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COOPOWER - Catalogue of youth employment practices based on intersectoral cooperation

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1. Introduction

Youth unemployment and labour-market exclusion remain persistent challenges across the Danube Region, disproportionately affecting young people facing socio-economic disadvantage, low educational attainment, territorial isolation, migration backgrounds, disability, or psychosocial vulnerabilities. While most countries have developed dedicated youth employment policies and activation measures, their impact is often limited by fragmented service delivery, insufficient coordination between institutions, and weak linkages between education, employment, social services and employers. As a result, many vulnerable young people fall through the cracks of existing systems and fail to transition successfully into sustainable employment.

Evidence from across the region demonstrates that no single sector can address youth labour-market exclusion in isolation. Effective responses require intersectoral cooperation that brings together public authorities, education and training providers, employment services, social and youth services, civil society organisations and the private sector. Such cooperation enables holistic support pathways that combine skills development, psychosocial assistance, mentoring, work-based learning and employer engagement, tailored to the diverse needs of young people aged 15–30.

The COOPOWER – “Strengthening cooperative employment practices for the empowerment of vulnerable youth” project responds to this need by systematically identifying, analysing and promoting best practices of intersectoral cooperation in youth employment across the Danube Region. Implemented within the framework of the Interreg Danube Region Programme and aligned with Specific Objective 3.1, the project fosters transnational learning and knowledge exchange among partners, with the aim of improving the accessibility, inclusiveness and effectiveness of employment-related support for vulnerable youth.

This Catalogue of Youth Employment Practices Based on Intersectoral Cooperation has been developed within the framework of Activity 1.2 of the COOPOWER project and represents one of the project’s key knowledge-building outputs.

It features a curated selection of 16 best practices identified by COOPOWER partners across eight countries of the Danube Region. The practices were chosen through a joint partner peer-review of the COOPOWER Good Practice Database (A.1.2, D.1.2.1) and reflect a shared process of collaboration, collective expertise, and evidence-based assessment.

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The COOPOWER logo features a stylized red wavy line above the word "COOPOWER" in a bold, sans-serif font.

The practices reflect diverse national, institutional and socio-economic contexts, yet share common characteristics: strong cross-sectoral collaboration, a focus on vulnerable target groups, innovative delivery models, and demonstrable outcomes in terms of skills development, employability and social inclusion.

The catalogue serves three main purposes:

- to document and systematise existing intersectoral youth employment practices in the Danube Region;
- to highlight key success factors, governance arrangements and implementation mechanisms that enable effective cooperation;
- to provide inspiration and practical guidance for policymakers, practitioners and organisations seeking to design or strengthen similar initiatives at local, regional or national level.

By bringing together these experiences, the catalogue contributes to a shared understanding of how intersectoral cooperation can be operationalised in practice and how it can support more inclusive, resilient and youth-centred employment systems across the region.

2. Comparative Analysis

2.1. Typology of Cooperation Models

To ensure analytical clarity and cross-country comparability, this section classifies the reviewed practices according to their dominant governance and implementation logic. The aim is to understand how institutional leadership structures influence effectiveness, sustainability, and transferability of youth employment interventions across the Danube Region. Practices are grouped according to their dominant governance and implementation logic, defined by the actor that leads coordination, management, and service delivery.

Based on this typology, five governance models are distinguished:

- State-led;
- NGO-led;
- Social enterprise;
- Regional hub or network;
- Education-integrated.

Each reflects different institutional capacities, strengths, limitations, and implications for sustainability and transferability.

State-led:

State-led models are typically embedded within public policy frameworks and institutional systems, which allows for broader territorial coverage, formal coordination across sectors, and greater long-term stability. Their strength lies in scale, legitimacy, and integration with employment, education, and social protection systems. However, these models may face lower flexibility and slower adaptation compared to community-based initiatives, often depending on administrative procedures and political priorities.

Practices:

- Youth Guarantee (Serbia);
- International Youth Center – Burgas (Bulgaria);
- Integrated services for vulnerable groups (Romania);
- SPACE Youth Centres (Slovakia);
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme for Youth (Serbia);

- Dual Education (Slovakia).

NGO-led:

NGO-led initiatives demonstrate high flexibility, strong local embeddedness, and the ability to tailor support to specific vulnerable groups through personalised and trust-based approaches such as mentoring, tutoring, and fieldwork. They often pioneer innovative solutions and reach youth who remain outside formal systems. At the same time, their sustainability frequently depends on short-term project funding or donor grants, which may limit continuity and scaling without stronger institutional support.

Practices:

- Tanoda Platform (Hungary);
- Upskill Now! (Ukraine);
- Mentor the Young – Burgas (Bulgaria);
- Bootcamps for Schools (Ukraine);
- POMA – Podpora mladistvých (Czech Republic);
- Kudy kam III (Czech Republic).

Social enterprise:

Social enterprise models combine social impact goals with entrepreneurial and revenue-generating activities, reducing reliance on grants and enabling more sustainable, long-term operations. Their hybrid structure often strengthens partnerships with the private sector and improves labour-market relevance. At the same time, balancing financial viability with social inclusion objectives can present strategic and operational challenges, particularly when serving highly vulnerable groups.

Practices: Promprylad.Renovation (Ukraine), Sindbad (Austria).

Regional hub / network:

Regional hub or network models operate primarily as coordination and competence platforms rather than direct service providers. Their added value lies in system-level impact: strengthening quality standards, professional development, knowledge exchange, and cooperation among multiple local actors. Such structures enhance coherence and capacity across a territory, although their outcomes are often indirect and dependent on the effectiveness of partner organisations.

Practice: bOJA – bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit (Austria).

Education-integrated:

Education-integrated approaches embed employability and skills development directly into formal learning pathways, creating early and structured links between education and the labour market. This integration facilitates prevention of NEET status and supports smoother school-to-work transitions. These models benefit from institutional stability and regular access to youth populations, though they may have limited reach beyond students already engaged in the formal education system.

Practice: Innovate and Do Business (Slovakia).

2.2. Key Cross-Country Insights

The comparative review of youth employment practices across the Danube Region demonstrates that effective interventions rarely rely on single-sector solutions. Instead, the most impactful initiatives combine education, employment, social support, and community engagement within integrated and cooperative frameworks. Across countries and institutional contexts, several consistent patterns emerge regarding what works best and under which conditions programmes achieve sustainable results.

What works best:

The strongest outcomes are observed in models that provide holistic and continuous support pathways rather than isolated services. Initiatives that combine skills training with mentoring, psychosocial support, career guidance, and direct labour-market exposure show higher levels of retention, completion, and employment placement. Youth facing multiple disadvantages often require more than technical training; they benefit from coordinated support that addresses motivation, confidence, and life skills alongside employability.

Programmes that offer practical, experience-based learning – such as internships, dual education, project-based learning, or real employer assignments – demonstrate particularly strong labour-market alignment. Early exposure to workplaces helps young people develop realistic expectations, professional behaviour, and networks that facilitate smoother transitions to employment.

Recurring success factors:

Several enabling factors consistently appear across diverse national contexts:

- intersectoral cooperation between education providers, employment services, NGOs, and employers;
- personalised and flexible service delivery;
- long-term engagement rather than one-off interventions;
- trust-based relationships with youth;

- clear local ownership and coordination.

These elements contribute to higher accessibility for vulnerable groups and greater responsiveness to local labour-market needs.

Role of employers:

Employers play a critical role in bridging the gap between training and employment. Their involvement is most effective when they act not only as end-recruiters but as active partners in programme design and delivery. Contributions such as internships, mentoring, workplace training, curriculum co-design, and recruitment pathways significantly increase the relevance and credibility of interventions.

Where employers are structurally embedded – for example through dual education systems or long-term corporate partnerships – employment outcomes tend to be more stable and predictable. In contrast, weak or ad-hoc employer engagement often results in skills mismatches and limited job placement.

Role of mentoring:

Mentoring emerges as one of the most consistently effective tools across practice types. Individual or small-group mentoring supports motivation, goal-setting, and self-confidence, particularly for youth with limited family or social capital. Mentors often act as trusted intermediaries between young people and institutions, helping them navigate education, training, and employment systems.

Role of stable funding:

Financial stability strongly influences programme sustainability and impact. Practices supported by multi-annual or institutional funding demonstrate greater continuity, staff retention, and strategic planning capacity. In contrast, short-term project funding frequently leads to interruptions, loss of expertise, and difficulties in scaling successful pilots.

Hybrid funding models – combining public budgets, donor support, and earned revenue – appear particularly promising, as they reduce dependence on a single source while enabling long-term operations.

Role of local embeddedness:

Local embeddedness is a defining feature of many successful initiatives. Programs that are rooted in communities, maintain close cooperation with schools, municipalities, and local employers, and adapt services to territorial realities show stronger outreach and trust among youth. Proximity enables faster identification of needs and more tailored responses.

This suggests that while national frameworks provide stability and scale, implementation effectiveness often depends on locally anchored delivery structures.

2.3. Common Structural Gaps

This section identifies the key gaps emerging from the comparative analysis of selected best practices. Its purpose is to highlight the structural limitations that hinder the long-term impact, scalability, and inclusiveness of youth employment interventions across the Danube Region, and to outline areas that require strategic improvement at policy and institutional levels.

Short-term and unstable funding:

One of the most frequently observed constraints is the prevalence of short-term, project-based funding. Many initiatives operate within limited funding cycles, which restricts long-term strategic planning, continuity of services, and staff retention. When funding periods end, programs are often interrupted or discontinued, even when they demonstrate positive results. This disrupts institutional learning, weakens trust among beneficiaries, and prevents the consolidation of successful models into permanent and systemic solutions.

Dependence on grants and donor priorities:

A related challenge is the strong dependence of many NGO-led initiatives on external donors or EU programmes. While grants enable innovation, they may also create instability and misalignment with local needs. Activities are sometimes shaped by donor priorities, reporting requirements, or short funding windows rather than long-term community strategies. This dependency reduces organisational autonomy and limits the institutionalisation of successful practices within public systems.

Difficulties in reaching inactive or disengaged youth:

Many initiatives struggle to engage the most vulnerable and inactive young people, particularly those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), or those facing psychosocial challenges. Traditional outreach methods often fail to reach youth who distrust institutions or lack motivation. Without proactive, community-based, or peer-led outreach, programmes tend to attract already motivated participants, thereby reinforcing inequalities instead of reducing them.

Narrow career orientation and limited labour-market exposure:

In several contexts, young people make educational or career choices based on limited information and narrow professional horizons. Weak links between schools and employers restrict awareness of diverse career pathways, emerging sectors, and practical skill requirements. As a result, mismatches between qualifications and labour-market demand persist. Insufficient career guidance and real-world exposure contribute to early drop-out, repeated transitions, or underemployment.

Overall gaps:

Taken together, these structural weaknesses highlight the need for more systemic, coordinated, and sustainable approaches. Addressing youth employment effectively requires stable funding frameworks, integrated services, stronger employer involvement, and territorially balanced delivery models that ensure vulnerable youth in disadvantaged regions of partner countries are not left behind.

3. Transferability & Adaptability Framework

3.1. Transferability Criteria

Based on the comparative analysis of 16 practices across the Danube Region, five key criteria have been identified that determine whether a practice can be effectively adapted and sustainably implemented in a different institutional and socio-economic environment.

Institutional Readiness:

Institutional readiness refers to the administrative, organisational, and governance capacity to implement coordinated youth employment measures.

Practices such as Youth Guarantee (Serbia), Dual Education (Slovakia), and SPACE Youth Centres (Slovakia) show that transfer is most feasible where:

- Clear institutional mandates exist;
- Roles between ministries, municipalities and service providers are defined;
- Coordination mechanisms are formalised;
- Monitoring systems are in place.

Decentralised models (e.g. Tanoda Platform, Promprylad, Mentor the Young) additionally require strong local implementers with project management capacity and partnership experience.

Where institutions are fragmented or cooperation remains informal, transfer risks include duplication, weak coordination and unsustainable implementation. A minimum level of governance stability and cross-sector collaboration is therefore a prerequisite for effective adaptation.

Funding Environment:

The funding environment strongly influences both scalability and long-term viability. The analysed practices rely on four main models:

- Public/state-funded systemic programmes (Youth Guarantee, Dual Education);
- EU co-financed schemes (Tanoda Platform, POMA, Innovate and Do Business);
- Donor-based projects (Upskill Now!, Integrated Services – Romania);
- Hybrid/social business models (Promprylad, Sindbad).

Transfer potential is highest when:

- Funding is institutionalised within public budgets;
- Multi-annual financing is available;
- Private-sector co-funding exists;
- Revenue-generating elements support sustainability.

Practices dependent solely on short-term grants face higher replication risks unless stable domestic co-financing mechanisms are introduced. Assessing access to EU funds, national programmes, donor ecosystems or impact investment is therefore essential before transfer.

Labour Market Conditions:

Labour market dynamics significantly shape adaptability. Employer-driven models such as Dual Education, Youth Guarantee, Sindbad and Upskill Now! depend on:

- Active employer participation;
- Demand-driven training systems;
- Availability of internships or apprenticeships;
- Sectoral skills alignment.

In regions with weak private-sector engagement, these models may require phased adaptation. For example, focusing first on skills development, mentoring, or entrepreneurship before large-scale employer integration.

Conversely, regions facing labour shortages, economic transition or reconstruction (e.g. digitalisation, post-crisis recovery contexts) create favourable conditions for rapid upskilling and school-to-work transition programmes.

Key factors include employer density, SME capacity, youth unemployment levels, and the strength of vocational education systems.

Stakeholder Ecosystem:

A functioning multi-actor ecosystem is central to intersectoral practices. The most transferable models operate within structured cooperation networks involving:

- Public authorities;
- Educational institutions;
- NGOs and youth organisations;
- Employers and business associations;
- Social and mental health services.

Practices such as Promprylad, SPACE Youth Centres and bOJA demonstrate that anchor institutions or coordinating bodies significantly increase stability and coherence.

Transfer is more likely where:

- Trust-based cooperation already exists,
- Civil society has operational capacity,
- Local partners can assume ownership,
- Networks can be mobilised quickly;
- In fragmented systems, ecosystem-building may need to precede programme replication.

Policy Alignment and Operational Flexibility:

Taken together, these structural weaknesses highlight the need for more systemic and sustainable approaches. Addressing youth employment requires stable funding, integrated services, stronger employer engagement, balanced territorial delivery for vulnerable youth in disadvantaged regions of partner countries, and broader education system reforms. Transferability increases when practices align with national or regional policy priorities, including employment, social inclusion, education reforms, and regional development.

Systemic models embedded in legislation (e.g. Dual Education) demonstrate higher sustainability and clearer scaling pathways. At the same time, operational flexibility is crucial. Locally embedded initiatives such as Tanoda Platform, SPACE Youth Centres, and Promprylad show that adaptable delivery mechanisms — responsive to territorial, socio-economic and cultural contexts — significantly enhance transfer success.

3.2. Conditions & Risks

This section outlines the key factors that support successful implementation, alongside the main risks that could hinder outcomes, helping ensure informed planning, adaptive management, and resilient programme design.

Conditions (enabling factors for successful replication):

Minimum institutional capacity:

A functioning institutional backbone is required to coordinate stakeholders, manage partnerships, and ensure service continuity. This may take the form of a public authority, a strong NGO, or a regional agency with operational and administrative capacity. Examples:

- Youth Guarantee (Serbia) relies on coordinated action of ministries and local employment offices;
- SPACE Youth Centres (Slovakia) are operated by the regional government with professional staff and standardized procedures;
- bOJA (Austria) functions as a national competence and coordination centre supporting local providers.

Baseline and predictable funding:

Stable multi-annual funding is essential to move beyond pilot or short-term projects and maintain staff, infrastructure, and partnerships. Examples:

- Dual Education (Slovakia) is embedded in the national education budget with employer co-investment;
- International Youth Center – Burgas combines EEA grants with municipal and service-based income;
- Promprylad.Renovation uses a mixed model (impact investment + commercial revenue + donors) to ensure sustainability.

Local partnerships and ecosystem engagement:

Effective practices depend on cooperation between schools, employment services, NGOs, municipalities, and employers to provide holistic support pathways. Examples:

- Upskill Now! partners directly with companies for internships and placements;-
- Tanoda Platform connects NGOs with schools and social services;

- Integrated services for vulnerable groups (Romania) combines social assistance, training, and employment mediation.

Employer involvement and labour-market relevance:

Active participation of employers increases the transition to jobs and ensures that training reflects real demand. Examples:

- Sindbad cooperates with 26+ companies providing mentors and exposure to workplaces;
- Dual Education formalizes workplace training contracts;
- Innovate and Do Business links students with firms through tours and mentoring.

Qualified human resources (mentors, youth workers, counsellors):

Skilled professionals and volunteers are critical for individualized and trust-based support. Examples:

- Mentor the Young (Burgas) depends on volunteer mentors;
- POMA provides case managers and tutors;
- Mental Health Programme (Serbia) trains educators and counsellors.

Physical or accessible service spaces (offline/online):

Safe, youth-friendly spaces or hybrid delivery models improve outreach, especially in rural or vulnerable settings. Examples:

- Promprylad provides a multifunctional hub;
- SPACE operates walk-in centres across towns;
- Upskill Now! and Bootcamps for Schools use hybrid/online access.

Risks:

Weak or disengaged private sector:

Limited employer participation reduces opportunities for internships, mentoring, and employment outcomes. Risk illustrated by contrast: models like Sindbad or Dual Education succeed largely due to strong company engagement; without such partners, replication would be significantly weaker.

Policy instability or administrative changes:

Frequent policy shifts, changing priorities, or bureaucratic delays may interrupt implementation and undermine trust. Example:

- State-led systems such as Youth Guarantee or Dual Education depend heavily on consistent governmental commitment and regulation.

Short-term or project-based financing dependence:

Reliance on grants may lead to service discontinuity, staff turnover, and loss of expertise once funding cycles end. Example:

- Tanoda Platform and several NGO-led projects operate mainly through 2–3 year EU project grants.

Human resource burnout or volunteer dependency:

Over-reliance on volunteers or small teams may threaten continuity and quality. Example:

- Mentorship-based models (Mentor the Young, Sindbad) depend heavily on sustained volunteer engagement.

3.3. Transfer Matrix(Comparative Table)

No	Practice	Country	Governance model	Funding model	Target group	Transfer potential	Key conditions
1.	bOJA - bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit	Austria	National association/competence centre	Federal Chancellery public funding	Youth generally	Medium-High – system/standards model transferable institutionally	Government recognition; national coordination role
2.	Bootcamps for Schools	Ukraine	NGO, schools and private mentors	NGO/donor funded grants	Rural/remote students, IDPs	High – short bootcamp and grants replicable regionally	School buy-in; trainers; seed funding
3.	Dual Education	Slovakia	State-regulated VET system, employers and schools	Public education budget and employer co-investment	VET students	High at system level; requires strong employer base	High at system level; requires strong employer base
4.	Innovate and Do Business (Inovuj a podnikaj)	Slovakia	Regional innovation centre, schools, firms	EU co-financing and free learning resources	Rural secondary students	High – elective course and mentor/firm tours replicable	Teacher training; regional companies; curriculum

5.	Integrated services for vulnerable groups – a bridge for the development of local communities	Romania	Public social services and NGO partnership	EEA/Norway Grants	Low-educated, disabled, minorities, rural	Medium – complex multi-service model, resource intensive	Interagency coordination; social service infrastructure
6.	International youth center – Burgas, Младежки международен център - Бургас	Bulgaria	Municipality-led centre with NGO/international partners	EEA Grants, mixed funding model	Vulnerable youth, minorities, rural, disadvantaged	Medium-High – transferable as municipal youth hub	Municipal commitment; facility; trained youth workers
7.	Kudy kam III	Czech Republic	Local NGO and Local Action Group	ESF and state budget	Socially excluded youth	Medium-High – outreach/fieldwork model transferable locally	Field workers; community trust; flexible support
8.	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme for Youth in Serbia	Serbia	National inter-ministerial policy and UNICEF	Government, UNICEF and Norway	Youth with mental health challenges	Medium-High – scalable with health/education integration	Cross-ministry coordination; stigma reduction; trained counsellors
9.	Mentor the Young – Burgas Mentorship Program	Bulgaria	NGO/volunteer mentorship model	Donations, grants and pro bono mentors	Talented youth from disadvantaged backgrounds	Very high – low-cost mentorship easily adaptable	Mentor pool; coordination; safeguarding

10.	POMA – Podpora mladistvých (Youth support program)	Czech Republic	NGO service with municipal/EU cooperation	EU co-financing and scholarships	Socially excluded/low-income youth	High – individualized counselling model scalable	Case managers; tutoring volunteers; scholarships
11.	Promprylad.Renovation	Ukraine	Social enterprise / innovation hub	Impact investment, donors and commercial revenue	Rural, IDPs, low-income, young entrepreneurs	High – hub-based regeneration and education model replicable in cities	Physical space; mixed revenue; private investors; local ecosystem
12.	Sindbad	Austria	Social business and corporate mentoring	Donations and generating part of its income through services	Students in transition to work	Very high – structured mentoring + corporate engagement	Volunteer mentors; company network; coordination
13.	SPACE Youth Centres	Slovakia	Region-run network of youth centres	Public (regional) funding with EU co-financing	Youth at risk of NEET	High – standardised “one-stop shop” hub network	Regional budget; trained staff; multi-town coverage
14.	Tanoda Platform	Hungary	State-designed, NGO-implemented (decentralised CSO delivery)	EU funds (primarily ESF, Human Resources Development Programme)	Roma youth, low-income, rural, risk of early school leaving	High – modular afterschool/community model easily replicable via NGOs	Stable public/EU funds; local NGOs; school & social service cooperation

15.	Upskill Now!	Ukraine	University and social enterprise partnership with employers	International donors , private sector and scholarships	Low-educated, IDPs, women, displaced youth	High – short intensive courses + employer linkage scalable nationally	Employer partnerships; labour-market analysis; hybrid access
16.	Youth Guarantee	Serbia	State-led employment policy (ministry and PES)	Government budget and employer/partner contributions	Unemployed youth, low-educated, rural	High at policy level; requires institutional capacity	Strong PES; employer network; coordinated services

4. Best Practices

This section presents 16 selected best practices from 8 countries in the Danube Region. Each practice is described in a common structure to ensure comparability.

4.1. bOJA - bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit

Country: Austria

Type of best practice: Association

Type of vulnerable youth: Youth generally

Area of best practice: National

Main implementer of best practice: Verein bOJA

Website: <https://www.boja.at/>

Funding/financial model

The financing of bOJA is largely provided by the Federal Chancellery (section Family and Youth) as part of the official youth policy framework.

Other institutions involved

The organization is a member of various networks and organizations, including those focused on participation, poverty reduction, youth clubs, children's rights, and social work. It also has official partnerships with institutions related to climate action and health literacy.

Context of best practice

The bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit (bOJA) was founded to strengthen and professionalise open youth work in Austria. It functions as a national competence centre, service and networking hub, and a platform for knowledge exchange. Its main aims are to advocate for open youth work, develop strategic concepts, promote cooperation, and establish quality standards.

bOJA responds to the increasing complexity of challenges faced by young people, such as inequality, exclusion, digitalisation, and political disconnection. While some young people grow up in supportive environments, others lack accessible spaces for participation, self-development, and non-formal education. Open youth work offers such spaces, but before bOJA was established, stronger national coordination, quality assurance, and policy recognition were needed.

The organisation's motivation is to secure equal opportunities and participation rights for all young people, regardless of background. By acting as a national service, competence, and advocacy

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centre, bOJA works to anchor open youth work within youth policy, strengthen its visibility and impact, and support professional development. Its target groups operate on two levels: directly, youth workers, organisations, and policymakers; indirectly, young people aged roughly 12–25 participating in open youth work settings such as youth centres, street work, and mobile youth work, particularly those with limited access to structured educational opportunities.

Activities

bOJA's activities aim to strengthen, professionalise, and increase the visibility of open youth work (OJA) in Austria. It lobbies for the field and its objectives, develops and disseminates quality criteria, and supports organisations in applying them through guidelines, reflection and evaluation tools, and a quality label system that supports recognition and funding.

The organisation provides further education, workshops, and conferences to help youth workers address current challenges and develop new methods. bOJA represents the interests of open youth work at national and European levels, cooperating with ministries, social partners, and networks to promote recognition of OJA as a key field of youth policy and to secure sustainable structures and funding.

bOJA also serves as a networking hub, connecting organisations, practitioners, and researchers across Austria through networking events, study visits, and European exchanges. In addition, it initiates and coordinates pilot projects focused on participation, democracy, inclusion, digital youth work, and sustainability, developing innovative approaches and transferable models. As a founding member of the European network POYWE, bOJA contributes to these efforts at the European level.

Why should it be considered a best practice

bOJA provides a nationally anchored, professional, and sustainable framework for supporting open youth work. Its strength lies in combining quality development, professional training, and advocacy with practical support for local youth organisations, bridging the gap between grassroots practice and national policy.

In recent years, it has published several publications and practical tools for professionals and developed a documentation database.



4.2. Bootcamps for

Schools

Country: Ukraine

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Type of best practice: Project

Type of vulnerable youth: Youth from remote or rural areas, Youth with limited access to modern education

Area of best practice: Regional - Kmlenytskyi region

Main implementer of best practice: Platform for Social Change

Website

<https://social-change.com.ua/en/rozpochynayemo-seriyu-butkempiv-dlya-shkil-hmelnytskoyi-oblasti/>

Funding/financial model: Funded by Platform for Social Change

Other institutions involved

Local schools of Khmelnytskyi region, Teachers and educational staff, Private sector experts (mentors, trainers)

Context of best practice

In Khmelnytskyi region, many schools — particularly in rural communities and those hosting IDPs — face serious resource gaps. Limited access to modern education, extracurricular activities, and digital tools leaves students at risk of exclusion. The war has deepened these challenges, with displaced youth needing both academic and emotional support. The Bootcamps program addresses this by combining intensive skills training, mentorship, and mental health support, helping students and teachers co-create projects that improve their schools and communities

Activities

- Educational Bootcamps: Intensive learning experiences designed to equip students and educators with the knowledge and tools to drive meaningful change in their schools and communities.
- Soft Skills Development: Focus on essential 21st-century skills such as teamwork, leadership, effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.
- Mental Health Support: Integrated sessions and resources aimed at promoting emotional well-being, resilience, and a supportive school environment.
- Community Project Co-Creation: Collaborative project development where students and teachers work together to design and implement impactful initiatives that address local challenges.

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- Grants for High Engagement: Schools demonstrating the highest levels of participation and engagement receive grants to bring their co-created projects to life and scale their impact.

Why should it be considered a best practice

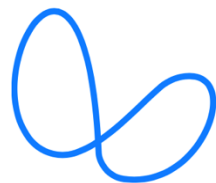
Youth empowerment: equips vulnerable youth with 21st-century skills that are not part of the regular school curriculum.

Inclusivity: engages schools from rural and remote areas, as well as those with IDP students.

Practical outcomes: financial support and mentorship ensure that ideas are implemented, not just theoretical.

Holistic approach: combines education, community engagement, and mental health support.

Scalability: the model can be replicated in other Ukrainian regions facing similar challenges



Platform for
Social
Change

4.3. Dual Education

Country: Slovakia

Type of best practice: Policy measure

Type of vulnerable youth: Secondary VET students aged 15+ whose skills need to be aligned with employer needs (reducing skills gaps).

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Area of best practice: National

Main implementer of best practice

State Institute of Vocational Education (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania – SIOV), in cooperation with employers and VET schools.

Website

<https://siov.sk/vzdelavanie/dualne-vzdelavanie/uvod-dualne-vzdelavanie/>

<https://www.minedu.sk/system-dualneho-vzdelavania/>

<https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/61/>

Funding/financial model

The system is publicly funded at the national level as a state policy measure financed from the education budget, with employer co-funding. Employers co-invest by providing workplace training, mentors, and stipends, while the state grant offsets part of these costs.

Operates as a regulated national system under Act No. 61/2015: schools deliver the school-based component and employers must be materially, professionally and personnel-wise prepared to provide practical training at the workplace (implying company-side provision of training capacity/resources).

Other institutions involved

Employers; secondary vocational schools (SOŠ); Employers' Council for VET (Rada zamestnávateľov pre OVP)

Context of best practice

Slovakia's Dual Education System (DES) links school studies with paid in-company practice based on a training contract. It is a nationally regulated VET model introduced on September 1st 2015 by Act No. 61/2015. It creates a formal partnership between the student and the employer, combining school-based learning with in-company practical training under a dual/training contract. The Ministry of Education frames the DES as a pathway available since the 2015/16 school year to increase students' employability and better align VET outcomes with labour-market needs. Implementation is nationwide through cooperating VET schools and participating employers, with employer-side coordination provided by the Employers' Council for VET (RZOVP). Key legal procedures (e.g., publication of opportunities once a dual agreement is concluded) are specified directly in the Act.

Activities

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- Training/dual contract between student, school and employer (student studies at school and trains at the employer)
- Work-based learning on company premises while employer provides the practical training environment.
- School-employer cooperation on recruitment and programme delivery (schools maintain active cooperation with lower-secondary schools for intake).

Why should it be considered a best practice

It represents intersectoral cooperation (school-employer-state) addressing skills gaps and reduces NEET risk after graduation. This model may be transferable across sectors/regions.



4.4. Innovate and Do Business (Inovuj a podnikaj)

Country: Slovakia

Type of best practice: Initiative

Type of vulnerable youth: Youth from remote or rural areas, Secondary-school students (approx. 15–19) whose access to mentors, firms and innovation opportunities is typically limited outside major cities.

Area of best practice: Regional – Košice region

Main implementer of best practice: Innovation Center of the Košice Region (ICKK)

Website

<https://ickk.sk/2023/10/26/inovuj-a-podnikaj-novy-predmet-na-strednych-skolach/>

https://ickk.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Startup-report-25_singlepage-preview.pdf?

Funding/financial model

The programme is co-financed by the European Union under the Programme Slovakia framework. Key learning resources are provided free of charge to participating students, including the programme's e-learning component available to all enrolled schools.

Other institutions involved

- Košice Self-Governing Region (KSK) – regional support/endorsement
- Secondary schools (pilot cohort: 16 schools in the Košice Region).
- Regional companies & mentors (talks, site visits, mentoring via Business/Biznis Tours)

Context of best practice

The program responds to the need for entrepreneurial, innovative and presentation skills among secondary-school students and for stronger school-to-practice links. ICKK and regional partners brought a new elective course into schools, combining classroom learning with visits to firms/universities, mentoring and a student innovation challenge. The aim is to help students identify problems, test ideas and gain real-world exposure while still at school.

Activities

The programme delivers a year-long elective subject at participating secondary schools, guiding students from problem discovery and idea validation through teamwork to pitching, using both classical and interactive teaching formats. Led by ICKK, the curriculum is anchored in practice through Business/University Tours -curated visits to companies, universities, and innovation actors - organised in cooperation with regional partners.

Schools apply online, receive teacher training at the start of the year, quarterly online upskilling, and a dedicated mentor. Students develop their own ideas into projects, supported by structured learning resources, including the Inovuj a podnikaj handbook and free e-learning access. Entrepreneurs, investors, and innovators contribute as mentors and guest speakers.

The pathway culminates in the Founders Challenge, a regional competition and mini-acceleration with targeted training, a preparatory camp, final pitching, prizes up to €4,000, and formal certificates. From 2024/2025, participation requires enrolment in the subject. Beyond the

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competition, ICKK and partners provide long-term support, university connections, and admission benefits at UPJȘ, engaging a network of around 32 business partners across the region.

Why should it be considered a best practice

The programme offers a strong, practice-oriented pathway that connects classroom learning with real-world experience. An elective subject is embedded in the school timetable, supported by teacher training, quarterly upskilling, and a mentor assigned to each school, ensuring consistent delivery quality. Learning is reinforced through free resources, Business/University Tours, and regular contact with entrepreneurs, investors, and innovators as role models.

The year culminates in the Founders Challenge, which provides targeted training, a preparation camp, final pitching, and follow-on support, enabling student teams to move beyond the classroom. This end-to-end design builds entrepreneurial skills, confidence, and presentation abilities while strengthening school-to-practice links and lowering participation barriers by covering costs. The model is sustainable and transferable, based on reusable materials, a growing regional partner network, and EU co-financing, and can be replicated using the same core building blocks.



4.5. Integrated services for vulnerable groups – a bridge for the development of local communities (Servicii integrate pentru grupuri vulnerabile – o punte pentru dezvoltarea comunităților locale)

Country: Romania

Type of best practice: Project

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth with disabilities, Youth from ethnic minority, Youth from remote or rural areas

Area of best practice: Regional – Giurgiu and Prahova counties

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Main implementer of best practice: General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Giurgiu

Website

<https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/areas-of-work/programmes-and-projects-information/archive/2014-2021/projects/ro-localdev-0058>

Funding/financial model: The EEA and Norway Grants

Other institutions involved: Estuar Foundation, Four Change Association

Context of best practice

In the South Muntenia Region, notable disparities exist between rural and urban areas in social protection, education, training levels, employment rates, understanding of anti-discrimination principles, and community spirit.

Giurgiu and Prahova counties are no different, as they are mainly rural areas with underdeveloped social services. The project aims to improve access to and the quality of social services for at least 1,265 people, members of eight disadvantaged communities in Giurgiu and Prahova counties, through local development initiatives in sectors such as education, employment, social assistance, housing, and anti-discrimination.

To boost employment levels in the labour market, the project provided counselling and information services, professional training (including qualifications for personal assistants, security guards, and carpenters-parquet workers), and mediation, aiming to help 400 unemployed and inactive individuals find jobs.

To aid people with disabilities in Giurgiu County, the project also involved establishing a pilot social service.

Activities

- Long-term vocational training
- Personal growth and creativity development
- Parents' School - parent education program
- Non-formal education club – an innovative method of intervention in education
- Information and counselling
- Work intermediation
- Development of social services in the community

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- Campaign to combat and prevent discrimination

Why should it be considered a best practice

The project can be considered best practice because it meets the criteria listed below.

Functionality: The project produced numerous results that helped improve the situation of disadvantaged groups.

Intersectoral cooperation: the project was implemented through collaboration between the public and private sectors

Innovativeness: The project not only helped individuals but also targeted families, using innovative methods such as non-formal education clubs.

Complexity: The project adopted a multifaceted approach centred on local community development; its activities targeted education, employment, social assistance, housing, and anti-discrimination.



4.6. International youth center – Burgas, Младешки международен център - Бургас

Country: Bulgaria

Type of best practice: Project

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth from ethnic minority, Youth from remote or rural areas, Students at risk, Youth in disadvantaged communities, Youth with limited opportunities

Area of best practice: Regional – Burgas Region, Local – City of Burgas (Meden Rudnik district)

Main implementer of best practice: Municipality of Burgas

Website: <https://yicburgas.bg/>, <https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/>

Funding/financial model

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The project was initially funded by the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014–2021 under the programme “Local Development, Poverty Reduction, and Enhanced Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups”. The Ministry of Education and Science acted as national programme operator, with the Municipality of Burgas as main implementer. During implementation (2021–2024), all services were provided free of charge to youth and partner organisations aligned with Council of Europe values. From 2025, the centre uses a mixed financing model, offering paid services to external organisations to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Other institutions involved

Municipality of Reykjavik, Iceland (project partner), Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science (through its External European Programs Directorate, managing the funding)

Context of best practice

The International Youth Center in Burgas was established in response to the growing need for accessible and inclusive youth services, particularly for vulnerable groups in the region. Many young people in Burgas and nearby municipalities face barriers such as limited educational opportunities, socio-economic hardship, and lack of access to structured support. The project was motivated by the need to empower youth aged 15–29, especially those from ethnic minorities, rural areas, and disadvantaged communities, by offering non-formal education, safe spaces for participation, and opportunities for social inclusion. The initiative aligns with the Bulgarian National Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe’s standards, aiming to promote democratic values, human rights, and active youth engagement in society.

Activities

- Career orientation and development programs
- Non-formal education sessions on topics like human rights, tolerance, social inclusion
- Trainings and workshops on youth leadership, democratic participation, and soft skills
- Art therapy, creative expression, sports events, and intercultural events
- Mental health awareness and well-being activities
- Volunteering opportunities and support for youth-led initiatives
- Mobile outreach programs in rural and smaller municipalities
- International exchanges and events with partner organizations (e.g. Iceland).

Why should it be considered a best practice

The International Youth Center is one of Burgas’ most well-known youth projects, serving as a flagship model for youth empowerment in Bulgaria. Its scale, management, and impact make it

a key point for civic participation, education, and social inclusion. The center offers a wide range of training courses, workshops, and programs, including soft skills development, career guidance, financial education, civic engagement, and non-formal education to improve employability. It supports youth in building skills and confidence to compete in the job market and navigate professional challenges.

The project brings together local authorities, NGOs, educators, youth workers, and international partners to implement integrated solutions. It hosts international projects and youth exchanges, such as its partnership with the Municipality of Reykjavik, providing young people with intercultural experiences and broader perspectives on employment and active citizenship in Europe.

The initiative engages thousands of young people, particularly from vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, rural areas, and low-income backgrounds. Through non-formal education, mentoring, volunteering, and creative programs, it helps youth develop skills, self-confidence, and employability, combining social inclusion with practical tools for workforce readiness.



4.7. Kudy kam III.

Country: Czech Republic

Type of best practice: Project

Type of vulnerable youth: Socially excluded youth

Area of best practice: Local – Local action group Mohelnicko

Main implementer of best practice: Podané ruce o.p.s. (Public Benefit Corporation)

Website

<https://podaneruce.cz/projekty-ukoncene/kudy-kam-iii/#1537392530001-aa1a8339-4596>

Funding/financial model

This project was co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Employment Operational Programme and the state budget of the Czech Republic.

Other institutions involved

Local action group Mohelnicko, EU, MPSV ČR- Employment Operational Programme

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Context of best practice

The project contributes to the social inclusion of socially excluded young people or those at risk of social exclusion living in the Mohelnicko LAG area. The target group are young people aged 15–21 (in individual cases up to 26) growing up in poor or dysfunctional families and at risk of social pathology and social exclusion. The project will remove or mitigate the barriers that the target group must overcome when taking their first independent steps in life. It focuses primarily on changing attitudes and developing basic social skills, which are at risk and insufficient due to the environment in which members of the target group grow up.

Activities

- Preparatory activities
- Mapping the terrain, reaching out to the target group
- Leisure and educational activities, trips, activities focused on financial literacy, the labor market, prevention, etc.
- Individual plans, job or part-time job search, online support (during the COVID-19 pandemic), information service
- Online work, field work, implementation of individual plans
- Monitoring, project control
- Final evaluation of selected locations, informing participants about the end of the project

Why should it be considered a best practice

This project should be considered best practice, as it uses an individual approach, meaning that participants are not just part of a target group, but are given specific tools and goals according to their needs. It is not just about counselling, but also includes activities that help develop key competencies, which in turn build skills and self-confidence. Feedback was based primarily on positive responses, and each participant developed in a specific direction according to their individual path.



4.8. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme for Youth in Serbia

Country: Serbia

Type of best practice: Policy measure

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth experiencing mental health challenges

Area of best practice: National

Main implementer of best practice: UNICEF Serbia

Website

<https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/mental-health-and-well-being.com>

<https://svejeok.rs/>

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Funding/financial model

The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Program for Youth is funded through a combination of government budgets and international support, including contributions from UNICEF and the Kingdom of Norway.

Other institutions involved

The program involves a wide range of institutions working together to provide comprehensive support. Key partners include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, and the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography. In addition, local youth offices and civil society organizations actively participate, creating a coordinated network that ensures mental health services are accessible, effective, and tailored to the needs of young people across the country. Local employment offices and municipal youth service

Context of best practice

In Serbia, a significant number of young people experience mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, a situation that was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Motivated by the urgent need to provide accessible and non-stigmatizing support, the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme was developed to deliver comprehensive services tailored to the needs of youth. The program specifically targets vulnerable groups, including low-educated young people and those from rural or remote areas, ensuring that mental health support reaches those most at risk.

Activities

- Establishment of an expert group comprising professionals from various sectors to address mental health protection.
- Provision of online and offline counselling services through platforms like svejeok.rs.
- Development of a legislative framework to enhance local-level service provision.
- Organization of awareness campaigns to reduce stigma associated with mental health issues.
- Training programs for educators, health professionals, and youth workers to better support young individuals.

Why should it be considered a best practice

The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme for Youth is considered a best practice because it exemplifies effective intersectoral cooperation among multiple ministries and organizations, ensuring coordinated and comprehensive support. It provides accessible, age-appropriate services that address a critical gap in mental health support, particularly for youth in underserved areas. By incorporating young people's participation in decision-making processes, the program ensures that services meet their needs while also contributing to the reduction of stigma surrounding mental health issues.



4.9. Mentor the Young – Burgas Mentorship Program

Country: Bulgaria

Type of best practice: Initiative

Type of vulnerable youth

Low educated youth, Youth from ethnic minority, Youth from low-income families, Youth with limited access to educational and cultural opportunities, Talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

Area of best practice

National – volunteers from across Bulgaria, Regional – volunteers from the Burgas region, Local – City of Burgas

Main implementer of best practice: Uspelite.bg Foundation (NGO media and youth platform)

Website



Program overview: <https://uspelite.bg/programata-Mentor-the-Young-vseki-chovek-ima-potentsial-da-se-zanimava-s-tova-koeto-obicha-1>

Call for mentors: <https://uspelite.bg/stani-mentor-na-talantlivo-dete-v-neravnostoino-polojenie--1>

Funding/financial model

- Operated by Uspelite.bg as a non-profit initiative
- Financed through donations, grants, and volunteer support
- Participation is free for youth and based entirely on community and pro bono engagement

Other institutions involved

- Volunteer mentors from diverse professions (journalists, artists, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, etc.)
- Schools, cultural institutions, local communities
- Business professionals and community leaders from Burgas and other cities

Context of best practice

Many talented young people in Bulgaria, including those in Burgas, grow up in economically or socially disadvantaged environments and lack access to guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for personal and professional development. The “Mentor the Young” initiative was launched to connect these youth with inspiring mentors who can support their growth, help them overcome limitations, and empower them to dream bigger. The goal is to ensure that every young person, regardless of background, has access to mentorship and development support.

Activities

- One-on-one mentorship between professionals and young people aged 14–20 from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Regular meetings, communication, and planning of personal development goals
- Mentors help with career orientation, confidence-building, and access to educational and cultural opportunities
- Events, workshops, and success-story sharing among participants
- Targeted outreach to youth from small towns, villages, or minority communities in/around Burgas

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Why should it be considered a best practice

“Mentor the Young” is a powerful example of community-based intersectoral cooperation, connecting youth with professionals from various fields (NGOs, education, business, culture). It is highly functional, with measurable impact on young people's self-confidence, career awareness, and life ambitions. The program is innovative in its personalized approach and adaptable to different contexts, including rural and urban areas. Its low-cost, high-impact model makes it easily scalable and transferable, while also being deeply human-centred and inclusive. It builds long-term relationships that support sustainable personal development.



4.10. POMA – Podpora mladistvých (Youth support program)

Country: Czech Republic

Type of best practice: Service

Type of vulnerable youth

Socially excluded youth, Young people from financially challenged families

Area of best practice: National

Main implementer of best practice: Člověk v tísni o.p.s. (Public Benefit Corporation)

Website: <https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/co-delame/socialni-prace-v-cr/karierni-poradenstvi>

Funding/financial model

This project is co-financed by the EU, Scholarship of up to CZK 12,000 per year from the Albatros foundation.

Other institutions involved: EU, Municipalities

Context of best practice

The basic mission of the service is to extend the educational career beyond compulsory schooling for the target group, which consists of young people and adolescents aged 14-26. Ideally, the goal

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is to formally improve the qualifications of young people so that their employability in the labor market increases. This may involve obtaining an education certificate, high school diploma, or higher education. However, it is essential to take into account the future employability of the chosen profession.

Activities

- Identification of the client's real motivation and potential – individual interviews
- Mediation of a specific field of education
- Support during studies
- Prevention of handicaps – e.g., in the form of tutoring
- Retro-scholarship program – prevents early departure
- Workshops – issues of education, employment in the labour market, prevention of over-indebtedness, etc.

Why should it be considered a best practice

This service should be considered best practice, as it operates on an individual basis and is tailored to each person. The popularity of the service is demonstrated by its expansion to several regions and cities in the Czech Republic, meaning that it can be applied in various locations. The retro-scholarship program is also significant, as it is an effective motivational tool. Volunteers can also get involved in the service, for example as tutors, which strengthens a sense of solidarity.



4.11. Promprylad.Renovation

Country: Ukraine

Type of best practice: Commercial activity/Social enterprise

Type of vulnerable youth: Youth from remote or rural areas, Youth from low income families and IDPs

Area of best practice: Local – Ivano-Frankivsk

Main implementer of best practice: Promprylad.Renovation (innovation center, Ivano-Frankivsk)

Website: <https://promprylad.ua/en/>

Funding/financial model

- Impact investment from private sector and individual investors
- International donor funding (education, youth empowerment, social inclusion projects)
- Revenue from commercial activities (office rental, coworking, events) reinvested into educational and social initiatives

Other institutions involved

- Local schools, vocational colleges, and universities (educational partnerships)
- Private sector employers and investors (internships, job opportunities)
- NGOs and cultural institutions (community and youth engagement)

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- International donors (financial support, capacity building)
- Municipal authorities of Ivano-Frankivsk

Context of best practice

Ivano-Frankivsk faces the dual challenge of revitalizing post-industrial spaces while supporting youth employment and community development, particularly for vulnerable groups such as IDPs, rural youth, and young entrepreneurs with limited access to resources. Promprylad.Renovation responds by transforming a former industrial plant into an integrated hub for education, culture, business, and social innovation, combining modern workspaces with structured learning and entrepreneurial programmes as a model of urban regeneration and youth empowerment.

Activities

- Educational programs: workshops, bootcamps, and training in digital literacy, entrepreneurship, creative industries, and social innovation
- Soft skills development: teamwork, leadership, problem-solving through project-based learning
- Career orientation & mentorship: connecting youth with business leaders and professionals from different industries
- Community engagement: hackathons, cultural events, and participatory projects where youth co-create local solutions
- Entrepreneurship & incubation: support for youth-led startups and social enterprises
- Safe and inclusive spaces: coworking areas, labs, and creative studios accessible for IDPs and vulnerable groups
- Partnerships with employers: to ensure internships and entry-level jobs for graduates of training programs

Why should it be considered a best practice

Inclusivity: ensures participation of vulnerable youth (IDPs, rural, low-income backgrounds)

Accessibility: hybrid educational formats, physical safe space, and scholarships make programs open to all

Integration: combines business, culture, and education to give youth real opportunities for skills, jobs, and entrepreneurship

Sustainability: financial model mixes investments, donors, and own revenue, ensuring continuity

Scalability: the Promprylad model of urban and social innovation can be replicated in other Ukrainian cities

Resilience: helps young people adapt to wartime challenges, prepare for reconstruction, and contribute to economic recovery

The initiative has already incubated dozens of startups, hosted hundreds of cultural and educational events, and provided mentorship to youth-led projects. Its financial sustainability model — combining commercial revenue, donor support, and impact investment — ensures long-term continuity. By bridging private investment with community needs, Promprylad demonstrates how industrial revitalization can directly benefit vulnerable youth and local development.

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4.12. Sindbad

Country: Austria

Type of best practice: Social business

Type of vulnerable youth: Students between 13 and 19 years old

Area of best practice: National – Austria, Germany (Görlitz, since 2025)

Main implementer of best practice: SINDBAD social business

Website: <https://www.sindbad.co.at/>

Funding/financial model: Donations and generating part of its income through services

Other institutions involved

Public funding bodies, corporate financial supporters, foundations, and educational institutions:

Sindbad is funded by the Federal Chancellery, the Innovation Foundation for Education and the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. It is supported by several private and public foundations such as Berndorf Privatstiftung, Mega Bildungsstiftung and others. In addition, the individual locations have specific public and corporate supporting organisations.

Sindbad cooperate with 26 large companies in Austria from diverse industries, such as ÖBB, KPMG, Erste Bank, Österreichische Bundesforste, Böhringer Ingelheim, Iglo, Hilti, Uniqua and others. The companies cooperate with Sindbad by engaging their employees in the Sindbad Social Academy, where they can actively participate in the mentoring programme or contribute their expertise through trainings and workshops. By taking on these roles, employees gain valuable insights into different life contexts, develop and strengthen their leadership skills, and deepen their awareness of social sustainability. This collaboration not only benefits the young people supported by Sindbad but also fosters personal growth and social responsibility within the companies themselves.

Context of best practice

Sindbad, founded in 2016, is an association that helps young people aged between 13 and 19 years enter the job market or further education. Many in this age group face significant challenges during this transition, as rising youth unemployment is becoming an increasingly pressing

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problem. Another motivation for Sindbad is that individual encounters strengthen understanding of different life worlds and thus social cohesion.

Sindbad's mission is to address the loss of opportunities and talents among young people on creating more equal opportunities in Austria's education system through personal mentorship and support during critical transition periods.

The organization operates as a social business, combining social impact with sustainable business practices to create lasting change in youth development and educational equity.

Activities

Sindbad operates a comprehensive mentoring programme that connects young people aged 14-19 who are transitioning from compulsory school with volunteer mentors aged 20-35. The programme runs for 8-12 months, with mentors supporting youth during their transition from compulsory school to further education or vocational training.

The individual mentoring support forms the cornerstone of their programme, where each mentor is paired with one young person for an intensive 8–12 month journey through their educational transition period. The mentoring relationship is built through regular meetings that blend recreational activities like bowling with practical career-focused experiences such as visiting companies together and engaging in future planning sessions. This comprehensive approach ensures that support encompasses both enjoyable leisure activities that help build trust and rapport, as well as hands-on practical assistance including collaborative work on job applications and the search for trial internships that prepare young people for their next educational or vocational steps.

Sindbad offers mentors opportunities to develop their leadership qualities through training and supervision.

Why should it be considered a best practice

Well established programme (by December 2024, 5,782 young people had been reached through the Sindbad program, with a goal of reaching 10,000 participants by 2026) with an extended network of supporting well-known companies which enables its success and scaling to multiple locations throughout Austria and beyond (each location providing localized mentoring services to youth in their respective regions).

SINDBAD

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4.13. SPACE Youth Centres

Country: Slovakia

Type of best practice: Regional project/initiative (Region-run network of youth centres)

Type of vulnerable youth: Young people up to 19, in risk of NEET or needing additional support (career, education, life skills, well-being)

Area of best practice: Regional – Banská Bystrica region, centres in Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Brezno, Lučenec, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota, Zvolen

Main implementer of best practice

Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK) with support from the Regional Development Agency of BBSK, n.o. (Rozvojová agentúra BBSK, n. o.)

Website

<https://www.bbsk.sk/centra-mladeze-space>

<https://www.tvojspace.sk/>

Funding/financial model

Public (regional) funding with EU co-financing — the initiative is run by the BBSK and co-financed by the European Union under Programme Slovakia

Other institutions involved

The network operates in cooperation with municipalities and local schools across seven towns in the Banská Bystrica Region and collaborates with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

Context of best practice

SPACE is a regional “one-stop” youth work model (youth work hubs) run by the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK), designed to give young people a safe, supportive place to develop and get tailored help with study, work and life decisions. Services are free of charge and available across seven towns in the Banská Bystrica Region - Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Brezno, Lučenec, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota and Zvolen - ensuring region-wide access.

Core activities include career guidance, coaching, psychological support, informal learning/workshops (life-skills, entrepreneurship), creative/tech labs (Innolabb), a safe community

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space, and international work placements as it connects youth to EU-supported mobility and employability projects (e.g., ALMA). The initiative explicitly aims to support youth employment and prevent NEET status, and centres had already helped hundreds of young people.

Launched in 2022 by BBSK, the network was distributed across the region from the outset to keep support close to young people in district towns and smaller localities, with a clear aim to prevent NEET status and strengthen youth employability.

Activities

Centres provide free walk-in and scheduled support: career guidance and job-search help, navigation of education and training pathways, coaching and life-skills development, and, where appropriate, psychological and social counselling. The offer includes workshops, community and creative activities (including tech/creative labs), connections to internships and mobility (such as ALMA), mentoring, and signposting to specialised services (public employment services, youth counselling, social support). The programme is standardised across the network yet adaptable to local needs in each town.

Why should it be considered a best practice

It provides integrated, one-stop access to counselling, skills development and opportunities across the entire Banská Bystrica Region. The model is built on intersectoral collaboration between the region, municipalities, schools and specialised youth-work staff, with documented uptake – hundreds of young people supported to date. It is also readily transferable, as a standardised regional concept with centres replicated across multiple towns.



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4.14. Tanoda Platform

Country: Hungary

Type of best practice: Initiative

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth from ethnic minority, Youth from remote or rural areas

Area of best practice: National

Main implementer of best practice

The state designs and funds the programme, but implementation is decentralized – it's carried out by civil society actors (NGOs, foundations, community associations) at the local level.

Website

<https://tanodaplatform.hu/>

<https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/hungary/44-inclusive-programmes-for-young-people>

Funding/financial model

Mainly through EU funds (mainly European Social Fund, under Human Resources Development Operational Programme – earmarked for social inclusion, education and reducing early school leaving) with national co-financing, distributed as project-based grants (typically 2-3 years) to NGOs and local organizations.

Other institutions involved

National ministries, EU Managing Authorities (design, funding), NGOs, churches, local associations (implementation), Schools, municipalities, child services (cooperating institutions)

Context of best practice

The Tanoda programme emerged in Hungary as a response to deep-rooted social and educational inequalities, particularly affecting Roma and socio-economically disadvantaged children. It operates in a context of high child poverty, segregated schooling, and limited family support for learning, where mainstream education often fails to address individual needs. Shaped by Hungary's National Social Inclusion Strategy and strongly supported by EU Structural Funds, Tanoda provides afterschool tutoring, mentoring, and community activities through NGOs, churches, and local associations. Located mainly in disadvantaged regions, the "tanodas" act as

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community-based hubs that help reduce early school leaving, improve educational outcomes, and foster inclusion, complementing formal schooling while bridging gaps left by both the state and families.

Activities

Activities vary by Tanoda but often include school preparation, afternoon training, individual development (like computer and language skills), creative arts and crafts, logic games, joint reading, technology courses, and career orientation. Many Tanodas also integrate psychosocial support, mentoring, individualized learning paths, and support for children with specific learning needs or developmental challenges.

Why should it be considered a best practice

The Tanoda programme combines educational, social, and community support in a flexible, locally embedded model. Targeting children from socio-economically disadvantaged background – particularly Roma youth and those at risk of early school leaving—it provides tailored tutoring, mentoring, and personal development opportunities. Afterschool study halls adapt to individual learning needs while fostering self-confidence, cultural identity, and life skills.

Tanoda promotes intersectoral cooperation, linking schools, municipalities, social services, and families, strengthening networks around disadvantaged children. Despite reliance on short-term EU funding, its strong community roots and repeated revival demonstrate resilience and long-term value. The programme’s adaptability and transferability make it a promising model of inclusive education and youth support.

Ministry data show positive impacts on students’ academic performance. In 2022, more girls than boys participated, with girls more likely to continue in high school and boys tending toward vocational training. In 2021–2022, 76% of eighth-grade Tanoda students planned to continue in high school to pursue higher education.



4.15. Upskill Now!

Country: Ukraine

Type of best practice: Project

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth from low-income families, IDPs

Area of best practice: National, implemented in different Ukrainian regions

Main implementer of best practice: Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) and Promprylad.Renovation

Website

<https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/to-train-10-000-specialists-for-the-ukrainian-labor-market-kyiv-school-of-economics-and-promprylad-launch-a-joint-project/>

Funding/financial model

International donor funding combined with private sector contributions and scholarships for participants.

Other institutions involved: Private sector employers, local schools, universities, municipalities

Context of best practice

Ukraine's labour market is undergoing rapid transformation due to both wartime disruptions and global digitalization trends. Thousands of professionals have been displaced, while employers urgently need new specialists. Young people, women, and veterans often lack access to retraining opportunities that match labour market demand.

The Upskill Now! program responds to this challenge by creating a nationwide platform for professional retraining and career development. It combines market research, targeted training, and direct employer engagement to ensure that at least 10,000 participants quickly acquire practical skills and find meaningful employment in Ukraine's recovering economy.

Activities

- Short-term intensive courses in digital literacy, IT, entrepreneurship, and project management.
- Development of soft skills (teamwork, communication, leadership, problem-solving).
- Career guidance and mentorship with business professionals.
- Partnerships with companies to provide internships and entry-level job opportunities.
- Hybrid learning model (online and offline) to ensure access for youth from remote areas.

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Why should it be considered a best practice

- Directly addresses the mismatch between education and labour market needs
- Provides fast, practical upskilling to 10,000+ specialists
- Supports vulnerable groups with accessible education models
- Builds strong employer partnerships ensuring employability and jobs
- Contributes to overcoming Ukraine's staffing crisis during wartime



4.16. Youth Guarantee

Type of best practice: Serbia

Type of vulnerable youth: Low educated youth, Youth from remote or rural areas

Area of best practice: Local – Niš, Kruševac, Sremska Mitrovica

Main implementer of best practice: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

Website:

<https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/dokumenti/ostalo/sektor-za-rad-i-zaposljavanje/garancija-za-mlade>

Funding/financial model

The Youth Guarantee Program is funded by the Government of Serbia as part of a pilot initiative aimed at addressing youth unemployment. In addition to government funding, the program is supported by contributions from social partners, including private sector employers, NGOs, and educational institutions, which actively participate in providing employment, internship, and training opportunities. This combined funding and partnership model ensures the sustainability of the program, encourages intersectoral collaboration, and creates a robust network of support for young people, enabling them to access quality opportunities and successfully transition into the labour market.

Other institutions involved

The Youth Guarantee Program involves a wide range of institutions working together to support young people. Local employment offices coordinate placements and guidance, while private sector employers provide opportunities for internships and employment. NGOs and civil society organizations contribute additional support services, and educational institutions offer further training and internship opportunities, creating a comprehensive network of intersectoral cooperation.

Context of best practice

Many young people under 30 in Serbia face unemployment or experience long delays in accessing employment or further education opportunities. Motivated by the need to address this challenge, the Youth Guarantee Program aims to ensure that all youth receive a quality offer of employment, an internship, or further education within four months of becoming unemployed or completing formal education, thereby facilitating smoother entry into the labor market. The program specifically targets young people under 30 who are unemployed or have recently completed their studies.

Activities



- Coordinating offers of employment, internships, or education for young people
- Engaging employers, NGOs, and educational institutions to participate in placements
- Providing guidance and support to youth to access opportunities
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of placements and employment outcomes

Why should it be considered a best practice

The Youth Guarantee Program is considered a best practice because it provides structured pathways that enable young people to enter employment, internships, or further education quickly and efficiently. It demonstrates strong intersectoral cooperation by engaging government bodies, private sector employers, NGOs, and educational institutions in a coordinated effort. The program's design allows for adaptation and transfer to other cities or regions, making it a flexible model for broader implementation. Additionally, it effectively addresses key barriers to youth employment in a targeted and measurable way, ensuring tangible results for the participants.



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3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis of the best practices presented in this catalogue highlights several cross-cutting insights relevant to youth employment policies and programmes in the Danube Region.

First, intersectoral cooperation is a decisive success factor in addressing complex and multidimensional barriers faced by vulnerable young people. Practices that effectively combine the expertise and resources of employment services, education and training providers, social and youth services, civil society organisations and employers demonstrate higher levels of outreach, retention and impact compared to single-sector interventions.

Second, the most effective practices adopt a holistic and youth-centred approach, integrating skills development with mentoring, psychosocial support, career guidance and real-world work experience. This integrated support is particularly critical for young people with low educational attainment, mental health challenges, weak family support or limited exposure to the labour market.

Third, local embeddedness and flexibility emerge as key strengths. Many successful initiatives are rooted in local communities and adapted to territorial specificities, labour-market conditions and the needs of target groups. Decentralised implementation allows for innovation, trust-building and long-term engagement with young people and employers alike.

At the same time, the analysis reveals common challenges, including short-term and project-based funding, limited institutionalisation of cooperation mechanisms, dependence on individual champions or organisations, difficulties in reaching inactive or disengaged youth, and narrow career orientation with limited labour-market exposure. Without systemic support, the sustainability and scalability of even highly effective practices remain at risk.

Effective youth employment and inclusion efforts require coordinated action from policymakers, practitioners, employers, and transnational stakeholders. The following recommendations outline key steps each group can take to strengthen cooperation, improve services, and ensure sustainable impact for vulnerable youth in disadvantaged regions of partner countries.

For policymakers and public authorities:

- Strengthen policy frameworks that institutionalise intersectoral cooperation, including formal coordination mechanisms between employment, education, social and youth policies.
- Ensure stable and multi-annual funding schemes that allow best practices to move beyond pilot phases and become embedded in national or regional systems.

- Support data sharing and joint monitoring frameworks across sectors to better track youth pathways and outcomes.

For practitioners and service providers:

- Design interventions that combine employment-related measures with social, educational and psychosocial support, tailored to the needs of specific target groups.
- Invest in partnership management capacities, including clear roles, communication structures and shared objectives among partners.
- Actively involve young people in the design and evaluation of services to ensure relevance and accessibility.

For employers and the private sector:

- Engage as long-term partners rather than short-term beneficiaries, contributing to programme design, work-based learning opportunities and mentoring.
- Collaborate with education and youth organisations to co-create pathways that align labour-market needs with youth capabilities.

For transnational and EU-level stakeholders:

- Promote cross-country learning and peer exchange on intersectoral youth employment models.
- Support the transfer and adaptation of proven practices across different institutional and socio-economic contexts.

The best practices presented in this catalogue demonstrate that intersectoral cooperation is not an abstract concept, but a practical and effective approach to improving youth employment outcomes. When actors work across institutional boundaries and place young people at the centre of interventions, employment measures become more inclusive, resilient and impactful. By documenting and analysing these experiences, the COOPOWER project contributes to building a shared evidence base that can inform future policies, programmes and partnerships aimed at empowering vulnerable youth and strengthening social and economic cohesion across the Danube Region.