

Youth Engagement Framework:

A Framework for mental health promotion and prevention



Funded by
the European Union

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Abstract

This Youth Engagement Framework is designed to support the mental health promotion and prevention initiatives for vulnerable children and young people aged 15–24 in Cyprus. The framework outlines key components, including an analysis of youth mental health resilience needs, principles ensuring diversity and inclusivity, and strategies for effective youth engagement. It introduces a structured roadmap for participation, emphasising youth-friendly, participatory, and transparent approaches. The document also presents a comprehensive implementation plan detailing legislative and regulatory adjustments, capacity-building initiatives, and stakeholder engagement strategies.

By integrating young people as active partners in decision-making, this framework fosters resilience, empowers youth leadership, and enhances access to mental health resources. It aims to create sustainable, youth-centered mental health services through collaborative efforts among policymakers, youth organisations, and mental health professionals.

Keywords: Youth engagement, youth mental health, promotion and prevention, decision-making processes, active participation



Acknowledgments

This framework reflects the efforts of many individuals and organisations working to improve the mental health of Cyprus youth. Special thanks to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Cyprus (MoH), the Mental Health Services of the MoH, SG REFORM, UNICEF, CARDET, the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC), the Youth Board, researchers, social workers, educators, and experts for their valuable contributions. Gratitude is also extended to the youth as well as to youth organisations, NGOs, and decision-makers whose efforts have shaped this youth engagement framework particularly in the municipalities of Kourion and Lakatamia.



Glossary of Terms

Mental Health Resilience

The ability to maintain psychological and physical health despite exposure to a traumatic event (6).

Youth Participatory Design

An approach where actively involves young people in the creation and evaluation of programmes and policies that affect their lives (5).

Youth Participation

Refers to the active involvement of young people in decisions that affect their lives. It encompasses a range of activities, from giving opinions and engaging in discussions to taking part in decision-making and leading initiatives (3).

Stakeholders

All individuals or groups involved in supporting youth mental health, including policymakers, educators, NGOs, researchers etc.

Youth Engagement Framework

A structured approach designed to involve young people in meaningful activities, decision-making, programmes and policies that affect their lives and communities (9).

Youth-Friendly Services

Services designed to address the unique needs, preferences, and contexts of adolescents and young people, in ways that are accessible, acceptable, equitable, and effective. These services aim to empower youth by addressing their health, social, and developmental needs in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

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01. Introduction

Youth engagement and participation are essential for fostering civic responsibility and empowering young people to become active contributors to their communities. According to the *Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement (UNICEF, 2020)* meaningful participation involves providing adolescents with space, voice, audience, and influence in decision-making processes that impact their lives. This Youth Engagement Framework specifically addresses the growing mental health challenges faced by young people aged 15-24. It prioritises their active involvement in shaping mental health programmes and policies, aiming to build resilience, foster self confidence and equip youth with the tools to navigate challenges, reduce and seek support when needed. Meaningful youth engagement in decision- making processes also strengthens leadership skills, enhances coping mechanisms and promotes community well-being. The framework ensures inclusivity, providing equitable access to mental health resources for all youth, including youth with fewer opportunities, marginalised groups and LGBTQI+ individuals. It incorporates tools and strategies to overcome barriers such as language, culture, and social exclusion ensuring broad participation. Additionally, a Comprehensive Implementation Plan outlines legislative changes, training, and stakeholder collaboration, fostering a sustainable, youth-centered approach to mental health in Cyprus.



02. The role of youth organisations in Cyprus

Youth organisations play a vital role in fostering active and civic engagement, personal development, and social inclusion among young people in Cyprus. These organisations provide platforms for youth to express their views, participate in decision-making, and contribute to society. By offering educational programmes, advocacy initiatives, and community activities, they empower young individuals to develop leadership skills and become active citizens. The Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) and the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) are the two primary entities driving youth development in the country, complemented by various independent youth organisations that address diverse social and cultural issues. Together, these groups shape a dynamic and inclusive youth landscape in Cyprus.

2.1

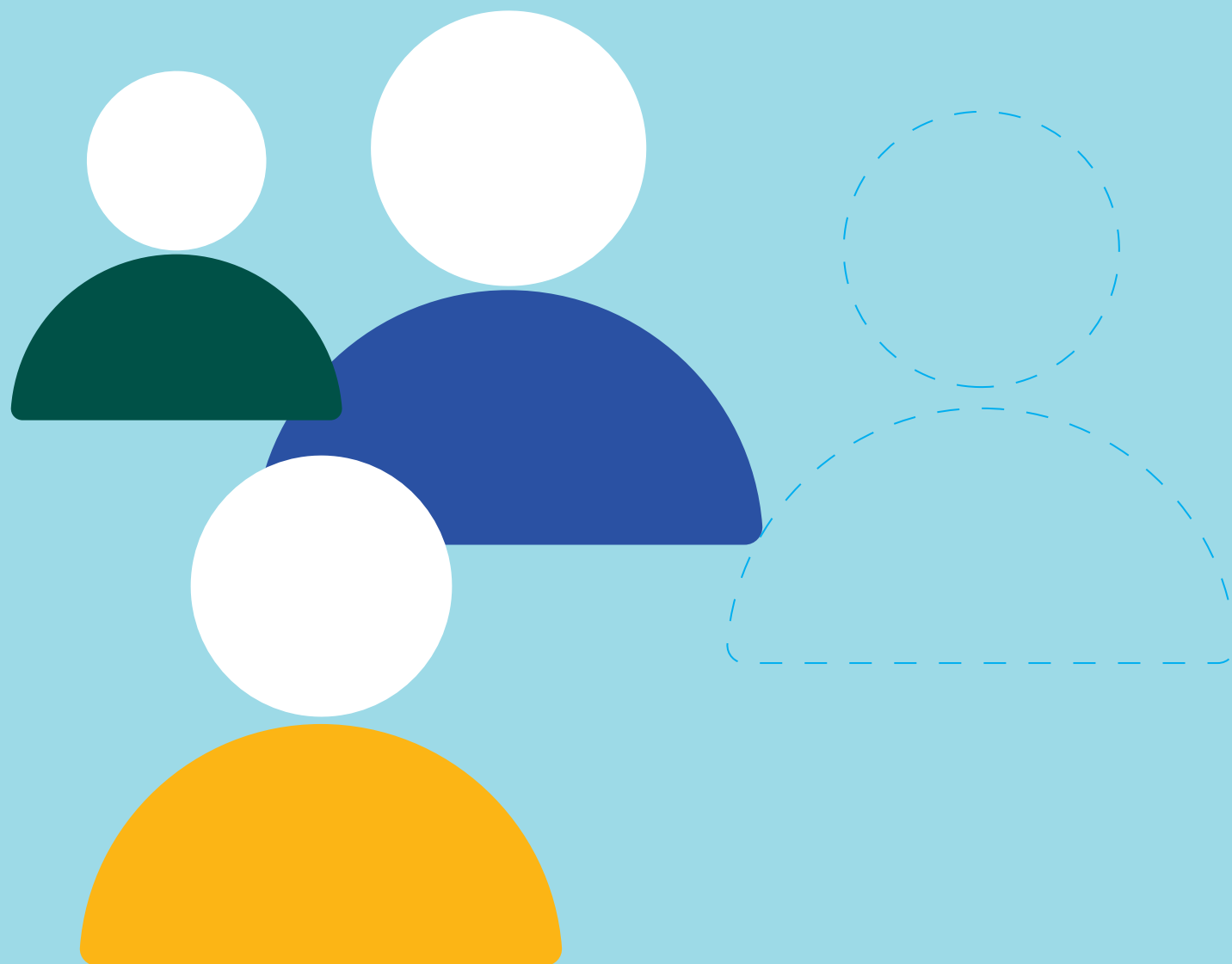
Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK)

The Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) is a semi-governmental organisation responsible for implementing national youth policies. It supports young people through programmes focused on education, employment, entrepreneurship, and well-being. ONEK operates youth centers, provides funding opportunities, and organises activities that enhance civic engagement, creativity, and innovation. By collaborating with stakeholders, ONEK plays a crucial role in shaping a dynamic and inclusive youth policy framework in Cyprus. Additionally, ONEK supervises the local youth councils of the municipalities and has a strong link with their ongoing progress and guidance.

2.2

Cyprus Youth Council (National Youth Council)

The Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) serves as an umbrella organisation representing youth organisations across Cyprus, advocating for young people's rights and active participation in society. CYC facilitates dialogue between youth and policymakers, ensuring that young voices are included in decision-making processes at national and international levels. Through various initiatives, training programmes, and projects, the council fosters youth empowerment, non-formal education, and social inclusion. CYC has 61 member organizations, which represent a diverse range of groups, including the Greek-Cypriot Youth Political Parties, Turkish-Cypriot youth political parties, student unions, the youth organisations of the religious groups, agricultural youth Organisations, trade unions, youth platforms and other youth NGOs.



2.3

Other Youth Organisations

While the majority of youth organisations in Cyprus are represented by the CYC several other initiatives and groups also focus on youth development. These organisations focus on a wide range of areas including education, environmental advocacy, cultural engagement, and community service. Although they may operate independently, they often collaborate with governmental and non-governmental bodies to promote youth participation and empowerment. In the context of the Youth Engagement Framework, we highlight the two primary entities that formally represent young people in Cyprus: the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) and the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC).

2.4

Existing Youth Representation Bodies in Cyprus

2.4.1

Cyprus Children's Parliament [*Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή*](#)

The Cyprus Children's Parliament was established in 2001, evolving from a symbolic event during children's week. It functions as a formal body modeled after the national Parliament, under the chairmanship of the President of the House of Representatives. Initiated by the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children ([PCCPWC](#)), its operational framework is defined by "[The Regulation of the Cyprus Children's Parliament](#)," first passed in 2004 and amended several times since, with the PCCPWC as its support body. Membership is open to individuals under 18 residing in Cyprus, comprising 80 voting members (56 Greek-Cypriots, 24 Turkish-Cypriots) and 3 observers from recognized minorities, elected for two-year terms by district electoral assemblies. The Parliament elects its officers and forms Special Commissions, convening bi-monthly and annually. District Parliamentary Groups also operate monthly. The Children's Parliament aims to involve young citizens in democratic processes and address children's rights issues, with the PCCWC responsible for promoting its views and securing funding.

While the Cyprus Children's Parliament focuses on the participation of children under 18, there is also a parallel initiative aimed at older youth: the House of Youth Representatives (Η Βουλή των Νέων Αντιπροσώπων). The initiative was developed by the Cyprus Youth Council as a youth-led programme and complements the work of the Children's Parliament by engaging young people in similar democratic processes.

2.4.2

The House of Youth Representatives [*\(Η Βουλή των Νέων Αντιπροσώπων\)*](#)

The House of Youth Representatives is an annual three-day initiative launched in 2016 by the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) and the youth NGO Cyprus Youth DiplomaCY. It simulates the House

of Representatives, allowing young people aged 16-30 from across Cyprus to participate. The 56 participants are selected through an online application process. The initiative aims to become a permanent platform for youth to express their views on relevant issues and operates through Parliamentary Groups that prepare reports for plenary discussion and submission to government ministries. The programme is funded by the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK).

Website of the initiative:

<https://voulineon.com/>

2.4.3

National Youth Council

The Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) serves as an umbrella organisation representing youth organisations across Cyprus, advocating for young people's rights and active participation in society. CYC facilitates dialogue between youth and policymakers, ensuring that young voices are included in decision-making processes at national and international levels. Through various initiatives, training programmes, and projects, the council fosters youth empowerment, non-formal education, and social inclusion. CYC has 61 member organizations, which represent a diverse range of groups, including the Greek-Cypriot Youth Political Parties Turkish-Cypriot youth political parties, student unions, the youth organisations of the religious groups, agricultural youth Organisations, trade unions, youth platforms and other youth NGOs.

The General Assembly is the supreme body of the CYC. The General Assembly meets with the decisions of the Governing Board once a year with the participation of representatives of all Member Organisations of CYC. The General Assembly deals with the subjects set in the agenda, such as activity reports, financial reports, discussion of issues that affect young people, setting the general framework for the CYC, presence and participation of the Council in a local and an international level and decision making and drafting of resolutions.

The Governing Board has 9 members. The members of the Governing Board are elected within candidacies which are submitted by the Full Member-organisations of the CYC for a two-year term. As regards the positions at the Governing Board, except the position of the President, 4 Political Parties' and 4 Non-Political Parties' Youth Organisations shall be elected. The meetings of the Governing Board are regular.

In addition to the Governing Boards, CYC has two consultative bodies, The Consultative Body on Member Applications and the Financial Control Committee. The two consultative bodies are comprised of three members from Full Member-organisations who are elected at the General Assembly for a period of two years starting from the date of election and have the right to vote. The age range of the CYC's members and its various bodies varies between 18 to 35 years old.

The CYC organises events, seminars, workshops and activities that provide the necessary space for its members to exchange good practices, interests and experience on any youth

related topic. To support the delivery of the seminars and workshops CYC has a volunteer Pool of Trainers (PoT), who is consisted of experts in the field of Non – Formal Education, method which is widely used in youth Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

The CYC also acts as a platform for its members to participate in European projects. The CYC is also the main stakeholder in the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) - along with the Youth Board of Cyprus and the Ministry of Education, Sport & Youth - that seeks to promote the political participation of all Cyprus youth. Areas of interest, always in relation to youth, include human rights and equality, employment and social issues, active citizenship and life-long learning, non-formal education and youth policies. Moreover, the CYC voices the concerns of youth NGOs including lobbying to policy makers for a number of youth related issues (e.g. youth unemployment, validation of non-formal education, etc.).

The CYC receives funding from various sources (national funding coming from the Youth Board of Cyprus and European programmes) and CYC's values and objectives are based on the [U.N. Constitutional Charter](#) and the [European Convention on Human Rights](#).

2.4.4

Municipal /Community Youth Councils

The [Municipal/Community Youth Councils](#) began in Cyprus in late 2001- early 2002 with the support from local authorities and the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK), there are 28 Municipal and 10 Community Youth Councils. These councils, guided by statutes approved by the YBC, typically include a member of the Municipal/Community Council as chairman and representatives from local youth NGOs. Their role is to advise local authorities, prepare annual action plans for youth, recommend solutions to youth-related problems, and propose beneficial projects. They are financially supported by local authorities and can receive funding from the YBC and European programs, as well as private sector grants.

2.4.5

Higher education student union(s)

[Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions \(POFEN\)](#)

The Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions (POFEN), established in 1973, is a recognised social partner in Cyprus. Its highest governing bodies are the Congress and the Administrative Committee, with the Secretariat as its executive board. POFEN comprises 16 member organisations, with the Secretariat elected annually. The federation aims to support and promote the rights and interests of Cypriot students through representation in relevant committees and bodies within higher education institutions. Its funding comes from membership fees and the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK).

2.4.6

School student union(s)

Pancyprian Student Coordination Committee (PSEM) (Παγκύπρια Συντονιστική Επιτροπή Μαθητών – ΠΣΕΜ)

The Pancyprian Student Coordination Committee (PSEM) operates under the regulations of secondary public schools and its Secretariat has 10 members. The composition of PSEM involves elections at class, school, and regional levels, culminating in the national committee. PSEM's objectives include safeguarding the rights of school students and ensuring their representation in educational decision-making processes. PSEM also receives funding from the Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK).

2.4.7

Commissioner's for Children's Rights - Advisory Group⁴

The Commissioner for Children's Rights established the Adolescent Advisory Group (AAG) in February 2010 to consult with children aged 13-16 on issues affecting them. Formalised in law in 2014, the AAG is made up of 30 children and allows children to voice their opinions and learn about their rights. Members serve for a year and can remain as members. Meetings are held four times a year, with school absences excused. Selection involves a lottery based on gender, age, and province, and a separate process for vulnerable children, ensuring diverse representation.

Many European Commissioners for Children's Rights maintain similar advisory groups and therefore a European Network of Young Advisors of the European Commissioners (ENYA) has been established, in which the FTA participates. The aim of ENYA is to facilitate communication between the different Young Advisers Groups and to give them the opportunity to express their views on issues related to Children's Rights. Children's participation is implemented through the use of online forums as well as through meetings conferences involving representatives of ENYA's Teenage Advisory Groups together with the Commissioners of their countries.

⁴ Ομάδα Εφήβων Συμβούλων / Adolescent Advisory Group https://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/DMLteam_gr/DMLteam_gr?opendocument

03. Strengthening Youth Mental Health Resilience of Young People (15-24)

Stressful life or certain life events may have harmful effects on individuals, making resilience a crucial component of mental health. Resilience refers to a person's ability to effectively adapt to change and navigate difficult situations in a positive and healthy way (Olive et al., 2006). It focuses on challenging circumstances rather than implying a person's invulnerability (Davydov, 2010).

Resilience is crucial for children and young people who are still in the process of forming their personalities and identities. There is a common consensus among scholars and youth mental health experts, that resilience is not an inherent trait nor something that individuals are born with (Shean 2015). As a result, the discussion centers on how to foster resilience among children and young people in order to empower younger generations and enhance their well-being. While mechanisms for promoting resilience among young people may vary, certain aspects remain consistent when working with younger audiences.

Meaningful youth participation

- Enables youth to participate in key decision-making processes
- Building self-confidence
- Enhances connection and a feeling of belonging
- Encourages young people to develop critical thinking and personal skills

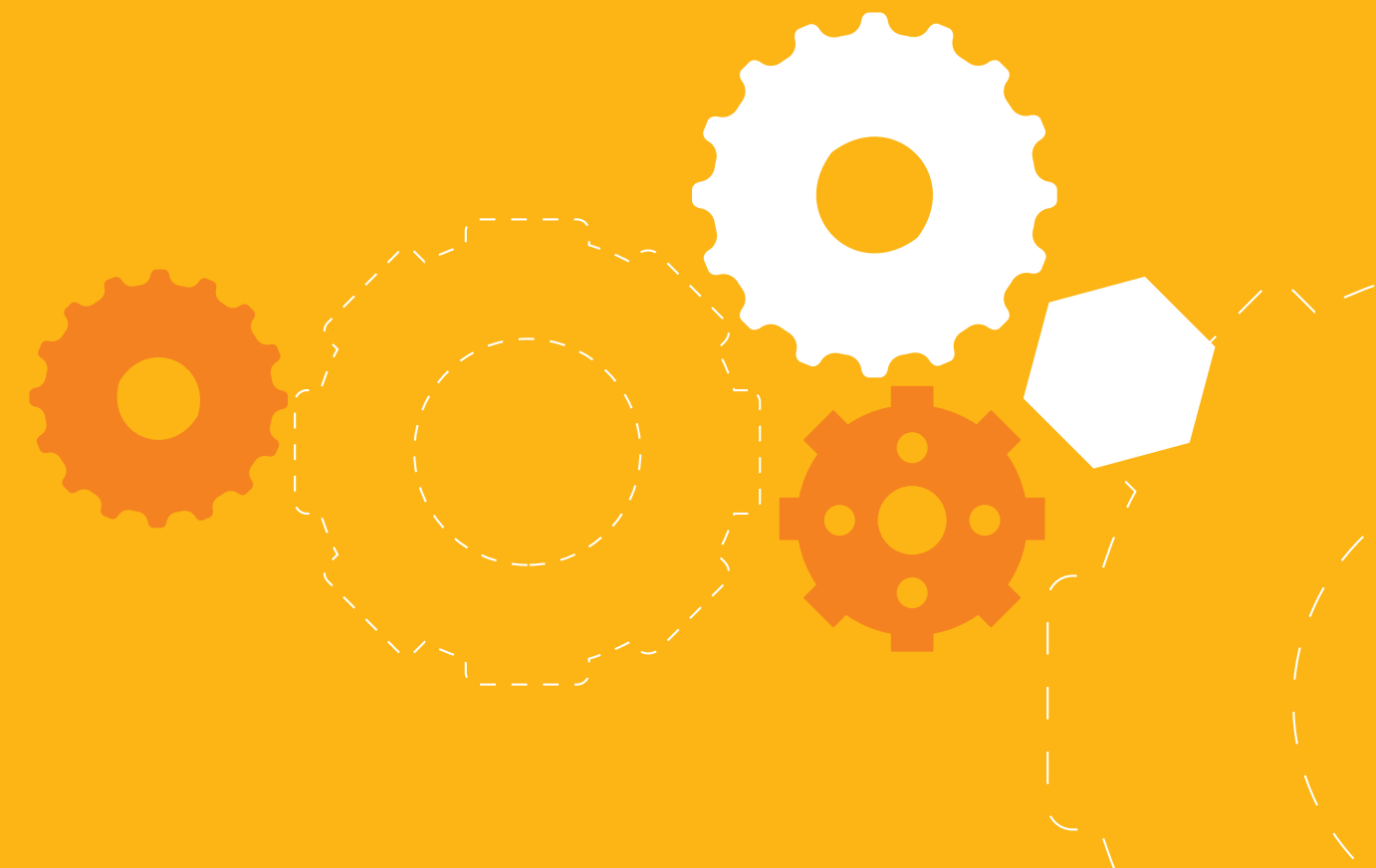
Prevention programmes

- Reduce risks (e.g. substance abuse, social exclusion)
- Young people's strength development to overcome adversity
- Promote positive relationships with peers, family, society in general etc.

One of the key ways to build resilience in young people is through meaningful youth participation. This approach allows young people to take part in important decision-making processes, which not only empowers them but also helps to build their self-confidence. Active participation strengthens their sense of belonging and encourages the development of critical thinking and personal skills, which are essential for navigating challenges and fostering resilience.

Additionally, prevention programmes play a vital role in promoting resilience by reducing risks such as substance abuse and social exclusion. These programmes focus on developing young people's strengths to help them overcome adversity, while fostering positive relationships with peers, family, and wider society. Together, meaningful participation and prevention programmes create a supportive environment that empowers young people and enhances their well-being, contributing to their overall resilience. The combination of promoting meaningful

youth participation alongside preventing programmes creates a holistic approach to building resilience, tailored to the mental health needs of young people. When young people actively participate in shaping both promotion and prevention programmes related to mental health, they develop key skills like stress management, emotional control, and problem-solving, which significantly enhance their resilience. These practices address their need to feel connected, valued, and empowered, all of which are essential for fostering effective resilience.



04. Youth Engagement Framework for mental health promotion and prevention in Cyprus

The development of a Youth Engagement Framework is essential for guiding the implementation of mental health promotion and prevention programmes for youth and children in Cyprus. This framework will provide a structured approach to delivering mental health support and services, ensuring that young people play an active role in shaping these initiatives. To achieve this, the framework will include the following key elements:

- 1. A focus on mental health resilience among young people aged 15-24,
- 2. Mechanisms to effectively reach diverse groups, including refugees, out-of-school adolescents, and other vulnerable youth,
- 3. Strategies and tools for meaningful youth engagement, and
- 4. A comprehensive implementation plan.

By fostering youth participation in decision-making, the framework will enable key stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of young people’s experiences, coping mechanisms, the factors contributing to harmful practices, and their preferences regarding service access and support.

This framework is built on the idea that young people’s voices, experiences, and ideas matter. It creates spaces where youth can contribute, feel heard, and help drive change in mental health awareness, support systems, and policy-making processes. Through inclusive participation, it strengthens youth leadership, fosters collaboration between young people and decision-makers, and ensures that mental health initiatives are designed with and for youth.

In formulating the framework, we took into account, among others, Professor Laura Lundy’s Lundy Model of Participation. By applying the Lundy Model in the Cypriot context, we were able to provide for the key principles of this Youth Engagement Framework being turned into concrete, workable processes. The model directly informed how we developed youth-friendly and safe spaces for young people (Space), built youth-friendly and diverse avenues for expression (Voice), necessitated decision-makers to listen and hear actively the voice of young people (Audience), and built systemic loops of feedback so that young people could observe how their thoughts shape mental health policy and services (Influence). By such an approach, the framework guarantees that young people in Cyprus are not merely listened to but truly valued as equal partners whose view makes a significant contribution to mental health promotion and prevention efforts. The model aligns with the legal obligation under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which Cyprus ratified



The Four Elements of the Lundy Model informed our design

Space: Creating Opportunities for Expression. The youth must be given secure, inclusive, and appropriate spaces to be listened to. Youth diversity in Cyprus—refugee youth, youth with disabilities, out-of-school youth, youth from isolated or marginalized communities including LGBTQI+ youth—must be addressed by participation spaces that respect cultural, language, and identity diversity.

Voice: Supporting Youth to Express themselves. Young people should be empowered to express their views in a medium of their choice. Power disparities, mental health stigma, and cultural expectations may limit young people from expressing themselves freely. Thus, variety and accessible media must be provided.

Audience: Ensuring Adults with Power are Listening. The decision-makers must hear youth voices. In our project, the co-design process engages the Ministry of Health, Municipalities, the Youth Board and the Youth Council.

Influence: Acting on Youth Input and closing the feedback. Young people's views must be answered to, as required and young people must be informed how their input has made a difference. This is the most commonly omitted stage, but it is crucial for building trust and engagement over the long term. One of the key aspects of the Lundy Model is that young people's views must lead to real changes.

The Lundy Model provides a roadmap to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and ethical youth engagement in Cyprus' mental health systems. Its outline is organised yet elastic and thus supplements the national Youth Engagement Framework,⁵ particularly to facilitate resilience development, stigma elimination, and leadership capacity development among young people. By embedding Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence in service and policy design, delivery, and evaluation, Cyprus can ensure young people are not just heard—but genuinely shape the systems that affect their lives.

4.1

Key Principles

The Youth Engagement Framework is developed under the context of an holistic approach on youth participation from various backgrounds and profiles. This Framework adapts Diversity, Equity, Inclusion⁶ (DEI), Youth Friendly, Transparent, and Participatory approaches as Key Principles.

² <https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/en/youthstrategy2030/#tab-id-1>

³ Barkley, L., Kelley, M. A., Mihaly, L., & Chulani, V. L. (2022). Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional organizations: Lessons from the society for adolescent health and medicine. *J Adolesc Health*, 71, 523-525.

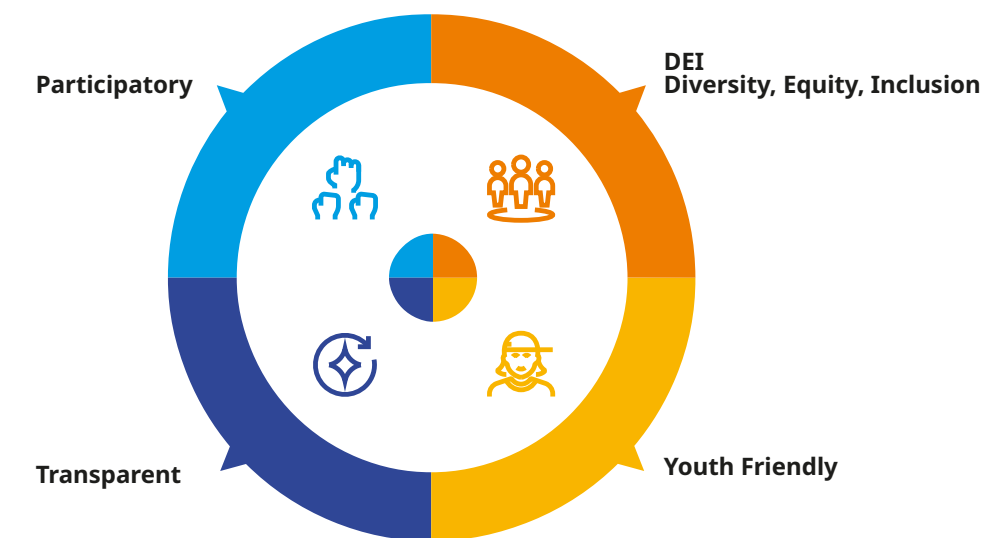


Figure 1: Key Principles

Participatory

- A participatory approach empowers young people by actively involving them in different processes and ensuring their voices are heard and valued at all stages of mental health programmes. This approach fosters ownership, accountability, and deepens young people's investment in the outcomes. Therefore, to ensure a participatory approach, practitioners can refer to established protocols such as Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A protocol for practitioners (UNICEF, 2022), which provides detailed guidance on involving young people in all stages of programme development, from planning to evaluation.
- The UNICEF's protocol emphasises the following steps for participatory engagement:
- Establishing clear communication channels
- Providing training for practitioners on participatory methods
- Ensuring youth have a voice in decision making etc.

We will do this by:

- Actively involving young people in all stages of programme development, from planning to evaluation, to ensure that their insights shape the initiatives.
- Fostering a collaborative environment where young people can contribute ideas and solutions that reflect their lived experiences and needs.
- Promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility among young people, encouraging them to engage as active partners in mental health efforts.

Mutual trust and transparency

- Encountering that actions and programmes will work effectively through a collaboration between stakeholders, experts, children and young people mutual trust and transparency needs to be accounted for ensuring young people's engagement.

We will do this by:

- Using accessible language for both written and verbal communication to rein-

force trust and transparency among interested parties;

- Ensure clarity and efficient distribution of roles, tasks, and responsibilities;
- Foster an intergenerational mutual respect and positive environment; and
- Ensure transparency among processes and follow fair aspects of all kinds of procedures.

Youth Friendly

- Participant safety and well-being are considered as a priority for all young people, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. All participants should feel safe, supported and confident to actively participate as equal partners in the development and implementation of mental health prevention and promotion programmes. To ensure this all activities need to be considered as youth friendly activities.

We will do this by:

- Recognising the abilities and strengths of each individual, empowering participants and encouraging them to feel safe, valued and understood;
- Creating a youth-friendly and safe environment for young people to express themselves and ensure that they are fully aware that they can cease involvement at any stage;
- Giving prior notice of potentially upsetting material;
- Using tools that ensures anonymous feedback; and
- Ensuring that facilities are accessible, inclusive and safe spaces for all participants.

Diverse, inclusive and accessible

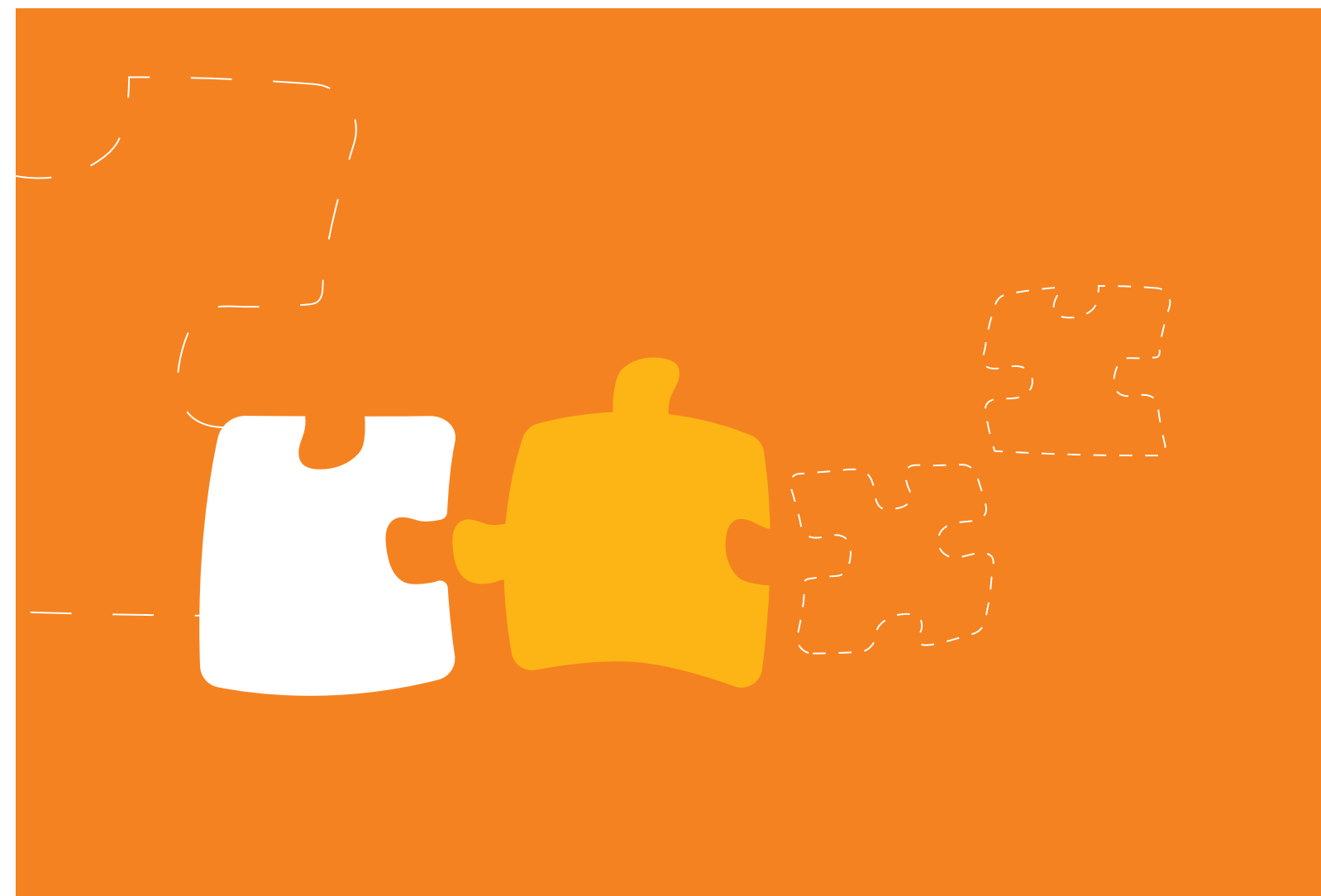
- To ensure that all children and young people will equally participate in promotion and prevention programmes of mental health, ways of overcoming challenges and enabling accessibility are needed. UNICEF's Brief: Creating Safer Spaces to Support Meaningful Participation of LGBTIQ+ Young People (2023) provides essential guidance on how to create inclusive environments and address potential barriers to participation for this group.

We will do this by:

- Gender mainstreaming: A horizontal approach of promotion and prevention programmes to ensure equal gender representation, and reduce/combat gender stereotypes;
- Encourage participation despite ethnic background, native language, sexual orientation or gender identities;
- Follow multiple methods of participation to enable accessibility (e.g. face to face, hybrid, online, encounter the different level of knowledge, information and skills);
- Overcome language barriers (e.g. active involvement of interpreters and translators for written documents or campaigning products);

- Incorporate multiple methods of communication to overcome ability barriers;
- Provide support on expenses for participants to encourage their engagement in the programmes;
- Actively seeking participants with fewer opportunities and from groups that are hard to reach (e.g. refugees, children out of school, young people from rural areas etc.); and
- Engage in individual or group-level assessment to ensure that specific needs can be addressed based on the audience / target group in each implemented programme.

These approaches derive from and aligned with UNICEF's [Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework](#) (UNICEF, 2017) and the [Youth engaged for mental health: a framework for youth participation under the WHO Pan-European Mental Health coalition](#) (2023), to create an inclusive environment where all young people can engage meaningfully. The framework emphasises youth-centered decision-making, gender equality, and overcoming participation barriers while fostering trust, transparency, and safe spaces where young people feel valued and heard.



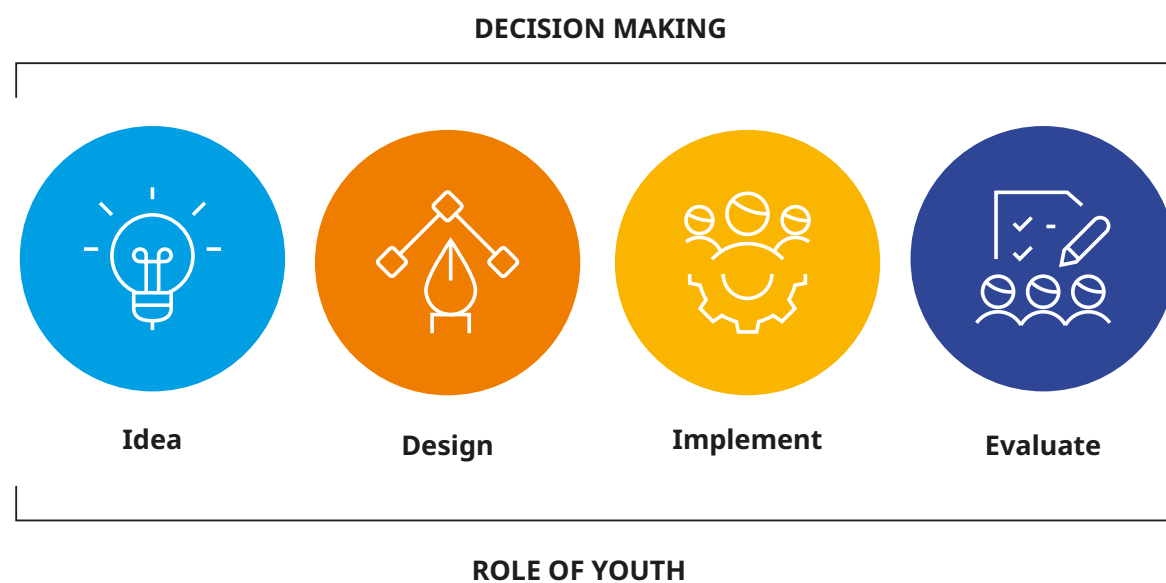


Figure 2: Youth Engagement Framework Stages

4.2

Roadmap of Youth Engagement Stages in Mental Health Initiatives

The Youth Engagement Framework Stages diagram illustrates a structured, participatory process for involving young people in the development and implementation of mental health promotion and prevention initiatives. It is divided into four key stages: Idea, where initial concepts and needs are identified; Design, where strategies and interventions are developed; Implement, where planned actions are put into practice; and Evaluate, where the effectiveness of these efforts is assessed and improved. The two horizontal arrows emphasise that youth play a continuous and active role throughout all stages, not only as participants but also as decision-makers. This ensures that their voices, lived experiences, and insights directly influence the design and execution of programmes, making them more relevant, effective, and youth-centered. This approach ensures that young people are consistently involved in shaping, making, and reviewing decisions at every stage, which strengthens their sense of ownership, supports their empowerment, and contributes to sustainable impact.

4.2.1

Modes of Participation

Youth can engage in decision-making through different modes, each offering varying levels of influence and involvement. These modes are categorised as consultative, collaborative, and youth-led, as outlined in the Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement.

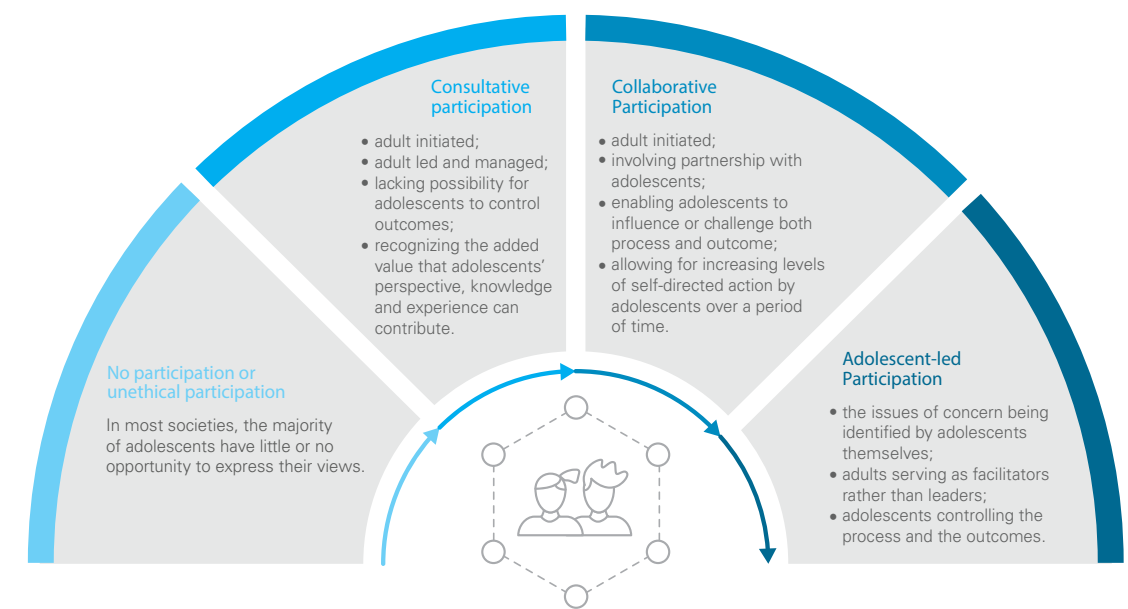


Figure 3: Modes of Participation (UNICEF, 2020)

Each mode of participation—consultative, collaborative, and youth-led—is valid and suitable depending on the context, provided it meets the nine essential criteria. For meaningful consultative and collaborative participation, it is especially crucial to consider elements such as space, voice, audience, and influence, ensuring that youth have an impact on adult decision-makers regarding issues that affect them. While these elements are important for many youth-led initiatives, they may not always be required in the same way.

4.3

Strategies for Youth Participation and Civic Engagement



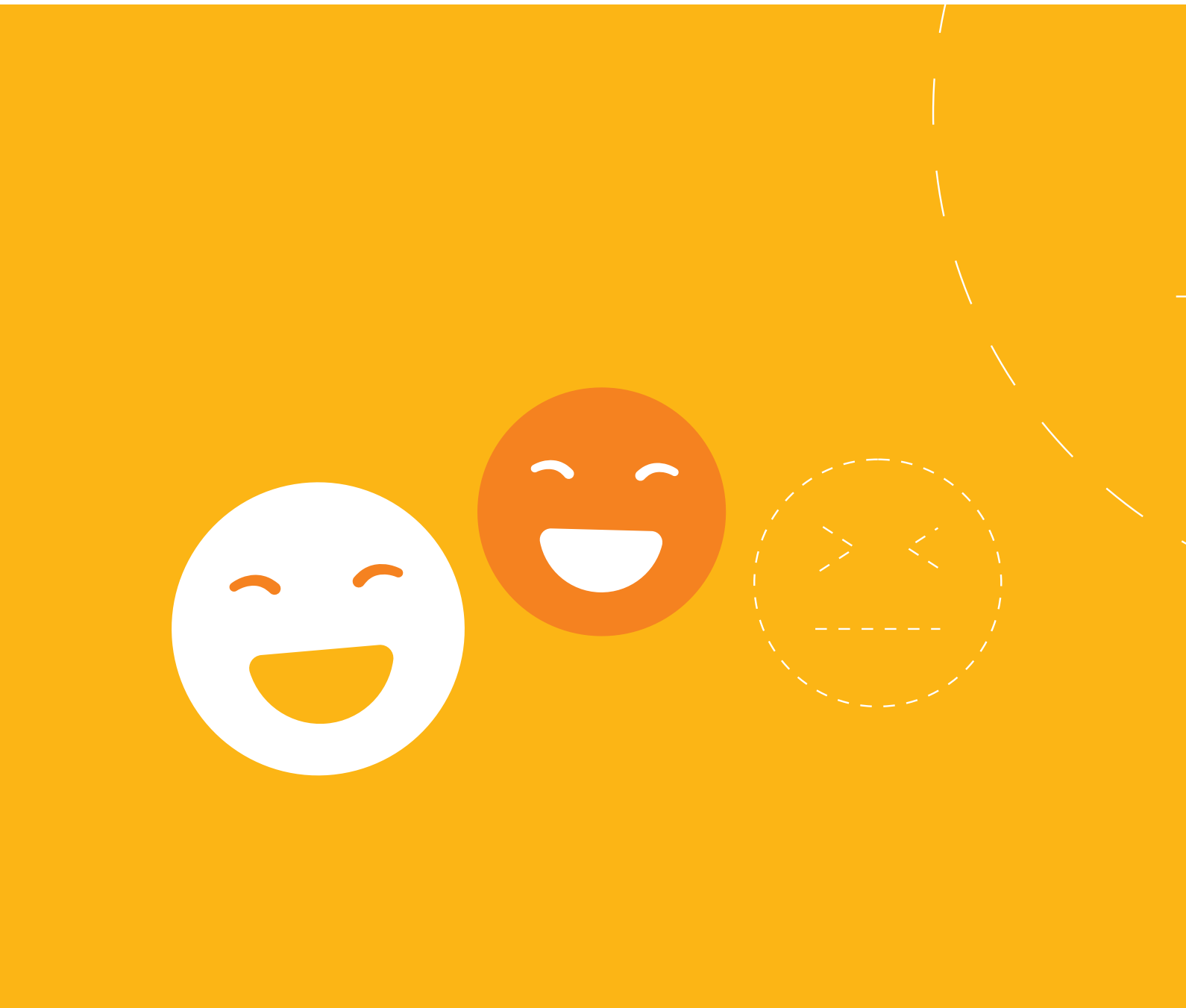
Figure 4: Five main strategies for adolescent participation and civic engagement (UNICEF, 2020)

This figure, drawn from *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, five core strategies designed to strengthen youth participation in civic life. The first strategy focuses on advocating for laws, policies, and budgets that support youth engagement and create an enabling environment for their involvement. The second emphasises enhancing positive social norms and attitudes, ensuring that communities recognise and value youth participation.

Additionally, the framework highlights the importance of building the awareness, skills, and capacities of both adults and youth to foster meaningful youth engagement. By equipping

adults with the knowledge and tools to support young people, and empowering youth with the skills to contribute effectively, this approach creates a foundation for sustainable participation. Lastly, the framework underscores the need to create and sustain platforms where youth can engage in civic activities, voice their opinions, and actively participate in decision-making processes.

These strategies work together to ensure that young people are not only included in civic life but also empowered to drive positive social change.aged 15-19 referred to the absence of school psychologists. The limited availability of mental health professionals in familiar environments can create barriers for students who need immediate support, leaving them without access to critical resources when they face mental health challenges. Also, older students mentioned that it is not always easy to find the right mental health professional as they must first feel comfortable with them.



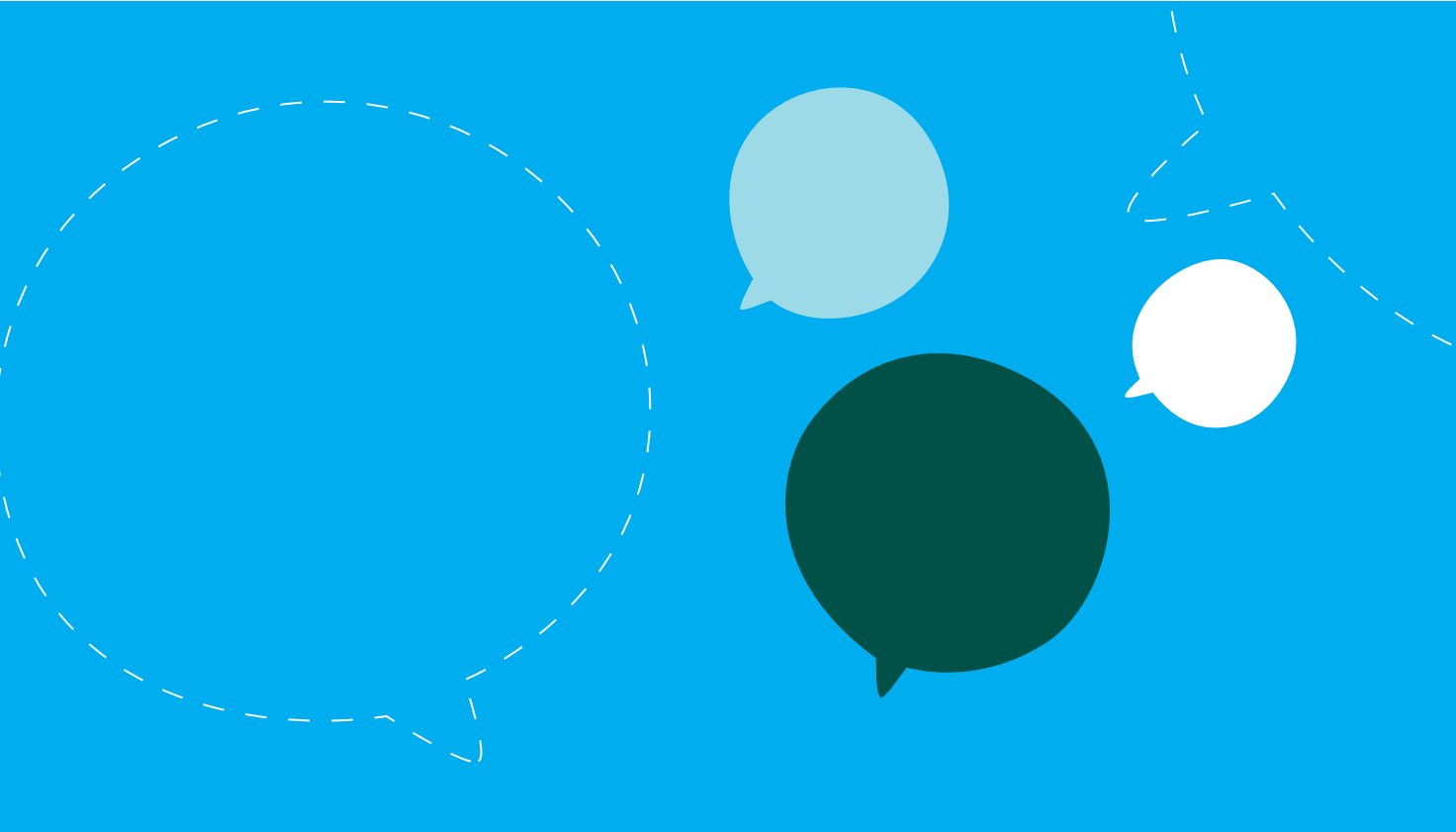
05. Strategies and Tools for Effective Youth EngagementEngagement

The following strategies and tools for effective youth engagement are based on the collected recommendations by experts and young people focusing on mental health promotion and prevention under TSI “Supporting Mental Health Resilience Among Youth in Cyprus” . Setting up youth engagement strategies must be aligned on the actual field of implementation, thereby, taking into consideration the proposed recommendations (see Table 1. Row 1/Column 1. Focus Areas) is an important aspect for the development of the Youth Engagement Framework.

Table 1. Strategies and Tools for Effective Youth Engagement in Focus Areas

Focus Areas	Strategies	Tools
Creating Inclusive Environments	Implement measures to ensure youth representing diverse backgrounds (social, economic, political, cultural and linguistic, ethnic, religious, gender and identity, disability etc.) feel safe and welcome	Creating safer spaces to support meaningful participation of young people from diverse backgrounds, guidance on inclusive language, policies and practices.
Youth-Friendly Mental Health Services	Involve youth in shaping mental health services.	• Youth committees and advisory boards. • Regular feedback and consultations. • Co-creation processes with young people.
Accessible Resources	Ensure mental health resources are youth-friendly and accessible.	• Digital platforms and multilingual resources. • Workshops and information sessions.
Combating Mental Health Stigma	Raise awareness and challenge stigma through youth-led initiatives.	• Digital campaigns and youth ambassadors. • Peer advocacy and storytelling.

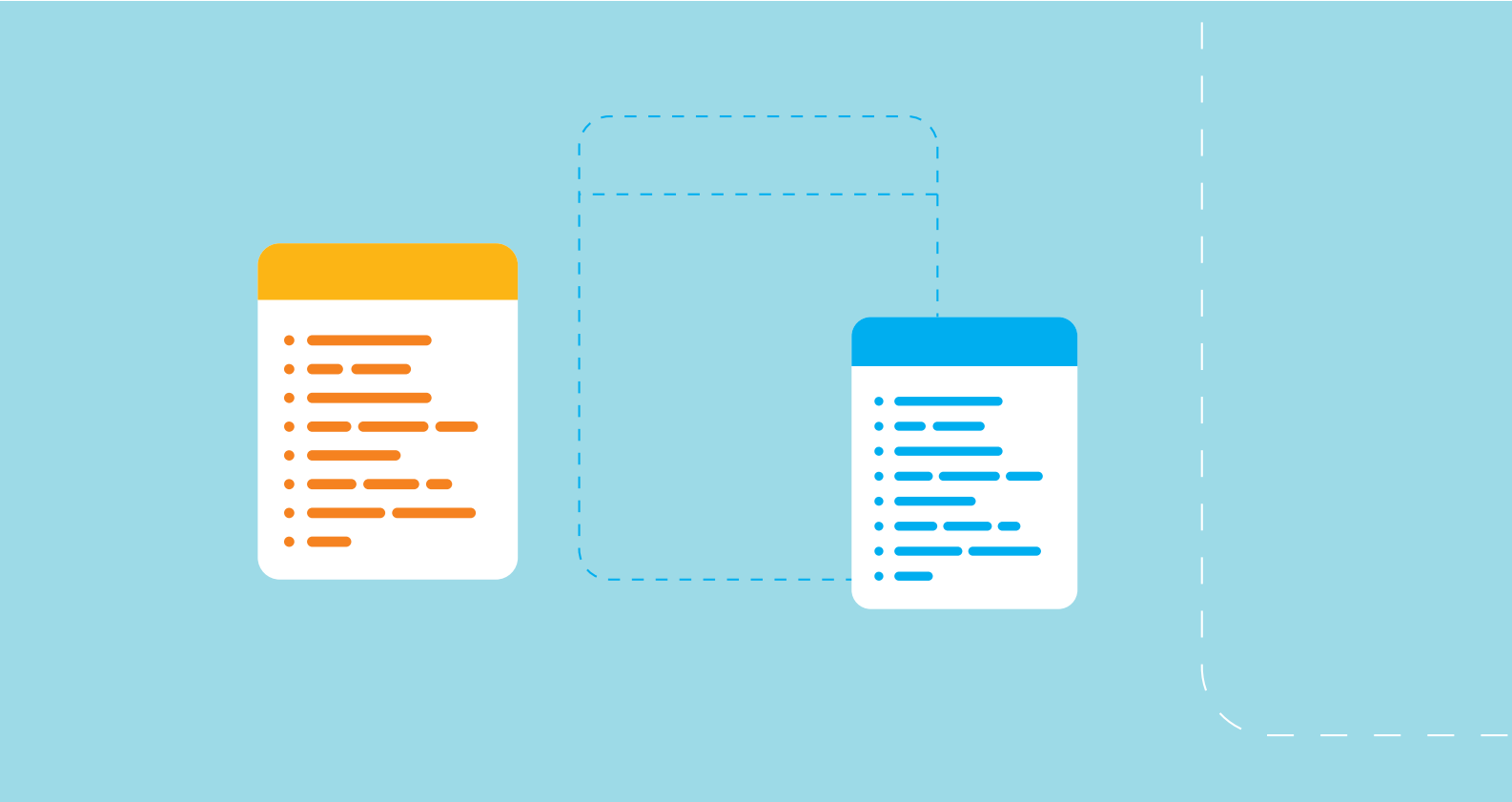
Targeted Preventive Approaches for Vulnerable Groups	Provide targeted health support for vulnerable youth. • Youth committees for marginalised groups. • Peer-to-peer mentoring and street-level interventions.
Multidisciplinary Collaboration	Foster cross-sector collaboration for comprehensive youth mental health support. • Horizontal strategies across sectors (education, health, welfare). • Community partnerships and safe spaces.
Strategic Investments in Mental Health	Prioritise investments based on youth input. • Focus groups and youth feedback on funding priorities. • Dedicated seats in working groups of major policy development processes (e.g. National Mental Health Strategy, Youth Strategy, etc.) • Continuous professional development for youth mental health workers.



06. Comprehensive Implementation Plan

To successfully execute the Youth Engagement Framework, key areas such as legislative and regulatory adjustments, guideline development, training initiatives and stakeholder engagement strategies are presented below through a Comprehensive Implementation Plan.

In support of the effective implementation of these legislative and regulatory adjustments, a Youth Mental Health Legislative Monitoring Committee under the Ministry of Health shall be established. The purpose of this committee will be to ensure that progress is monitored, conformity with youth-inclusive provisions occurs, and there is continuous evaluation of the policies adopted. The committee will comprise representatives from the Ministry of Health, Mental Health Services, the Ministry of Education, Social Welfare Services, ONEK, CYC, municipal authorities, and at least four youth organisations representatives from diverse backgrounds, including marginalised groups. Reviewing implementation data, the quality and inclusivity of youth participation, identification of barriers, and the issuance of recommendations for improvement - this will be the essence of quarterly meetings held within the committee. An annual public report shall summarise findings, outline achievements, and propose corrective actions, securing full transparency and accountability throughout the legislative process.



6.1

Legislative and Regulatory Adjustments⁴

Table 2. Legislative and Regulatory Adjustments

Action	Idea	Design	Implement	Evaluate
Mental Health Policies	Revise policies to include youth engagement. Youth: Provide input on needs and priorities. Decision-makers: Initiate policy review.	Youth: Participate in consultations to ensure policies reflect their needs. Decision-makers: Lead policy design and alignment with education and health sectors.	Youth: Advise on policy revision. Ministry of Health: Lead policy update. Ministry of Education: Align policies with formal educational institutions (schools, universities, VET providers, etc.).	Youth: Provide feedback on policy effectiveness. Decision-makers: Assess engagement and impact on youth services.
Youth Participation Legislation	Develop youth participation regulations. Youth: Advocate for legal changes and representation. Decision-makers: Lead legislation drafting.	Youth: Collaborate in designing regulations that ensure their participation. Decision-makers: Design youth-inclusive legislative framework.	Youth: Advocate for the implementation of youth-inclusive legislation. Ministry of Health: Enforce regulations. Cyprus Youth Council: Represent youth interests.	Youth: Measure the success of youth participation. Decision-makers: Track implementation and participation rates.
Funding Mechanisms	Youth-centered mental health programmes. Youth: Suggest funding priorities based on needs. Decision-makers: Ensure proper funding allocation.	Youth: Advise on funding priorities to align with their needs. Decision-makers: Design funding allocation criteria.	Youth: Help ensure programmes are youth-centered. Ministry of Health: Allocate funding. Municipalities: Ensure equal access to funds.	Youth: Provide feedback on the effectiveness of funded programmes. Decision-makers: Evaluate the impact and reach of funded initiatives.

- Youth's Role:** Youth are involved in each phase by providing input, participating in consultations, advocating Youth's Role: Youth are involved in each phase by providing input, participating in consultations, advocating for their needs, and evaluating the impact of policies and programmes.
- Decision-makers' Role:** Decision-makers (like ministries and councils) take the lead in designing, implementing, and evaluating policies, ensuring that youth input is actively considered and that the programmes are successfully carried out



Youth

Actively participate and provide input



Decision Makers

Lead development and ensure youth input

Indicators:	Establishment and operationalisation of a Youth Mental Health Monitoring Committee with at least 2 youth representatives
Timeframe:	By December 2026

⁴National Mental Health Strategy (2025–2028) In March 2025, the Council of Ministers approved a new National Mental Health Strategy 2025–2028, developed by the Ministry of Health. This is Cyprus' first comprehensive mental health plan, aiming to strengthen the mental health system and protect the rights of people with mental health conditions, ultimately improving quality of life for all – with a particular focus on young people. The strategy, unveiled by Health Minister Michael Damianos in April 2025, is structured around six key pillars addressing: prevention/early intervention, expansion of community-based services, social inclusion (housing, education, employment) and patient reintegration, public awareness and stigma reduction, updated policies and legal frameworks, and promotion of research. For example, it calls for mental health action plans “in every school and every workplace,” and introduces “cultural” and “sports” prescriptions to support mental well-being. The strategy was formulated with input from the World Health Organisation and in collaboration with other ministries and stakeholders, including youth representatives, underscoring the priority on youth mental health in Cyprus' agenda. It was officially published/announced in early 2025 (approved on 12 March 2025), and the Ministry of Health is now tasked with its implementation. Over the 2025–2028 period, authorities will roll out an Action Plan under this strategy – reviewing mental health laws, establishing assisted-living facilities, training professionals and employers, and enhancing psychological support services for children and adolescents.

6.2

Guideline Development for Youth Mental Health Promotion and Prevention

Table 3. Guideline Development

Action	Idea	Design	Implement	Evaluate
Youth-Oriented Mental Health Guidelines	Develop youth-friendly mental health service guidelines. Youth: Share input on service needs and preferences. Decision-makers: Initiate guideline development.	Youth: Provide insights on how services can be more accessible and engaging for young people. Decision-makers: Lead the creation of guidelines in collaboration with youth.	Youth: Ensure the guidelines reflect their needs and perspectives. Ministry of Health: Lead the development of guidelines. Ministry of Education: Align guidelines with school environments.	Youth: Give feedback on the accessibility and effectiveness of the guidelines. Decision-makers: Assess how well the guidelines are integrated into youth mental health services.
Framework for Youth Advisory Committees	Establish Youth Advisory Committees at national and local levels. Youth: Advocate for the creation of advisory committees. Decision-makers: Lead the establishment of committees.	Youth: Participate in designing the structure and function of the committees. Decision-makers: Develop a formal framework for Youth Advisory Committees.	Youth: Actively participate in local and national advisory committees. Ministry of Health: Formalise and implement the committees. Cyprus Youth Council: Facilitate youth involvement and actively participate in local and national advisory committees.	Youth: Evaluate the effectiveness of the advisory committees. Decision-makers: Gather feedback and assess the impact of committees on decision-making processes.
Youth Participation Evaluation	Develop tools to assess youth participation and satisfaction in mental health services. Youth: Provide feedback on how their participation can be evaluated.	Youth: Assist in designing evaluation tools to assess their experience. Decision-makers: Develop the evaluation framework in collaboration with youth representatives.	Youth: Help implement the evaluation by participating in surveys or interviews. Ministry of Health: Oversee the implementation of evaluation tools. Youth Board of Cyprus: Collect and analyse feedback.	Youth: Offer insights on their experience with mental health services and participation. Decision-makers: Review and integrate evaluation results into future mental health strategies and programmes.

- Youth’s Role:** Youth are involved in each phase by providing feedback, participating in the design of guidelines or frameworks, and evaluating how well programmes and committees work.
- Decision-makers’ Role:** Decision-makers (ministries, councils, and committees) lead the development and implementation of guidelines, frameworks, and evaluation processes, ensuring youth input is included at every stage.
- The guidelines developed under this section refer to** national youth-oriented mental health service guidelines, **led by the Ministry of Health, which will provide a** common, standardised framework for youth-friendly service provision across Cyprus.
- While the guidelines are developed at** national level, **their** implementation and piloting will take place primarily at municipal and community level, **including municipal youth services, community mental health services, and school-based support structures. This approach ensures consistency at national level while allowing flexibility for adaptation to local contexts and needs.**
- Municipalities are therefore not expected to develop separate guidelines, but to apply, pilot, and provide feedback on the national guidelines, contributing to their refinement prior to wider national rollout.**



Youth

Provide feedback and participate in design



Decision Makers

Lead development and ensure youth input

Indicators:	Youth-oriented mental health service guidelines and the local framework for Youth Advisory Committees will be fully developed and piloted in at least two municipalities, with a strong focus on mental health promotion and prevention services.
Timeframe:	By September 2026

6.3

Training and Capacity-Building Initiatives

Table 4. Training and Capacity-Building Initiatives

Action	Idea	Design	Implement	Evaluate
Youth Engagement Training for Professionals	Develop training programmes for mental health professionals to enhance youth engagement. Youth: Provide input on what training should include. Decision-makers: Initiate training programmes. Training programmes for mental health professionals should include information on established protocols for youth engagement (e.g. Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A protocol for practitioners, UNICEF, 2022) to enhance their capacity to work effectively with young people.	Youth: Help design training content, ensuring youth perspectives are integrated. Decision-makers: Develop a framework for training mental health professionals.	Youth: Facilitate workshops where they share experiences with professionals. Ministry of Health: Coordinate and provide resources for training. Ministry of Education: Deliver training in schools.	Youth: Provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training and its relevance to their needs. Decision-makers: Evaluate training success and its impact on youth engagement in mental health services.

Youth Leadership Empowerment	Empower youth to become leaders in mental health advocacy. Youth: Identify areas of leadership and mentorship they need support with. Decision-makers: Support youth leadership development.	Youth: Contribute to the design of leadership programmes to ensure they address key areas of youth empowerment in mental health. Decision-makers: Facilitate training development.	Youth: Participate in leadership training and mentorship programmes. Youth Board of Cyprus: Lead and provide resources for the programmes. Cyprus Youth Council: Support youth-led advocacy initiatives.	Youth: Provide feedback on leadership training effectiveness. Decision-makers: Assess the impact of leadership programmes on youth mental health advocacy.
Policy-makers and Stakeholders Trainings	Train policy-makers and stakeholders on how to engage with young people in mental health. Youth: Identify the key skills and topics needed for the training. Decision-makers: Coordinate the training efforts.	Youth: Help design the curricula by identifying relevant topics (e.g., youth mental health, resilience, engagement strategies). Decision-makers: Develop and structure the training programme.	Youth: Share experiences during training sessions to provide context for policymakers. Ministry of Health: Lead and organise training for policymakers and service providers. Municipalities: Ensure local engagement in training.	Youth: Evaluate how well policymakers and stakeholders incorporate youth engagement into their work. Decision-makers: Review the outcomes of the training to see its impact on mental health policies and services.

- Youth's Role:** Youth provide insights during the **Idea** and **Design** phases, ensuring that training programmes and leadership opportunities are relevant to their needs. They also actively participate in the **Implement** phase by facilitating workshops, taking part in training, and sharing experiences. Lastly, youth provide valuable feedback in the **Evaluate** phase.
- Decision-makers' Role:** Decision-makers (ministries, councils, municipalities) initiate, lead, and coordinate the training and capacity-building initiatives. They design the frameworks, provide resources, and assess the outcomes of the programmes in collaboration with youth.



Youth

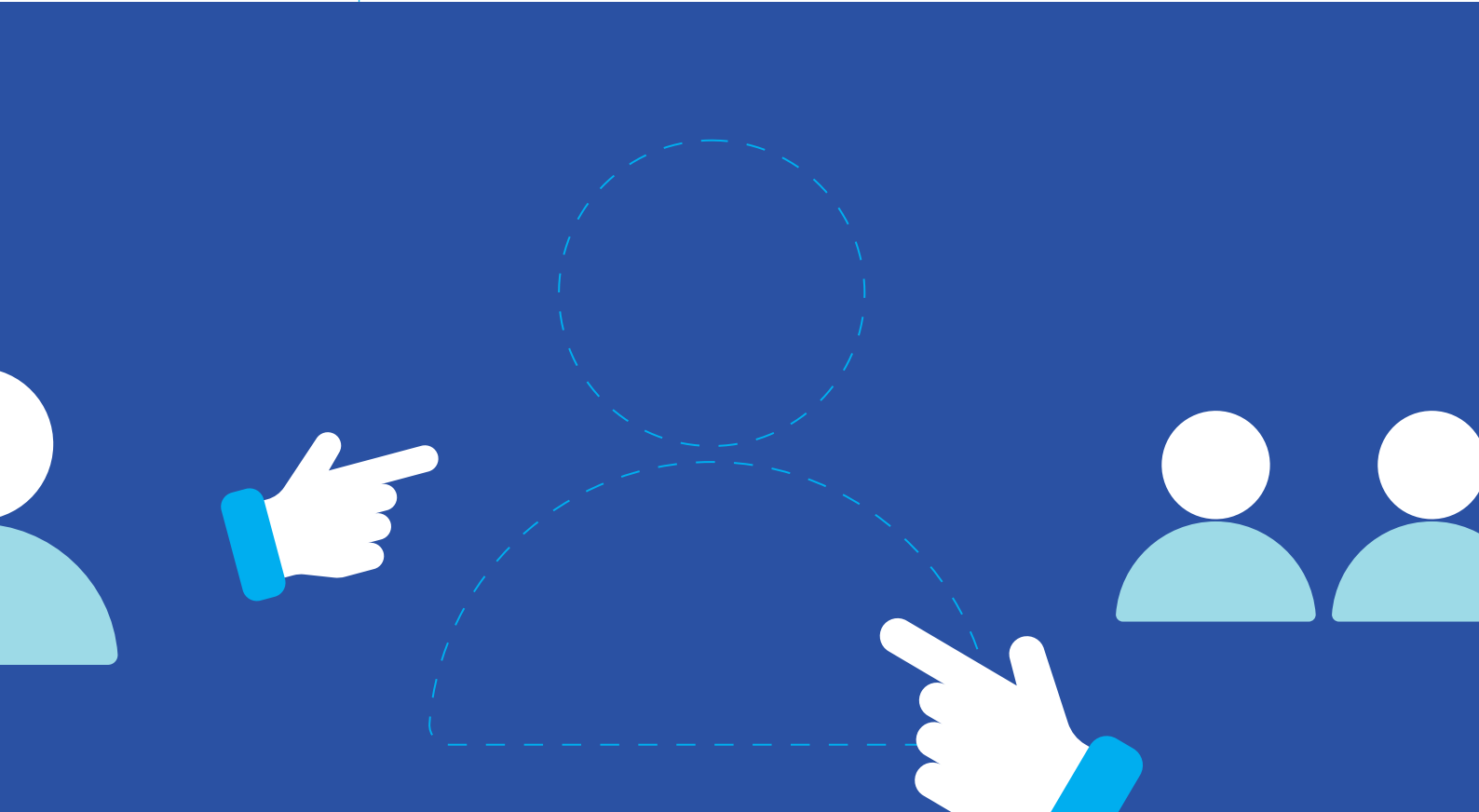
Provide insights, facilitate workshops, and give feedback



Decision Makers

Initiate, coordinate, and assess programmes

Indicators:	A minimum of 200 mental health professionals, policymakers, and youth leaders are trained using the new youth-engagement curriculum.
Timeframe:	By December 2026



6.4 Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Table 5. Stakeholders Engagement Strategies

Action	Idea	Design	Implement	Evaluate
Stakeholder Partnerships	Develop partnerships across sectors to align with national mental health policies. Youth: Advocate for youth participation/representation in these partnerships. Decision-makers: Initiate cross-sector partnerships.	Youth: Provide input on how to ensure meaningful youth participation in decision-making. Decision-makers: Design partnerships that include youth and local stakeholders.	Youth: Participate in decision-making processes within partnerships. Ministry of Health: Lead the facilitation of partnerships. Municipalities: Advocate for local partnerships.	Youth: Assess whether their needs are effectively addressed in the partnerships. Decision-makers: Review the outcomes of the partnerships and their impact on youth mental health services.
Engagement of Young People in Design and Implementation	Ensure youth engagement in the design, delivery, and evaluation of mental health services. Youth: Advocate for their role in shaping services. Decision-makers: Ensure youth involvement in all stages.	Youth: Help design mental health services to ensure they are relevant and accessible. Decision-makers: Integrate youth engagement strategies in the service framework.	Youth: Organise and lead events to gather feedback and share perspectives. Ministry of Health: Incorporate youth feedback into service design and delivery. Local youth councils: Facilitate youth involvement locally.	Youth: Provide feedback on their level of engagement and the effectiveness of services. Decision-makers: Evaluate how well youth engagement has been integrated into the services and make adjustments where necessary..

Communi-ty Aware-ness and Advocacy	Raise aware-ness about mental health and advocate for positive change. Youth: Advo-cate for youth-led campaigns. Deci-sion-mak-ers: Support national and local aware-ness initiatives.	Youth: De-sign and lead youth-specific mental health advocacy cam-paigns. Decision-mak-ers: Create resources and funding op-portunities for awareness efforts.	Youth: Lead awareness campaigns in schools, com-munities, and social media. Ministry of Health: Provide resources and support for campaigns. Municipali-ties: Assist in organising local events.	Youth: Evalu-ate the success and reach of their awareness campaigns. Decision-mak-ers: Assess the impact of awareness efforts on re-ducing stigma and improving youth engage-ment with mental health services.
Inclusive Approach	Ensure all youth, includ-ing marginal-ised groups, are included in mental health initia-tives. Youth: Advo-cate for the inclusion of vulnerable populations. Deci-sion-makers: Oversee inclu-sive processes.	Youth: Assist in identifying marginalised groups and sug-gesting inclusive strategies. Decision-mak-ers: Design poli-cies and strate-gies for inclusive engagement.	Youth: Facili-tate outreach efforts to marginalised groups. Ministry of Health: Sup-port inclusive consultation processes. Local youth councils: Work directly with hard-to-reach populations.	Youth: Pro-vide feedback on the inclu-siveness of outreach and engagement efforts. Decision-mak-ers: Review the effectiveness of inclusive strategies and adjust policies or approaches as needed.

- **Youth's Role:** Youth provide insights during the **Idea** and **Design** phases, ensuring that training programmes and leadership opportunities are relevant to their needs. They also actively participate in the **Implement** phase by facilitating workshops, taking part in training, and sharing experiences. Lastly, youth provide valuable feedback in the **Evaluate** phase.
- **Decision-makers' Role:** Decision-makers (ministries, councils, municipalities) initiate, lead, and coordinate the training and capacity-building initiatives. They design the frameworks, provide resources, and assess the outcomes of the programmes in col-laboration with youth.



Youth

Actively involved and represent marginalised groups



Decision Makers

Facilitate inclusion and resource provisions

Indicators:	Establish and actively engage at least five new cross-sector stakeholders in youth mental health partnerships
Timeframe:	By May 2026

6.5

Detailed Role Definitions

Clear roles and responsibilities are critical in outlining how all the actors will have their contri-bution to the development of coherent, inclusive, and effective youth-oriented mental health guidelines. The following role descriptions outline the specific contributions of each stakehold-er group through the various stages of idea generation, design, implementation, and evalua-tion. By detailing these roles, this framework ensures accountability; it catalyzes collaboration and ensures that the voice of youth remains central throughout the guideline development process.

Ministry of Health (MoH) – Lead Authority and Technical Owner

- Provides leadership to the entire guideline development process and ensures align-ment with national mental health priorities.
- Appoints a technical drafting team consisting of specialists in mental health, public health officers, and legal advisors.
- Oversees the incorporation of youth feedback into the final guidelines, ensuring align-

ment with national standards.

- Coordinates piloting of the guidelines in selected municipalities; evaluates readiness of services for adoption.
- Provides final approval and distributes guidelines to all public mental health units, hospitals, and community centers.

Ministry of Education, Sport & Youth (MoE) – Education System Integration Lead

- Ensures that school-based mental health structures adopt the new guidelines.
- Aligns guidelines with existing school counselling protocols, well-being programs, and psychosocial support systems.
- Coordinates training sessions for school counsellors, psychologists, teachers, and student welfare teams.
- Collects quarterly feedback from schools to support the revision and improvement of the guidelines.

Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) – Youth Participation and Accessibility Lead

- Identifies and recruits diverse youth participants for the co-creation and review of guidelines.
- Ensures guidelines are accessible to young people: in clear language, in inclusive formats, and in multiple languages.
- Supports the development of youth-friendly versions, such as summaries or infographics.
- Facilitates workshops and focus groups with youth during the design and piloting phases.
- Ensures the guidelines address real barriers experienced by young people when accessing services.

Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) – Youth Consultation and Validation Lead

- Mobilizes youth organizations across Cyprus to provide input and evidence.
- Leads structured consultations to ensure representation from the youth NGOs, student unions, political youth wings, and marginalized youth groups.
- Consolidates youth recommendations and presents them to the drafting team.
- Ensures transparency by reporting back to youth about how their input influenced the final guidelines.

National Youth Advisory Committee: Co-creation and Review Body

- Participates directly in drafting sessions with the MoH technical teams.
- Ensures that guidelines reflect the lived experiences of young people, such as stigma, access barriers, and service expectations.
- Reviews drafts at each stage: idea, design, implementation and evaluation.
- Provides feedback on language clarity, cultural relevance, and youth friendliness.
- Supports monitoring by assessing whether the guidelines continue to be relevant over time.

Municipal Authorities: Implementing Locally and Providing Feedback

- Pilot the guidelines in municipal youth services such as youth centres and community mental health hubs.
- After piloting, collect data on accessibility, youth engagement, and service quality.
- Provide bi-annual implementation reports to MoH, summarizing progress and challenges.
- Facilitate outreach to hard-to-reach youth groups at community level.

Mental Health Professionals (Psychologists, Social Workers, Counsellors) – Technical Review and Practice Alignment Role

- Provide expert input regarding clinical accuracy, risk management, and service protocols.
- Ensure that guidelines align with ethical practices and evidence-based mental health standards.
- Test the feasibility of recommended procedures during the pilot phase.
- Provide technical guidance on modifications that are needed prior to national scale-up.

Youth Representatives Organizations – Lived Experience Contributors and Co-Design Partners

- Identify major barriers young people face in accessing mental health services.
- Review all guideline drafts for their youth-friendliness, accessibility, and relevance.
- Offer lived experience insights into confidentiality concerns, stigma issues, and trust-building measures.
- Participate in evaluation surveys and co-present findings during feedback meetings.

NGOs & Civil Society Organisations – Specialist Advisory and Monitoring Support

- Provide thematic expertise, such as LGBTQI+ youth, refugees, and youth with disabilities.
- Ensure guidelines reflect the needs of marginalized youth and are in line with human rights principles.
- Assist with training of service providers on inclusion and safeguarding.
- Support external evaluation and independent quality assurance.

UNICEF/External Experts - Technical Oversight and Standards Alignment Role

- Provide the methodological guidelines and ensure that these are congruent with international frameworks like UNICEF, WHO, and UNCRC.
- Support co-design processes with appropriate tools and best practices.
- Review final drafts to ensure they meet global standards for youth-friendly, rights-based mental health services.
- Provide technical capacity-building to national partners throughout the development process.

07. Conclusion

The Youth Engagement Framework represents a critical step toward addressing the mental health needs of young people, fostering resilience, and ensuring their active participation in the development of mental health initiatives. By involving youth in decision-making processes and empowering them to be co-creators of mental health programmes, the framework provides tools to navigate the complexities of mental health challenges and contribute to positive societal change. Through targeted prevention programmes, meaningful participation, and tailored support services, young people will be equipped to manage stress, build emotional intelligence, and develop problem-solving skills.

The successful implementation of this framework will require ongoing collaboration among institutional actors, stakeholders, youth organisations, and mental health professionals. By investing in training, creating youth-friendly policies, and fostering mutual trust and equal collaboration in decision-making processes for mental health, Cyprus can build effective mental health services that truly respond to the needs of its youth. The Youth Engagement Framework has the potential to transform the way mental health services are designed and delivered, ensuring that young people are not just recipients of care but active contributors to the creation of a mentally healthy future in Cyprus.



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