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Modern practices in non-formal education as a tool for preparing youth to work with migrant and refugee children as part of the DP5YOU project

Galan Yaroslav

PhD of Physical Education and Sports, Associate Professor,
Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University,
NGO YOUTH. SCIENCE. SPORTS. HEALTHY MOVEMENT OF UKRAINE,
Chernivtsi, Ukraine
e-mail: y.galan@chnu.edu.ua
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7024-5690>

Yarmak Olena

PhD in Physical Education and Sports, Professor,
National Defence University of Ukraine,
NGO YOUTH. SCIENCE. SPORTS. HEALTHY MOVEMENT OF UKRAINE,
Kyiv, Ukraine
e-mail: yarmak_en@ukr.net
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6580-6123>

Hutsuliak Liliana

Bachelor's degree, administrative worker
NGO YOUTH. SCIENCE. SPORTS. HEALTHY MOVEMENT OF UKRAINE,
Chernivtsi, Ukraine
e-mail: hutsuliak@yssukraine.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1743-7108>

Abstract. This article presents the results of the project "Digital Platform of Knowledge and Skills Development for Youth Working with Child Migrants and Refugees at the European Level" (DP5YOU), co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ program. It aims to develop and implement innovative tools to train youth (youth workers) for social work in the context of martial law and the migration crisis. The relevance of the study stems from the need to identify effective non-formal education methods for the professional training of youth capable of working with displaced children and refugees in Ukraine and the European Union. The purpose of the research is to provide a theoretical foundation and practical development of the concept of a digital platform as a tool for the non-formal education of youth (youth workers) to ensure their effective work with vulnerable groups of children. Results. A total of 78 respondents participated in the study, including 42 girls and 36 boys. The study found that only 34.6 % of the respondents had experience participating in youth projects, indicating significant potential for increasing youth civic engagement. At the same time, most respondents are familiar with the concept of non-formal education and demonstrate a willingness to organize activities for vulnerable groups of children. Among the priority competencies that need to be developed through non-formal education, leadership and career skills were identified by 46.2 %, European values by 33.3 %, digital skills by 33.3 %, and

environmental awareness by 10.2 %. Young people's interest in digital learning formats—specifically videos (55.1 %), flipbooks (53.8 %), and online platforms (44.9 %) – formed the basis for developing the concept of a digital platform. An important result obtained during the analysis of the responses is the high level of readiness among young people for practical activities; 82.1 % of respondents expressed a desire to participate in organizing events, which confirms the feasibility of developing innovative training tools within the DP5YOU project. Conclusions. The findings of this study confirm the relevance of using modern non-formal education practices as an effective tool for preparing youth to work with vulnerable groups of children. It was found that despite insufficient engagement in youth projects, young people demonstrate high motivation to participate in practical activities and a willingness to organize events. The scientifically grounded and well-developed concept of the digital platform is a key innovation of the project, fostering synergy between the theoretical training and practical work of youth workers. Priority competencies and a demand for blended learning formats have been identified, which justifies the feasibility of implementing innovative educational tools, particularly flipbooks, within the DP5YOU project.

Keywords: project, digitalization of education, professional competencies, migrant children, refugees, flipbooks, DP5YOU.

Сучасні практики неформальної освіти як інструмент підготовки молоді до роботи з дітьми-переселенцями та біженцями в рамках проєкту DP5YOU

Галан Ярослав Петрович

кандидат наук з фізичного виховання та спорту, доцент,

Чернівецький національний університет імені Юрія Федьковича,

ГРОМАДСЬКА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ МОЛОДЬ. НАУКА. СПОРТ. ЗДОРОВИЙ РУХ УКРАЇНИ,

Чернівці, Україна

e-mail: y.galan@chnu.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7024-5690>

Ярмак Олена Миколаївна

кандидат наук з фізичного виховання і спорту, професор,

Національного університету оборони України,

ГРОМАДСЬКА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ МОЛОДЬ. НАУКА. СПОРТ. ЗДОРОВИЙ РУХ УКРАЇНИ,

Київ, Україна

e-mail: yarmak_en@ukr.net

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6580-6123>

Гуцуляк Ліліана Василівна

бакалавр, адміністративний працівник,

ГРОМАДСЬКА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ МОЛОДЬ. НАУКА. СПОРТ. ЗДОРОВИЙ РУХ УКРАЇНИ,

Чернівці, Україна

e-mail: hutsuliak@yssukraine.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1743-7108>

Анотація. У статті представлені результати проекту "Digital Platform of Knowledge and Skills Development for Youth Working with Child Migrants and Refugees at European Level" (DP5YOU), що співфінансується Європейським союзом в рамках програми Еразмус+. Він спрямований на розробку та впровадження інноваційних інструментів підготовки молоді (молодіжних працівників) до соціальної роботи в умовах воєнного стану та міграційної кризи. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю пошуку дієвих методик неформальної освіти для фахової підготовки молоді, здатних працювати з дітьми-переселенцям та біженцям в Україні та Європейському Союзі. **Мета дослідження** передбачає теоретичне обґрунтування та практичну розробку концепції цифрової платформи як інструменту неформальної освіти молоді (молодіжних працівників) для забезпечення їхньої ефективної діяльності з вразливими категоріями дітей. **Результати.** У дослідженні взяли участь 78 респондентів, серед яких 42 особи становлять дівчата та 36 осіб юнаки. Встановлено, що лише 34,6 % опитаних респондентів мають досвід участі у молодіжних проектах, що свідчить про наявність значного потенціалу для підвищення рівня громадянської активності молоді. Водночас більшість респондентів обізнані з поняттям неформальної освіти та демонструють готовність до організації заходів для вразливих категорій дітей. Серед пріоритетних компетентностей, які потрібно формувати під час неформальної освіти визначено лідерство та кар'єру 46,2 %, європейські цінності 33,3 %, цифрові навички 33,3 % та екологічну свідомість 10,2 %. Запит молоді на діджиталізовані форми навчання, зокрема відеоролики 55,1 %, фліпбуки 53,8 %, онлайн-платформи 44,9 %, стали підґрунтям для розробки концепції цифрової платформи. Важливим результатом, який отриманий у ході аналізу відповідей, висока готовність молоді до практичної діяльності, так 82,1 % респондентів виявили бажання брати участь в організації заходів, що підтверджує доцільність розробки інноваційних інструментів підготовки в межах проекту DP5YOU. **Висновки.** Отримані результати дослідження підтверджують актуальність використання сучасних практик неформальної освіти як ефективного інструменту підготовки молоді до роботи з вразливими категоріями дітей. Встановлено, що попри недостатній рівень залученості до молодіжних проектів, молодь демонструє високу мотивацію до участі у практичній діяльності та готовність до організації заходів. Науково обґрунтована та розроблена концепція цифрової платформи виступає ключовою інновацією проекту, що забезпечує синергію між теоретичною підготовкою та практичною діяльністю молодіжних працівників. Визначено пріоритетні компетентності та запит на змішані формати навчання, що обґрунтовує доцільність впровадження інноваційних освітніх інструментів, зокрема фліпбуків, у межах проекту DP5YOU.

Ключові слова: *проект, цифровізація навчання, професійні компетентності, діти переселенці, біженці, фліпбуки, DP5YOU.*

Introduction

Relevance of the issue. The current social challenges caused by the full-scale war in Ukraine have highlighted the need to find effective approaches to supporting migrant and refugee children who are facing difficult life circumstances, have experienced forced displacement, the loss of their familiar social environment, and the challenge of adapting to new conditions for learning, living, and interpersonal interaction. Today, significant attention in this context must be given to preparing youth to work with vulnerable groups of children, as it is youth leaders, volunteers, representatives of civil society organizations, and active participants in non-formal education who can become important agents of social support, integration, and the psycho-emotional recovery of children [1, 10].

Non-formal education is becoming particularly important as a flexible, practice-oriented, and values-driven tool for developing professional competencies of today's youth. It allows for the integration of learning, social interaction, teamwork, volunteer activities, and the development of civic responsibility. In contrast to formal education, non-formal education creates a space for active participant engagement, the exchange of best practices, the simulation of real-life situations, and the development of practical skills for working with children who require special attention and support [10].

The use of modern non-formal education practices within international projects is particularly relevant, particularly the Erasmus+ program, which promotes youth work, cross-sectoral cooperation, European values, inclusion, solidarity, and social cohesion. In this context, the DP5YOU project serves as an important tool for preparing young people to work with migrant and refugee children, as it focuses on developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to organize educational, sports, health and recreational, social, and cultural activities for vulnerable groups of children [3, 10].

The relevance of the chosen topic stems from the need for a scholarly examination of the potential of non-formal education as a means of preparing young people for practical work with children affected by war, forced displacement, and social instability. It is also important to study the experience of implementing the DP5YOU project as an example of international cooperation aimed at strengthening youth participation, developing volunteer competencies, supporting migrant and refugee children, and implementing European approaches to social integration, inclusion, and non-formal learning.

Therefore, the study and implementation of modern non-formal education practices in the context of preparing youth (youth workers) to work with migrant and refugee children is timely and socially significant, as it addresses the needs of Ukrainian society, the challenges of wartime, and the strategic objectives of youth policy development, civic engagement, and international project activities [3, 9, 11].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Eurostat statistics on temporary protection for individuals who have left Ukraine due to the war highlight the scale of the challenge of supporting Ukrainian refugees in European Union countries. As of March 2026, 4.3 million Ukrainians were under temporary protection in EU countries, with women and children constituting a significant proportion of those receiving protection [3, 8]. This underscores the need for specially trained youth (youth workers), volunteers, and representatives of civil society organizations capable of working with children who have experienced forced displacement, adaptation to a new environment, and psycho-emotional challenges [8, 12].

Previous research conducted as part of the DP5YOU project has demonstrated the need to create a digital platform for training youth (youth workers) who will work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and the EU. It was noted that such a platform should include training modules, self-assessment tools, a certification system, interactive resources, a library of materials, and a calendar of events, which will contribute to enhancing the professional competence of youth and the exchange of best European practices [4, 10, 15].

The European Commission places significant emphasis on modern approaches to youth work. Within the framework of EU youth policy, the key priorities are identified as engaging young people in active participation in public life, creating opportunities for mobility, volunteering, and learning, as well as supporting high-quality youth work. The European Youth Strategy is based on three pillars—Engage, Connect, Empower—which aim to increase youth participation, strengthen connections between young people and organizations, and expand opportunities for youth self-realization [6, 7]. In the context of the DP5YOU project, these pillars directly relate to preparing young people for volunteer, social, educational, and integration work with children affected by war and forced displacement [4].

European documents place particular emphasis on the development of digital youth work. The European Commission's materials on digital youth work highlight the need to implement digital tools, develop the digital competencies of youth workers, and create accessible online resources to support young people. This directly aligns with the concept of the DP5YOU project, which envisions the use of a digital platform as a modern tool for training, knowledge sharing, self-assessment, and certification of youth who work with migrant and refugee children [5, 6].

Particularly important is the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on youth work, in which youth work is viewed as a key tool for social inclusion, the development of active citizenship, support for young people, and the development of their competencies. The document emphasizes the need to create conditions for high-quality training of youth workers, the development of non-formal education, support for volunteer activities, and ensuring the accessibility of youth work for various categories of young people, particularly those in vulnerable situations [2].

Youthpass is an important tool for recognizing the outcomes of non-formal learning within the European educational area. It allows participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs to document the competencies they have acquired, reflect on their learning experiences, and validate the outcomes of their participation in non-formal educational activities. This is particularly important for the research topic, as training young people to work with migrant and refugee children should be based not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the development of practical knowledge, skills, and communicative and social competencies [7, 19].

Experience with other European projects in the fields of education, sports, and the integration of European values also confirms the effectiveness of non-formal education as a practice-oriented tool for working with children and youth [9]. For instance, within the TEAM-EU-UA project, the importance of interactive, multimedia, and practical forms of learning was demonstrated, including flipbooks, training sessions, video lessons, team activities, and educational modules on leadership, inclusion, gender equality, fair play, and environmental awareness [11]. This experience is methodologically aligned with the DP5YOU project, as it demonstrates the potential of non-formal education for developing social, leadership, and communication competencies.

Therefore, an analysis of academic publications, European regulatory documents, statistical data, and practical experience in implementing international projects shows that modern training for young people to work with migrant and refugee children should be based on a combination of non-formal education, digital tools, an intercultural approach, volunteer activities, social inclusion, and the recognition of acquired competencies. That is why the DP5YOU project can be viewed as a relevant tool for implementing modern European practices in preparing young people to work with vulnerable groups of children.

Identifying the unresolved aspects of the issue. Despite the existence of certain European practices, educational resources, and programs supporting youth work, there remains a lack of sufficiently developed digital tools that would provide systematic training for young people to work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and in European Union

countries. Of particular relevance is the need to create an accessible digital platform that would combine training modules, practical materials, and a system for certifying learning outcomes.

An important issue remains not only the organization of youth training but also the formal recognition of the knowledge, skills, and professional competencies acquired. That is why the creation of a digital platform within the DP5YOU project can serve as an effective tool for preparing young people to work with vulnerable groups of children, contribute to improving the quality of youth work, strengthen international cooperation, and provide the opportunity to obtain a certificate recognized within the European education and youth sector [19].

The purpose of this article is to theoretically justify and develop the concept of a digital platform as a tool for the non-formal education of youth (youth workers) to ensure their effective work with vulnerable groups of children.

Scientific novelty. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the development and practical implementation of a modern digital approach to training youth (youth workers) to work with migrant and refugee children as part of the DP5YOU project. For the first time in the context of project activities, a digital educational platform has been developed that provides accessible training for youth using video materials, flipbooks, interactive resources, and the involvement of experts in the fields of youth work, non-formal education, and social support for vulnerable groups of children. The innovative nature of this approach lies in the combination of non-formal education, digital technologies, a bilingual learning format—in Ukrainian and English—and the ability to scale educational materials to reach a wider audience of young people in Ukraine and European Union countries.

Practical Significance. The practical significance of this study lies in the potential to use the DP5YOU digital platform to train the youth (youth workers) and volunteers to work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and European Union countries. The proposed training materials, videos, flipbooks, and expert recommendations can be implemented in the activities of civil society organizations, youth centers, and educational institutions focused on the social adaptation, support, and integration of vulnerable groups of children.

Methodology

Research Methods. To achieve the stated objective, the following research methods were applied: theoretical analysis and synthesis of scientific literature and official EU documents to define the conceptual foundations of non-formal education; sociological methods for collecting primary data; and methods of mathematical statistics for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of results. The application of these methods made it possible to comprehensively characterize contemporary approaches to preparing youth to work with migrant and refugee children, as well as to justify the feasibility of using digital tools within the framework of the DP5YOU project.

Data sources. The research was based on academic publications on non-formal education, youth work, and the social adaptation of migrant and refugee children, as well as regulatory and analytical documents from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, Eurostat, and Youthpass. A separate group of sources consisted of materials obtained as part of the DP5YOU project, specifically information from the project's digital platform, training materials, video resources, flipbooks, and the results of seminars, expert discussions, and project activities conducted between 2024 and 2026.

Analysis Tools. To analyze the collected data, we conducted a content analysis of scientific literature, official documents, materials from the DP5YOU project, and resources from the digital platform. Empirical data was collected using Google Forms and subsequently processed using Microsoft Excel, spreadsheets, descriptive statistical methods, and chart creation. Additionally, the digital platform's educational materials, video resources, flipbooks, and the results of seminars and expert discussions were analyzed, which made it possible to

scientifically substantiate the effectiveness of the proposed approaches to youth training within the DP5YOU project.

Limitations of the study. The limitations of the study are related to the fact that the analysis was conducted within the framework of the DP5YOU project and primarily covered materials, activities, and participants involved in its project activities. In addition, the study's findings require further validation on a broader sample of youth (youth workers), volunteers, and representatives of organizations working with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and European Union countries.

Results

A total of 78 respondents participated in the study, with women accounting for the majority—53.8 % (n = 42)—while men made up 46.2 % (n = 36). This sample distribution is typical for studies in the field of non-formal education and youth work, where a higher level of engagement among female participants is traditionally observed. Analysis of the survey results showed that most respondents are urban youth, though rural youth are also represented, allowing for consideration of diverse social contexts. A significant portion of the respondents has experience participating in youth projects and volunteer activities, which indicates a sufficient level of civic engagement; Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the distribution of respondents.

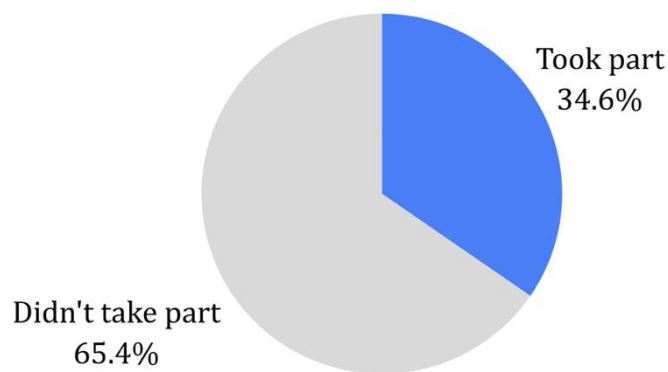


Figure 1. Youth participation in youth projects, %

An analysis of the survey results showed that only 34.6 % (n = 27) of respondents had experience participating in youth projects, while the majority of respondents, 65.4 % (n = 51), had not been involved in such activities. The data obtained indicate that there is significant potential for increasing youth participation in project-based and civic activities.

Most of the respondents are familiar with the concept of non-formal education and are willing to organize activities for children, including those from vulnerable groups.

An analysis of respondents' answers regarding the development of priority competencies during non-formal education showed that Leadership and Career skills were the most in demand, at 46.2 % (n = 36). A significant proportion of respondents also noted the importance of European Values (33.3 %, n = 26) and Digital Skills (33.3 %, n = 26), as well as Ecological Culture (10.2 %, n = 8). As shown in Figure 2, the dominance of social and communication competencies indicates that young people are oriented toward effective interaction, organizational activities, and teamwork.

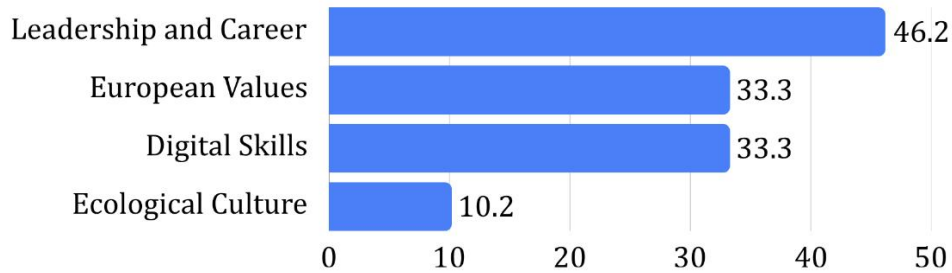


Figure 2. Priority competencies for young people in the context of non-formal education, %

It is worth noting that when responding, participants were able to select several topics related to non-formal education that they considered to be the highest priority. The results confirm the importance of developing these skills within non-formal education programs.

An analysis of responses regarding the choice of non-formal education formats also revealed that today's youth prefer digital and flexible learning tools. The most popular formats were videos (55.1 %, n = 42) and flipbooks (53.8 %, n = 42), highlighting the demand for mobile and visually oriented learning tools. At the same time, more than half of the respondents (51.3 %, n = 40) noted the importance of sports, health, and environmental activities, while 44.9 % (n = 35) of those surveyed preferred working with online platforms. The data obtained confirms the need to integrate multimedia content with active forms of social interaction within the implementation of the DP5YOU project. This tendency indicates the need to digitize educational products within the DP5YOU project. This approach will ensure sustainable access to knowledge for youth from different regions and speaking different languages, regardless of their geographic location. Figure 3 represents an analysis of the responses from participants who selected forms of non-formal education.

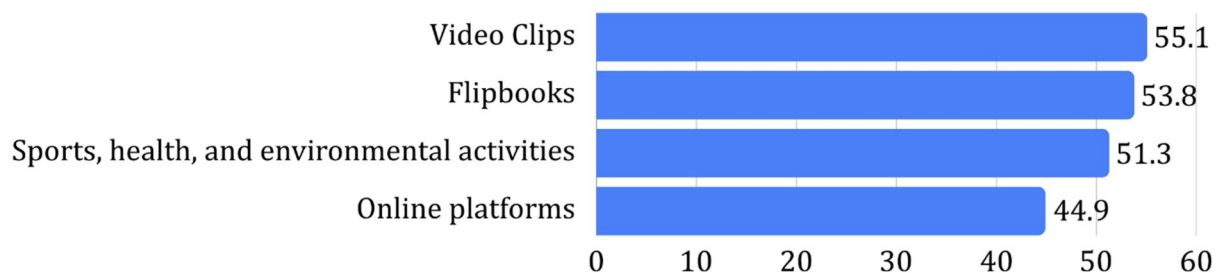


Figure 3. Preferred forms of informal education among young people, %

In response to young people's expressed need for mobility and visual learning materials, the DP5YOU project developed a series of interactive flipbooks containing essential information for working with vulnerable groups of children. These digital publications combine the structure of a traditional manual with the dynamics of online platforms, allowing users to quickly find the information they need. The flipbooks address respondents' need for hybrid learning, as they integrate easily into digital ecosystems and are accessible from any mobile device. Figure 4 represents flipbooks, which are a key tool for preparing young leaders to work in the context of modern challenges.



Figure 4. Educational flipbooks developed as part of the DP5YOU project

At the same time, young people remain interested in hybrid learning, which includes in-person meetings, training sessions, and workshops. The focus on a hybrid learning model allows the project to be adaptive; it remains technologically advanced to reach a large number of participants while also being deeply personalized through practical workshops, training sessions, and meetings. This approach ensures not only the transfer of information but also the profound transformation of young people into responsible leaders in the public sector.

One of the most encouraging outcomes we found during our analysis of the responses was the high level of motivation among young people to engage in active, practical activities. Although 65.4 % of respondents had not previously participated in youth projects, an overwhelming majority of 82.1 % (n = 64) expressed a willingness to join in organizing joint events. The results indicate the presence of a significant human resource pool among young people who are waiting for the appropriate tools and methodological support. The young men and women surveyed are ready to take on the responsibility of conducting classes, workshops, and games for vulnerable groups of children. This attitude confirms the relevance of the project and the development of a digital platform for youth training within its framework.

Discussion

Interpretation of the results. The results indicate that young people have significant potential to participate in non-formal education and to implement socially meaningful initiatives aimed at supporting migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and the EU. Despite the fact that most respondents had not previously participated in youth projects, a significant number of them expressed their willingness to get involved in organizing events, workshops, and recreational and health-promoting activities for vulnerable groups of children. The interest shown for video clips, flipbooks, online platforms, and blended learning formats confirms the appropriateness of using digital tools within the implementation of the DP5YOU project. Therefore, the study's findings justify the need for further development of the digital platform as an effective tool for training youth (youth workers) to work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and EU countries.

Comparison with other research. Recent studies by European authors confirm the growing role of digital technologies in working with children and youth. In particular, M. Georgiou and co-authors view the digital skills of adolescent refugees in Europe as a key factor

in their social adaptation, access to information, communication, and overcoming vulnerability [13]. The study by J. Castaño-Muñoz, E. Colucci, and H. Smidt highlights the potential of free digital learning, MOOCs, and open educational resources for integrating migrants and refugees into the European educational space [1]. The RAY-DIGI report highlights the importance of digital youth work, the development of digital competencies among youth workers, and the use of digital tools in non-formal education [14]. At the same time, the experience of the IMMERSE project demonstrates the importance of involving children and youth with migration backgrounds in the development and evaluation of integration practices, which allows for their real-life experiences and needs to be taken into account [16].

Scientific novelty (detailed). As part of the DP5YOU project, implemented with the support of the European Union, a series of motivational videos were developed to raise awareness among young people about key areas of non-formal education, including European values, leadership, and career development. An example of one such video is presented in Figure 5, which demonstrates the use of modern digital content as a tool for motivating, engaging, and preparing young people to work with migrant and refugee children. The proposed approach is a key element of the project's innovation, as it combines non-formal education, visual communication, digital technologies, and practice-oriented learning in a format accessible to young people in Ukraine and European Union countries.



Figure 5. A motivational video as a digital tool for raising awareness among young people as part of the DP5YOU project

Based on the results of the study, and in line with the goals and objectives of the DP5YOU project, a concept for a digital platform was developed to prepare youth (youth workers) to work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and European Union countries. The platform contains six training modules: psychological support and health-saving technologies, European values, digital literacy and the use of modern technologies, environmental culture, recreational activities, leadership, teamwork, and volunteer practices. In addition, the platform presents a methodology for conducting recreational and health-promoting activities for children, which can be used by young people in their practical work.

A key advantage of the digital platform is its bilingual nature, as all materials are available in both English and Ukrainian, making it possible to use the resource both in Ukraine and in European Union countries. The conceptual model of the platform (Fig. 6) envisions a user-friendly interface optimized for mobile devices, which integrates the necessary educational resources and practical materials for working with vulnerable groups of children.

The platform's curriculum is designed for 30 hours, which corresponds to 1 ECTS credit, and provides the opportunity to validate learning outcomes by obtaining the corresponding Youthpass certificate.

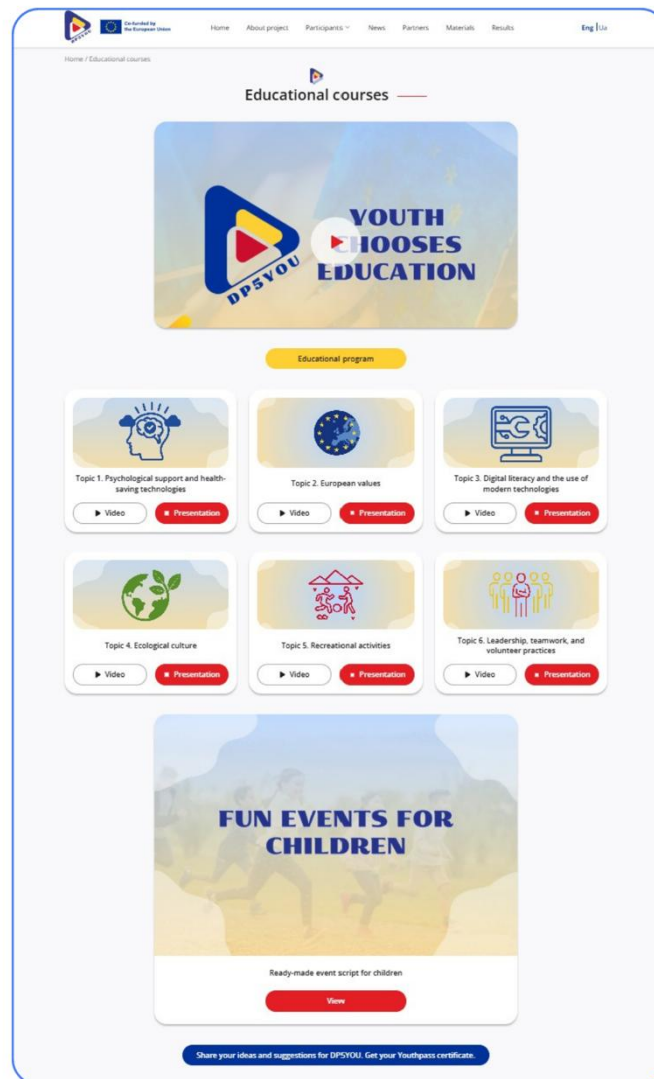


Figure 6. Concept of the DP5YOU digital platform as a tool for training youth to work with migrant and refugee children

Therefore, the creation of the DP5YOU digital platform is one of the project's key practical outcomes and, at the same time, a key element of its scientific novelty. The proposed tool combines non-formal education, digital technologies, expert guidance, video content, and practice-oriented materials that contribute to the development of competencies among youth (youth workers) for effective work with vulnerable groups of children. This approach allows for scaling up training, ensuring the accessibility of educational resources, and strengthening international cooperation in the field of supporting migrant and refugee children.

Practical Significance (detailed). The practical significance of this study lies in the potential to use the DP5YOU digital platform as an accessible tool for training youth (youth workers), volunteers, and representatives of civil society organizations to work with migrant and refugee children in Ukraine and European Union countries. The developed training modules, video materials, presentations, flipbooks, and guidelines for conducting recreational and health-saving activities can be integrated into the activities of youth centers, educational

institutions, civil society organizations, and various initiatives. This digital resource helps young people develop practical skills in leadership, volunteering, digital literacy, psychological support, European values, and organizing safe leisure activities for vulnerable groups of children. Particularly significant is the opportunity to participate in training in a bilingual format, in Ukrainian and English, with the subsequent issuance of a certificate (Youthpass), which increases participants' motivation and ensures the recognition of non-formal education outcomes.

Conclusions

An analysis of the survey results confirmed that non-formal education is a strategically important tool for preparing young people to work with migrant and refugee children as part of the DP5YOU project. Analysis of empirical data indicates a high level of readiness among young people for social action, despite the fact that most respondents do not yet have significant experience participating in international projects. A clear shift in educational paradigms has been identified, as today's youth prefer digitalised and visually oriented learning formats. In response to the youth's requests, the concept of a digital platform—which serves as a comprehensive ecosystem for non-formal education—was theoretically grounded and developed. The platform's structure is based on a combination of informational, educational, and practical modules, which allows users not only to accumulate knowledge but also to develop practical skills through case studies and interactive formats. The digital products developed within the project, particularly the flipbooks, serve as an effective training tool, ensuring the mobility and accessibility of knowledge in any context. The platform's multilingualism and its content, designed for 1 ECTS credit with the option of Youthpass certification, make it a universal educational tool for today's youth both in Ukraine and beyond. In summary, it can be said that the successful training of young people is possible only through the synergy of modern digital tools and interpersonal communication.

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