

National Index - Norway

First Step is Half the Journey: Exploring
Adventure-Based Outdoor Education for
Well-Being and Inclusion of Young Migrants
in Norway

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National Index - Norway

**Exploring Adventure-Based Outdoor Education
for Well-Being and Inclusion of Young Migrants in
Norway**

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Introduction



Across Europe, many young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face overlapping challenges: social isolation, uncertainty about the future, mental health struggles and limited access to meaningful leisure activities. In Norway, where nature and outdoor life are a central part of everyday culture, these young people often remain on the margins of activities that could support their well-being, integration and sense of belonging.

The small-scale partnership “First Step is Half the Journey” brings together organisations from Norway, Germany and Spain to explore how adventure-based outdoor education can support young people with migrant backgrounds and the youth workers who accompany them. Building on traditions of friluftsliv and experiential learning, the project assumes that structured outdoor experiences – such as hiking, climbing or simple nature-based activities close to home – can strengthen resilience, self-confidence and social connectedness.

This National Index, developed by International Volda, compiles and analyses findings from focus groups with young people and youth workers, as well as interviews with practitioners experienced in outdoor education in Norway. It highlights both the needs and aspirations of young migrants and the practical, social and psychological barriers that limit their participation in outdoor activities. The insights presented here aim to inspire more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches to outdoor education for organisations and professionals working with young people across Europe.



Chapter 1: Focus Group with Young People

Methodology

International Volda conducted a focus group discussion with five participants aged 18–26, all of whom have migrant backgrounds. The primary aim was to gather first-hand insights into the current needs, aspirations, and challenges faced by young migrants in relation to participation in adventure-based and outdoor learning. This qualitative exploration also sought to investigate how such activities might address issues of social isolation, mental health, and integration barriers.



Chapter 1: Focus Group with Young People

Methodology

The participants were invited to share their experiences, perspectives, and suggestions in response to several guiding questions, covering topics such as their previous involvement in adventure activities, perceived suitability of such activities, barriers to participation, types of support needed, coping strategies for stress, preferred forms of active recreation, and personal goals for the coming years. The session lasted approximately 40 minutes and was held in an informal and supportive atmosphere to encourage honest and open sharing. This analysis summarises the key themes emerging from the discussion and highlights potential directions for future initiatives.






Key findings

Attitudes towards Outdoor and Adventure Activities

Participants expressed a predominantly positive attitude towards outdoor and adventure activities such as hiking, rock climbing, camping, kayaking and nature-based quests, associating them with enjoyable free time, a break from daily stress and digital overload, opportunities to recharge and “clear the mind”, and moments of connection with others; while levels of comfort with more challenging or high-risk formats differ, there is a clear openness to trying new activities when the environment feels safe, inclusive and well organised.

“I have taken part in many adventure activities such as hiking, climbing, surfing, skiing, and snowboarding. I really enjoy them – they give me a sense of comfort and peace in my soul... it’s very important not only for the body, but also for the soul.”

“It was really fun, and experiences like this make me realise that I truly like outdoor and adventure activities.”



Key findings

Barriers to Participation

At the same time, young people identified several barriers that limit their participation, including challenging weather conditions typical for Norway, long distances and limited public transport to activity locations, financial constraints linked to equipment, fees or travel, and a dependence on others for organisation and transport, which together create a feeling that joining outdoor activities is often too complicated or demanding, even when motivation and interest are present.

Aspirations and the Role of Adventure Education

Looking ahead, young people spoke about goals such as finding stable employment, obtaining a driver's licence and car, completing or continuing education, improving language skills, travelling, reconnecting with family and developing creative or sports interests, and while adventure and outdoor education is not always seen as a direct route to these concrete achievements, it is widely recognised as an indirect support that strengthens mental health, self-confidence, courage to try new things, social networks and a sense of personal progression.

Key findings

Mental Health and Well-Being

Participants drew a strong connection between outdoor experiences and emotional well-being, describing time in nature and physical movement as effective ways to reduce stress, manage anxiety and negative thoughts, feel calmer and more grounded, and restore energy, with walking, hiking, cycling, camping and especially being near water perceived as particularly restorative, while other strategies such as yoga, meditation, reading, music, gaming or spending time with friends complement these nature-based resources in their everyday lives.

When I reach the top of the mountain, I think: ‘Yes, this is exactly what I needed to feel.’ On bad days, going climbing or hiking – either alone or with others – really helps.”

“Spending time by the fjord or at a lake, swimming, and being in the water can feel like it ‘takes away’ all the bad feelings and lets them go.

Key findings

Social Connection and Sense of Belonging

The social dimension of outdoor activities emerged as crucial, as participants reported that they feel most motivated and comfortable when they are welcomed and respected in the group, can share experiences with peers and are supported by approachable youth workers, and for young migrants in particular, such activities provide rare opportunities outside school or work to meet new people, practise language skills and gradually build a sense of belonging in the local community.

“The only kind of support I sometimes need is emotional support – just having someone to go with me, who is willing to listen, talk, or simply be there so we can relax together in nature.”

“When I do need to relax, I play computer games, listen to music, or go for a walk with friends. Simple things like that are the best.”



Recommendations

Based on the focus group with young migrants, several key recommendations can strengthen access to and the impact of adventure-based and outdoor education in Norway. Activities should be low- or no-cost, with shared equipment available, and organised in places that are easy to reach by public transport or simple group transport. Programmes also need to reflect the Norwegian climate through shorter, local and seasonally appropriate activities, with clear guidance on clothing and preparation.

Equally important is the emotional and social dimension. Youth workers should create inclusive, non-judgmental group environments where young people feel safe, welcome and taken seriously, and where fears and insecurities are openly acknowledged. Stable groups that meet regularly can build trust and continuity, making it easier for young people to return and gradually take more initiative.

Finally, activities should be flexible and youth-centred. This means offering different levels of challenge, involving young people in co-designing activities, and making the link to mental health explicit so participants can see how nature, movement and social contact support their well-being and self-confidence. Regular outdoor activities can also become informal spaces for language practice, intercultural contact and the gradual development of a sense of belonging in the local community.

Chapter 2: Focus Group with Youth Workers and Educators

Methodology

International Volda conducted a focus group with youth workers who regularly engage with young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Norway. The purpose of the discussion was to explore their perspectives on the role of adventure-based and outdoor education in youth work, to identify barriers to participation for their target groups, and to collect ideas for future training programmes. The conversation covered topics such as previous experience with outdoor and adventure pedagogies, perceived value for integration and personal growth, challenges in involving young people, effective and ineffective strategies for engagement, the impact of outdoor work on youth workers' own well-being, and expectations regarding relevant training content.

The focus group was held in an informal yet structured setting, allowing participants to exchange concrete examples from their practice and reflect on both successes and difficulties. The material has been analysed thematically and is presented below as key findings, followed by recommendations for the design of future training and support measures.

Key findings

Use of Adventure Education in Work with Young Migrants

Youth workers reported that they already integrate elements of adventure and outdoor education into their practice with young migrants and other vulnerable groups. In the Norwegian context, where many young people spend substantial time on digital devices, nature-based activities are perceived as a powerful way to create shared experiences, foster social connection and support integration, even when language skills are limited. Activities such as rock climbing and mountain hiking are seen as particularly valuable for mental health and personal development, as they offer opportunities for setting and achieving goals, receiving emotional support from peers and adults, and experiencing a sense of achievement and joy that can be transformative - especially for those who are in the mountains for the first time.



Barriers and Strategies for Engagement

At the same time, youth workers face significant challenges when trying to bring young people into nature and adventure settings. A lack of appropriate equipment and clothing, combined with young people's low motivation to leave indoor, familiar environments, often makes participation difficult to initiate.

Practitioners emphasised that building trusting relationships is crucial: when young people feel safe, supported and practically cared for (for example through access to free equipment and clear information), they are more likely to try something new. Well-structured, engaging programmes that are clearly explained in advance help reduce uncertainty and fear; although some participants may initially be hesitant or afraid, positive first experiences tend to increase their energy, openness and willingness to join future activities.

Benefits for Youth Workers' Own Well-Being

Participants underlined that adventure and outdoor education contributes not only to the well-being of young people, but also to their own mental health and professional sustainability. Time in nature, physical movement and shared experiences with groups were described as ways to restore balance, manage stress and cultivate a deeper connection with the environment. Working outdoors can be demanding, especially when supporting children and young people with complex needs, but it is also seen as rewarding, helping youth workers develop patience, resilience and acceptance. For many, outdoor activities offer a space for friendship-building, mutual support and personal growth, which in turn strengthens their motivation to remain in the field.



Expectations for Training Content and Formats

Youth workers expressed a clear interest in training that combines practical outdoor components with team-building and reflective elements. They highlighted the importance of starting with ice-breaking and trust-building activities to create a safe and comfortable group atmosphere.

Suggested training components included rock-climbing sessions, basic navigation with map and compass, hiking, yoga and meditation, alongside explicit attention to environmental awareness and responsibility in nature. Ending training days with shared rituals - such as gathering around a campfire - was seen as a way to reinforce a sense of unity, collective achievement and connection to place. Overall, participants stressed that training should model the kind of holistic, experiential and relational approach they wish to implement in their own work with young migrants.





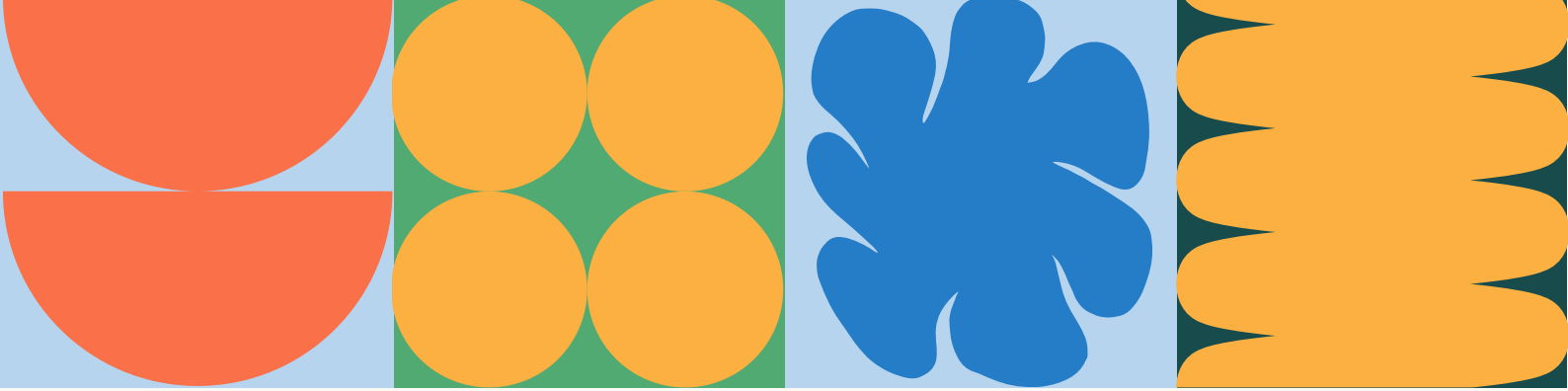
Recommendations

Based on the focus group with youth workers, the following recommendations can inform the design of training programmes and support structures in adventure-based and outdoor education:

Integrate adventure education systematically into youth work: Training should strengthen youth workers' capacity to use outdoor and adventure activities as regular pedagogical tools for integration, relationship-building and personal development, not only as occasional excursions.

Address equipment and motivation barriers together: Programmes should include guidance on how to secure access to basic equipment (through partnerships and local schemes) and on how to build motivation among young people through trust-building, clear communication and gradual exposure to new activities.

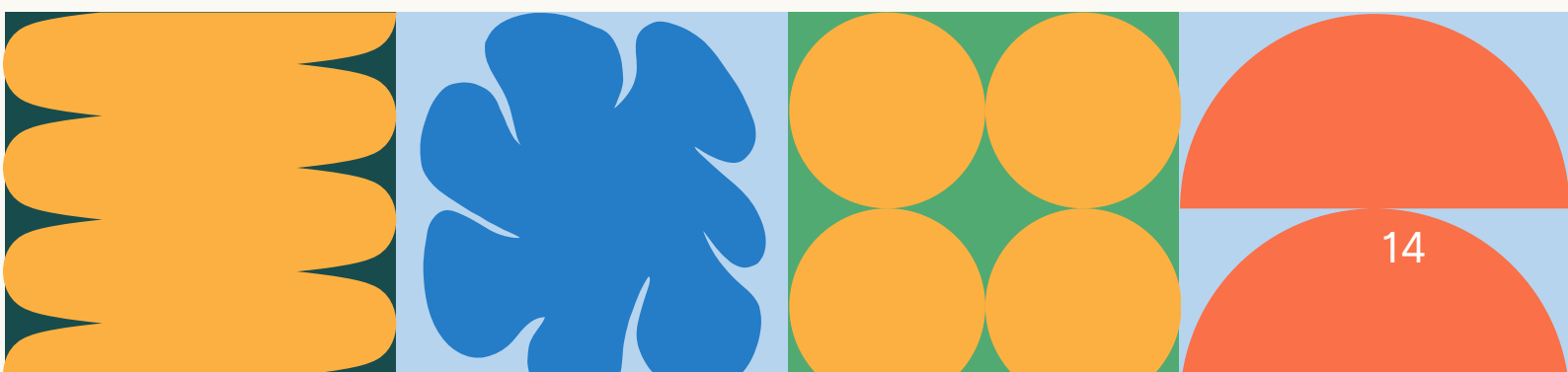
Support youth workers' own well-being: Training should recognise youth workers as beneficiaries as well as facilitators, incorporating elements that help them reflect on their own stress, resilience and needs, and offering outdoor experiences that restore energy and prevent burnout.



Combine practical skills with reflective and relational components: Courses should balance technical competencies (e.g. navigation, basic climbing, safety) with team-building, communication, yoga, mindfulness or simple reflective practices that can be transferred to work with young people.

Embed environmental awareness and responsibility: Training content should promote respect for nature, including principles of leaving no trace, caring for outdoor spaces and linking environmental responsibility with social responsibility and community belonging.

Model inclusive, safe and participatory learning environments: The structure and facilitation of training should demonstrate how to create psychologically safe groups, use icebreakers and shared rituals (such as campfires) to build cohesion, and actively involve participants in shaping the learning process, so that youth workers can later replicate these approaches with young migrants and other vulnerable youth.



Chapter 3: Insights from the interviews

3.1 Sondre Johan Chesney Kvamme

Sondre Johan Chesney Kvamme is a PhD candidate in Nordic Literature at Volda University College, a trained Nordic language teacher, board member of Sunnmørsk Klatreklubb responsible for drop-in climbing, and a DNT guide and certified climbing instructor. His work is strongly rooted in the Norwegian tradition of friluftsliv and local community building, offering climbing courses, introductory hikes and cabin trips that make outdoor life more accessible, including for young people who are new to Norwegian nature and outdoor culture

In the interview, he describes adventure education as “teaching people how to be outdoors” within a value-based framework of respect for nature and others, including how to move in the mountains, behave in cabins and follow “leave no trace” principles. Drawing on his guide training, he emphasises learning by doing and the importance of good role models, noting that the effects of demanding trips are often delayed: hikes that feel “terrible” in the moment later become sources of motivation, a sense of achievement and even less attachment to phones.

3.1 Sondre Johan Chesney Kvamme

When speaking about work with migrants and refugees, Sondre highlights language barriers, unfamiliarity with Norwegian outdoor culture and the physical demands of the local terrain as key challenges. Clear communication, interpretation and realistic preparation are essential to ensure safety and positive experiences. At the same time, he observes that many migrant participants show a strong sense of wonder and gratitude for landscapes that locals often take for granted, which helps guides see their own environment with fresh eyes. For future training in adventure education, he stresses the need for practice-based learning, space for mistakes and an exploratory mindset, and for guides who truly “see” each participant rather than focusing only on reaching the summit.

Check the [full interview](#) here

**FIRST
JOURNEY**

**Sondre Johan
Chesney
Kvamme**



Chapter 3: Insights from the interviews

3.2 Raul Grau-Ruiz

Raul Grau-Ruiz holds bachelor's degrees in physical activity and sports sciences (University of Sevilla, Spain) and in outdoor life and nature guiding (Volda University College, Norway), as well as master's degrees in researching physical activity and quality of life (University of Granada, Spain) and in health and social sciences (Volda University College). He has worked as a nature guide at "Outdoor Life Norway" in Stavanger, focusing on mountain guiding and canoe paddling, and has managed and lectured the course "Health Promotion Work" at Volda University College.

He is currently completing his doctoral thesis, which combines outdoor recreation and psychology to explore how contact with nearby nature influences the well-being of people living in Norway, using nationally representative survey data. This trajectory places him at the intersection of practice-based outdoor education and empirical health research, with a consistent focus on the links between nature, physical activity and quality of life.

3.2 Raul Grau-Ruiz

In the interview, Raul describes adventure education as an educational setting where adventure is central to learning, usually rooted in outdoor contexts and friluftsliv. He refers to a formative 25-day university course in Norway that combined practical outdoor skills with reflection on sustainability, well-being and the meaning of life: playful, social experiences that strongly influenced his decision to build a life and career in Norway. Speaking about migrants and refugees, he stresses that many “obvious” Norwegian outdoor norms how to dress, what equipment to use, or even the idea of friluftsliv can become real barriers if not addressed, and argues that good adventure educators must stay flexible, question their assumptions, adapt activities to participants’ skills and realities, and design formats that foster a genuine connection with nature rather than using it merely as a backdrop.

Check the [full interview](#) here

**FIRST
JOURNEY**

**Raul
Grau-Ruiz**



Chapter 3: Insights from the interviews

3.3 Thilo Linder

Thilo Linder is a scout leader in Volda who has spent around thirteen years guiding and supporting children and young people in the local scouting movement. Through weekly meetings and trips, he introduces them to practical outdoor skills and shared life in nature.

In his work, he focuses on creating a safe and playful environment where children can try things out, cooperate and gradually take more responsibility. Scouting, as he practises it, combines simple technical skills – making a fire, building shelters, sleeping outside – with values such as teamwork, perseverance and respect for nature.

In the interview, Thilo describes adventure education as active, hands-on learning: “not at a school desk, but with your hands and body”. His own formative experiences include time in the forest with his father and grandfather, school camps, and an outdoor line at a folk high school in Western Norway, where he first slept outside without a tent and learned, through trial and error, how crucial good clothing is – “wool is gold”. He sees the same pattern in children today: they may arrive afraid of the dark, cold or strange noises, but after managing a night in a tent or under the open sky, they wake up proud and realise they can do more than they thought.

3.3 Thilo Linder

When speaking about migrants and refugees, Thilo highlights language, equipment and contact as the main challenges. Newcomers are often not used to the local climate and lack suitable clothing, which can make outdoor experiences uncomfortable rather than enjoyable. Language barriers mean that information about activities may not reach them clearly, or details about what to bring are misunderstood. He notes that outdoor trainers must actively reach beyond their usual networks and communicate clearly if they want to include new groups. At the same time, he has seen how quickly people from other countries appreciate “raw nature” when given the chance, for example on canoe trips, and he emphasises “learning by doing” – giving simple tools and tasks, letting participants try, fail and succeed – as the most effective method in adventure education.

[Check the full interview here](#)

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Thilo Linder

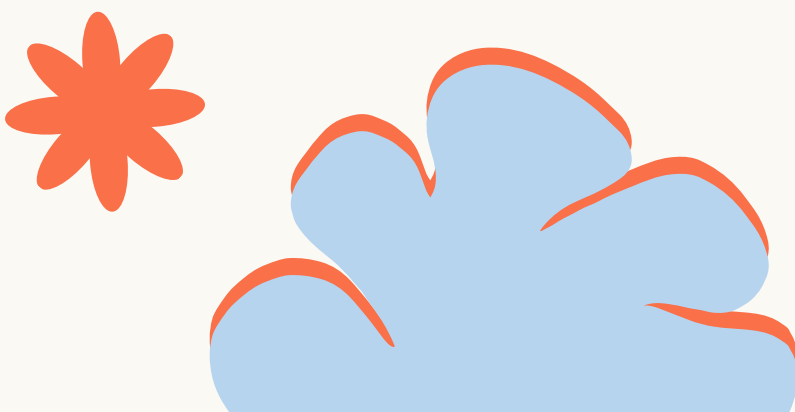


Conclusion and Overall Recommendations



The Norwegian National Index indicates that adventure-based outdoor education can play a meaningful role in supporting young migrants' well-being, confidence and sense of belonging. Young people, youth workers and experts all describe nature as a space where stress is reduced, social ties are strengthened and new skills are discovered. However, this potential is realised only when basic conditions for inclusion are met and when programmes are intentionally adapted to diverse cultural and personal backgrounds.

Across all perspectives, the most persistent obstacles are practical and structural: costs, lack of clothing and equipment, distance and transport, unclear or Norwegian-only information, and unfamiliarity with local outdoor norms and climate. These are closely linked with emotional barriers such as fear of not coping, not understanding instructions or “not belonging” in outdoor environments that are strongly associated with Norwegian majority culture. At the same time, youth workers and experts highlight that when these barriers are reduced, young migrants often show strong motivation, curiosity and appreciation for nature, and outdoor activities can become important spaces for integration for both participants and professionals.

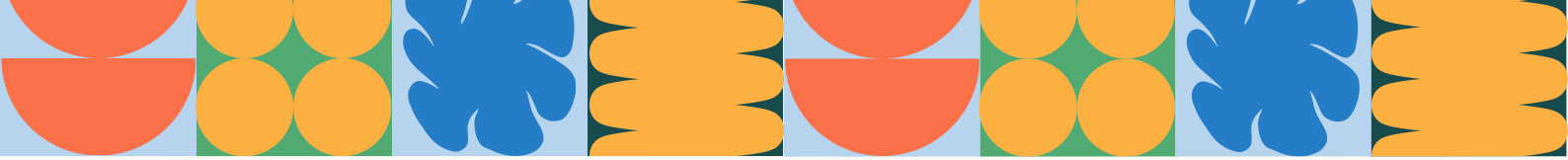


Pedagogically, the material consistently points towards learning by doing, stable and trusting groups, and culturally responsive facilitation as key ingredients of good practice. Hands-on activities, real responsibility and room for mistakes help young people experience mastery, while simple reflection moments make the link to mental health and everyday life more visible. Nature should be treated not only as a backdrop, but as an active partner in learning and in developing care for the local environment.

In light of this, several overarching recommendations emerge for organisations and practitioners:

- Prioritise low- or no-cost participation, shared equipment, realistic routes and clear, multilingual information as core inclusion measures.
- Build emotionally safe, stable groups where participants are known by name, encouraged to bring friends and supported over time.
- Make the connection between outdoor participation, mental health and personal growth explicit through short, regular reflection.
- Use practice-based, “learning by doing” approaches in both youth activities and staff training, combining technical skills with relational, intercultural and environmental competences.

If these elements are taken seriously in planning, partnership and funding decisions, adventure-based outdoor education can become a realistic “first step” towards stronger well-being, agency and belonging for young migrants in Norway, and a valuable reference for similar initiatives in other European contexts.



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