into account in **group dynamics depending on this approach**. For example, who is at the table and who we may miss, to what extent the participants can have a say, how the equal role of the participants in the process is ensured, etc.
- Think about which methods contribute to the emergence of group dynamics, how you can learn from each other, what are the different tools, **so that even the most modest young people can speak or their voice is heard**.
- The more diverse the group, the **more views come to the table**. The small size of the group allows you to move forward faster, but a larger group brings depth and detail.
- If possible, include a **neutral process manager**, this avoids the situation that the process is pressured from one point of view.
- Use **youth-friendly environments** and allow them not to turn on their picture at first, for example in a virtual meeting. This picture will eventually appear!
- Use **youth-friendly approaches, games and interactivity!** Include youth workers if necessary!
- An important part of co-creation is to understand **what problem is being solved**. If this is not clear, it may happen that each party solves their own problem and a result may not be reached.
- Think about what solution is being sought, either from the young person's **point of view or from the system's point of view**. From the point of view of the service/activity to be created, there is a need to describe it from both points of view, thus reducing subsequent barriers to its implementation.
- In the creation of youth-related activities, it is also important to understand **how to reach the corresponding activity/service later**. Young people may need a service but may not have the skills or knowledge to get it. Therefore, an important part is to map **where young people move and which channels they use**.
- An activity/service completed through co-creation will **never be completed**. It is important to constantly receive feedback and develop it as needed. Therefore, it is important that the created activity has finally an owner who takes responsibility for it.

10.3 Setting up a Youth Board

General suggestions:

- If there is an officially recognized youth council in the city then the Youth Board related to NEET youth should be created within the structural frame of setting-up youth councils.

- Issues related to city planning should be resolved by an official youth council, and if they concern a specific target group, e.g. NEET youth, round tables should be implemented to discuss these issues with the target group (or an 'advisory group' of young people could be created among the policy target group who can be involved in co-creation). In its work, the youth council must handle all issues related to city planning in such a way that they are viewed according to different target groups. Youth workers should also be involved in these discussions as supportive companions for young people with NEET status.

10.4 Managing the co-creation process

General suggestions:

- If the goal of the co-creation is to influence a certain field or topic, one needs to carry out mapping what are the **existing documents related to the topic, which laws currently regulate it** and find out which institutions are related to them. This allows **understanding which parties need to be reached and what possibly can be done** (to avoid unrealistic solutions).
- The premise of co-creation is that all parties are immediately behind the same table, and they **must let go of their position**. This helps to avoid biasing the result from a single institution's point of view.
- Already during the process of co-creation, it is necessary to consider that **the promises and agreed solutions are to be fulfilled**. Otherwise, it may happen that young people have a negative experience and they do not want to be involved again the next time. Putting the co-creation results into practice is often a question of finances.
- From the point of view of stability and sustainability, it is **important that the activities of the group continue**, therefore it is important that already during the process it is monitored that the group **includes specialists** who, for example, **can take over** the leading role when the researchers leave the group. For this, it is important to **build trust between young people and the professionals involved**.

10.5 Towards a Reflexive Policy Agenda and follow-up of reflexive policy-making

The plan is to move forward with the established network of parties – the Tallinn youth council, Tallinn City Government and other relevant stakeholders, and also to continue with the Youth Board activities (to make sure the solutions will be worked out on the most valuable way to support the NEETs.) The results of the local policy co-creation (voices of young people in the Tallinn region) should have a stronger national impact on policy creation and implementation in the future. The national conference will be held in spring 2023 where the roundtables will be organized to target different areas of issues. Also, the state-level negotiations will be continued based on cooperation with specific public authorities and taking part of different

policy making processes (for example when designing state-level development plans and their implementation programmes, and other initiatives).

During the process the project team has made their effort to make sure the young people's voices and ideas have been included into the policy co-creation, and to secure their involvement in the process. This kind of encouragement of the policy target groups to participate in the policy-making will continue in the future and the current bottlenecks in the system should be paid a critical attention.

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