



FIRST JOURNEY

NATIONAL INDEX (Germany)

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



Project: First Step is Half the Journey:

Exploring Adventure-Based Outdoor Education for Well-Being and Inclusion of Young Migrants in Germany.

National Index – Germany

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Introduction

In recent years, youth work and integration services across Europe have increasingly engaged with questions of mental well-being, social participation, and inclusion, particularly in relation to young migrants. Experiences of social disconnection, uncertainty linked to migration processes, and limited access to community-based activities have been identified as factors that may affect both well-being and opportunities for participation at the local level. Within this context, there is growing interest in educational approaches that combine social interaction, experiential learning, and non-formal settings.

The small-scale cooperation project First Step is Half the Journey, implemented by partner organisations in Norway, Germany, and Spain, examines the role of **adventure-based outdoor education** as a potential method to support the social integration and well-being of young migrants. The project draws on established practices in outdoor and experiential education, which emphasise learning through shared activities, reflection, and cooperation in non-formal environments. Rather than positioning outdoor education as a universal solution, the project explores its applicability and perceived value within specific youth work and community-based contexts.



The underlying assumption guiding the project is that **structured outdoor activities**, such as hiking, kayaking, climbing, or camping, may offer conditions that facilitate social interaction, peer support, and engagement with the local environment. These activities create shared experiences that do not rely primarily on linguistic proficiency and may therefore be accessible to participants with diverse backgrounds. The project does not seek to measure clinical mental health outcomes, but instead focuses on participants' self-reported experiences related to stress, confidence, social connection, and sense of belonging.

This National Index presents the findings of focus groups, surveys, and interviews conducted in Germany with young people, youth workers, trainers, and educators engaged in youth and community work. The analysis examines participants' experiences with outdoor and adventure-based activities, perceived barriers to participation, and practitioners' perspectives on the opportunities and limitations of applying such methods in work with young migrants. Based on the collected data, the report also formulates practice-oriented observations and recommendations intended to inform youth organisations, educators, and professionals working in related fields.



Chapter 1: Focus Group with Young People

Methodology

The focus group with young people was conducted on 14 June 2025 and involved eight participants aged 18–30. Most participants had been living in Germany for a relatively short period (less than two years). The discussion followed a semi-structured format, using open-ended prompts to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in relation to adventure-based outdoor activities.

The guiding questions focused on:

- previous participation in adventure-based outdoor activities (e.g., hiking, kayaking, climbing, trekking)
- perceived emotional and social effects of these activities
- barriers to participation (practical, social, cultural)
- perceived inclusion in local community life
- perceived links between outdoor activities and stress or well-being
- preferred types of activities
- channels through which participants typically receive information about local opportunities

Participants reported diverse backgrounds (including Ukraine, Vietnam, India, Italy, Poland, and Spain). Gender representation was balanced. The focus group data were analysed qualitatively through thematic grouping of recurring answers and expressions.



Key Findings:

1. Participation in adventure-based outdoor activities

A majority of participants (10 of 12) reported having taken part in outdoor or adventure-based activities, most commonly hiking, trekking, and kayaking. Participants described these experiences primarily in terms of perceived well-being and social effects, including greater calmness, confidence, and connection with others. Their descriptions included phrases such as “more grounded and clear-minded,” “less stressed,” and “connected with nature and others.”

Two illustrative statements were:

- “Being close to nature is the best way to heal in my opinion.” (female participant, <1 year in Germany)
- “It (being outdoors) helps me feel centered, grounded, present, and away from the noise of the city.” (female participant, ~2 years in Germany)

These responses indicated that participants associate outdoor activity not only with physical movement, but also with social and emotional experiences.

2. Barriers to participation

Participants identified several barriers to joining outdoor activities more regularly. The most common barriers were financial and logistical constraints, including the cost of preparation for full participation and difficulties related to transport. Participants also described social and cultural hesitation, often expressed as uncertainty about their physical readiness to engage in such activities or discomfort with unfamiliar group settings. A further barrier was the lack of information about where activities take place and how to join them.

As one participant summarised:

- *“Transport costs, most of the time, people to go with. I’m not locally connected.”*

Another participant emphasised confidence-related barriers:

- *“Fear, sometimes I feel I’m not fit enough for hikes.”*

Taken together, these comments suggest that barriers are not limited to practical issues, but also include perceived social risk and limited access to supportive entry points.

3. Perceived inclusion in local community life

Participants expressed mixed views regarding inclusion in local community activities. Some reported - feeling included through work or through participation in NGO settings. Others described a more segmented experience, with stronger connection to international or migrant networks than to local German social circles.

One participant stated: *“I feel included in community activities with migrants but not so much with Germans.”*

This pattern does not allow conclusions to be generalised beyond the group studied. However, it suggests that, within this sample, community participation can be experienced in different ways depending on the social context and how accessible local networks are perceived to be.

4. Perceived effects on stress and well-being

All participants described outdoor activities as beneficial for well-being, most frequently in relation to stress reduction, improved mood, and emotional regulation.



Two specific mechanisms were mentioned repeatedly: (1) immersion in nature and (2) temporary disconnection from digital environments, including reduced phone use or limited mobile network coverage.

Illustrative statements included:



“The absence of mobile networks helps a lot.”

“When we explore and enjoy nature, we feel relaxed.”

While these are self-reported perceptions rather than scientific indicators, they suggest that participants experience outdoor activities as supportive conditions for calmness and psychological recovery.

5. Preferred activities

Participants expressed the strongest interest in activities that are relatively accessible and common in the German context, including:

- hiking and trekking
- kayaking and water-based activities
- climbing and bouldering
- camping and nature retreats

Some participants also mentioned more specialised activities (e.g., parasailing, “tree paths”), indicating openness to a wider spectrum of adventure-based formats when opportunities and support structures are available.

6. Communication and outreach channels

Participants reported that they primarily learn about activities through informal and peer-based communication, especially:

- WhatsApp / Telegram groups
- Instagram and other social media posts
- word-of-mouth

Overall, institutional channels were less prominent in the responses than social networks and direct messaging. This suggests that outreach strategies targeting young migrants may be more effective when they rely on trusted community networks and low-threshold communication formats, rather than the official social media channels with the wide open calls.

Implications for Practice

The focus group does not provide a basis for broad statistical claims; however, several practice-relevant implications can be derived from consistent patterns in participants' responses:

1. While the focus group does not allow for statistical generalisation, consistent patterns in participants' responses point to several practice-relevant implications. In particular, lowering entry barriers appears important for supporting engagement. Participants' references to fear related to physical ability, uncertainty about expectations, and hesitation toward unfamiliar group settings suggest that beginner-friendly formats can facilitate participation. This includes offering shorter and less demanding routes, communicating expectations clearly in advance, and providing supportive facilitation during activities. Such measures may reduce perceived social and physical risk and support more sustained and confident engagement in open community-based outdoor activities.
2. The findings indicate that outdoor and adventure-based activities can support social connection, but this outcome should not be assumed as automatic. Several participants described feeling more integrated within migrant or international circles than in interactions with local German local peers. This suggests that mixed-group formats benefit from intentional facilitation. Simply placing participants in a shared outdoor setting does not necessarily lead to meaningful interaction across social or cultural lines.

Practices such as small mixed working groups, or task-based cooperation can help structure interaction and reduce uncertainty, particularly for participants who are less confident in new social environments.

3. Participants consistently described outdoor experiences as calming and emotionally supportive. These effects were often linked to being in nature, slowing down, and temporarily disengaging from digital communication. While these experiences were described spontaneously and without prompting, their educational value may remain implicit if not actively reflected upon. Incorporating short reflective elements, for example: group debriefs, check-ins, and some tasks during the experience can help participants articulate what they experienced and relate it to their everyday well-being. Such practices do not require therapeutic framing but can strengthen learning and self-awareness within non-formal educational settings.
4. The focus group also highlights the importance of how activities are communicated. Participants reported learning about opportunities primarily through informal and trusted channels, including messaging apps, social media, and personal recommendations. Formal institutional communication appeared less prominent in their responses. This suggests that outreach strategies aiming to engage young migrants should prioritise peer-based dissemination, community ambassadors, and easily shareable formats that circulate within existing social networks. Visibility within these channels may be more effective than reliance on official organisational platforms or open call announcements alone.
5. Finally, the findings indicate that continuity is a key factor in sustained participation. Barriers such as low confidence, limited familiarity with local networks, and hesitation toward

new group settings are unlikely to be overcome through one-off activities. Regular and repeated participation allows trust, social familiarity, and confidence to develop gradually. For this reason, organisational focus on continuity and the regular offering of activities creates predictable opportunities for engagement, supporting both individual participation and the gradual strengthening of community connections over time.



Chapter 2: Perspectives from Youth Workers and Educators

Methodology

Between 4 and 29 July 2025, an online survey was conducted among youth workers, educators, volunteers, and social entrepreneurs who currently work with, or intend to work with: young migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Germany.

Respondents were affiliated with a range of organisational forms, including non-governmental organisations, social enterprises, and informal civic initiatives. Most were engaged in areas such as intercultural education, social inclusion, community development, and youth participation. Altogether we have received over 50 responses.

The survey aimed to explore four main dimensions:

1. challenges encountered when engaging young migrants and refugees,
2. perceived strategies for addressing these challenges,
3. practitioners' views on the potential role of adventure-based education, and
4. training and resource needs related to the use of outdoor and adventure education methods.

Responses were analysed qualitatively through thematic grouping of recurring issues, proposals, and reflections.



1. Main Challenges in Engaging Young Migrants and Refugees

Survey responses point to a set of interconnected challenges that limit the engagement of young migrants and refugees. These challenges can be grouped into capacity-related, linguistic, logistical, and institutional factors.

1.1 Human and Institutional Capacity

The most frequently reported challenge concerns limited human resources, particularly the shortage of staff or volunteers with the skills and time to plan and implement programmes. This constraint is especially acute for small organisations, student-led initiatives, and informal groups, where responsibilities are concentrated among a few individuals.

Several respondents also highlighted weak institutional prioritisation of work with migrant and refugee youth. Inclusion activities are often driven by individual commitment rather than embedded organisational strategies, which undermines continuity and long-term planning.

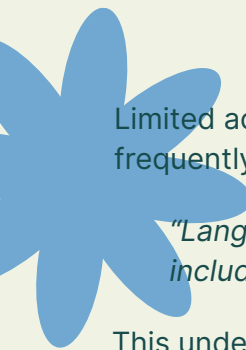
“We have a lack of team members with knowledge of how to organise such activities.”

“There’s little motivation from the organization to get involved with migrant groups.”

These responses indicate that capacity limitations are both quantitative and structural, affecting sustainability as much as day-to-day delivery.

1.2 Language and Communication Barriers

Language barriers were identified by nearly all respondents as a major obstacle. These affect both outreach - informing young migrants about opportunities, and implementation, particularly during group-based activities.



Limited access to translators and multilingual materials was frequently cited.

“Language barriers are the main reason it’s hard to include migrants.”

This underscores the need for communication support structures in non-formal education settings where participation relies on interaction and shared understanding.

1.3 Logistical and Material Constraints

Respondents also reported limitations related to funding, space, equipment, and transport. Many organisations operate with restricted budgets and depend on temporary access to venues or borrowed materials, which constrains the scale, frequency, and reliability of activities.

“We lack materials, space, and time, even when motivation is there.”

“Funding and access to venues are key to holding inclusive programs.”

Such constraints are particularly relevant for outdoor and adventure-based activities, which often involve additional equipment and travel costs.

2. Proposed Approaches to Address Identified Challenges



Despite these constraints, respondents proposed several practical strategies to improve access and sustainability. A recurring recommendation was the development of partnerships with NGOs, schools, universities, and community organisations in order to share staff capacity, facilities, and expertise.

“Partnerships with other organizations and institutions can solve both human and material shortages.”

Respondents also emphasised the importance of accessible funding, especially small-scale or local grants that can cover essential costs such as equipment, transport, and facilitation time. Language support through translators or bilingual volunteers was identified as critical for inclusion, alongside the use of shared community spaces as cost-effective venues.

Finally, respondents stressed the need for recognition, support, and motivation mechanisms for volunteers and staff to prevent burnout and sustain long-term engagement.

“Give them space, materials, and personal support when they don’t know where to start.”

3. Perceived Contribution of Adventure-Based Education

Respondents who reflected on adventure-based education consistently described it as a potentially supportive method in work with young migrants, particularly in relation to integration, well-being, and personal development. Their responses clustered around three main themes.

3.1 Integration through shared experience

Adventure-based activities were described as offering a shared experiential context that does not depend primarily on language. Respondents emphasised that cooperation in unfamiliar or challenging situations can facilitate trust-building and social connection.

“Adventure education helps people connect beyond language or cultural differences. Shared challenges build trust, teamwork, and resilience.”

“When people are out of their regular life and on an adventure, they connect and understand each other on a deeper level.”

These observations suggest that adventure activities may lower communicative barriers and enable interaction through action rather than verbal exchange.

3.2 Well-being and stress regulation

Respondents frequently associated outdoor activities with stress reduction and emotional relief, particularly in the context of migration-related uncertainty and pressure.

“Time spent outdoors supports mental well-being, especially for migrants who constantly experience stress.”

“It brings peace to the mind and reminds us how to live with minimal resources.”

While these reflections are experiential rather than clinical, they indicate that practitioners perceive outdoor settings as conducive to emotional regulation and recovery.

3.3 Personal growth and empowerment

Adventure-based education was also linked to confidence-building, problem-solving, and leadership development. Respondents stated that structured challenges, when appropriately facilitated, can encourage participants to move beyond comfort zones in a controlled and supportive manner.

“It encourages individuals to take on new challenges and builds a sense of accomplishment.”

“It’s easier to connect without pressure, even if you don’t speak the same language.”

4. Training and Resource Needs

Respondents expressed a clear interest in further professional development related to outdoor and adventure education. Four main areas of need emerged from the data.

4.1 Inclusive facilitation and intercultural competence

Participants requested tools and training to navigate cultural differences, language diversity, and trauma-sensitive contexts.

“Training on understanding and respecting cultural differences would help create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued.”

4.2 Safety and risk management

Several respondents reported limited confidence in managing safety during outdoor activities and requested practical guidance.

“Familiarity with safety protocols and risk management strategies would help me lead sessions confidently.”

4.3 Mental health awareness

There was broad recognition of the emotional dimension of youth work. Respondents expressed interest in learning how to recognise signs of distress and provide basic support or referrals.

“Learning about mental health principles, including how to recognize signs of distress, is essential.”

4.4 Practical toolkits and mentoring

Finally, respondents emphasised the need for concrete, practice-oriented resources, such as: session templates, checklists, and opportunities to learn from experienced facilitators.

“Access to adaptable workshop templates and mentoring would really strengthen my skills.”

“Face-to-face training with experienced educators, even short one-day trips, would be super useful.”

Interim Conclusion

Overall, the perspectives of youth workers and educators highlight both structural limitations and strong professional interest in using adventure-based education with young migrants. While respondents do not present adventure education as a standalone solution, they consistently describe it as a useful complementary approach when supported by adequate resources, training, and organisational collaboration.

Chapter 3: Insights from the Expert Interviews

Methodology and Interviewee Profiles

Chapter 3 is based on three semi-structured expert interviews conducted within the framework of the project. The interviews complement the perspectives of young participants (Chapter 1) and youth workers and educators (Chapter 2) by contributing expert practitioner insights into: (i) what constitutes “quality” in adventure-based learning, (ii) approaches to risk and responsibility, and (iii) strategies for adapting programmes to diverse groups, including migrants and refugees.

All interviewees are experienced trainers with over a decade of practice in outdoor and adventure-based education. They are members of multiple international trainer pools, including those of the Council of Europe and SALTO, and have delivered a large number of educational programmes with diverse participant groups.

The interviews followed a shared thematic structure covering conceptual distinctions (outdoor vs. adventure education), learning processes, inclusion and group diversity, safety and risk management, and pathways to professional competence. The data were analysed using a thematic approach.



Interview 1: Bogdan Imre - Adventure Education as Embodied Learning with Real Consequences

Bogdan Imre is an experienced trainer working with outdoor and adventure education. He holds an academic degree in outdoor and experiential learning and applies adventure education regularly in his work with diverse groups.

(The following text is based on the interview conducted with Bogdan, as part of the project “First Journey”; the full version of the interview can be watched on the video below.

Adventure education is described as a form of learning that is defined less by its outdoor setting and more by how learning takes place.

Three elements are central to this understanding.

First, learning is framed as an **experiential process** in which action and reflection are continuously connected. Activities are not isolated experiences but part of an ongoing cycle in which participants act, stop to reflect, and return to action with new and adjusted understanding. Learning is therefore not passive or purely cognitive, but emerges through doing and reflecting within the activity itself.

Second, learning is shaped by **physical involvement**. Adventure education involves movement, effort, and physical engagement such as walking, climbing, or hiking. Physical states, as an example - fatigue over time, might influence how people feel, interact, and make decisions. Decision-making at the beginning of an activity differs from decision-making after several hours of physical effort, as the body affects perception, judgement, and behaviour. Physical engagement is therefore not an add-on, but part of the learning process.

Third, adventure education involves **risks that cannot be fully eliminated**, even when risk assessments and safety measures are in place. While serious incidents are rare, minor physical consequences or unexpected situations are common.

Beyond physical effects, consequences also appear at psychological and social levels: facing obstacles, deciding whether to try or withdraw, responding to failure or success, and experiencing achievement in unfamiliar situations. Learning is closely linked to working with others, relying on them, communicating needs, and respecting the needs of others during shared activities.

Experiences in adventure education are understood to vary at the individual level, rather than being determined by group labels such as “migrants” or “refugees.” Background can influence how activities are experienced, but it does not allow for generic assumptions. Identical activities may carry very different meanings for different individuals, depending on their past experiences.

For this reason, careful observation during the initial phase of working with a group is considered essential. Early activities serve to identify limits, sensitivities, and potential “red flags,” particularly when working with participants who may have experienced trauma. Introducing challenges gradually and proceeding step by step allows facilitators to adapt activities without forcing participation or escalating risk prematurely. Language barriers further increase the need for clarity, especially when instructions relate to safety.

Several practical challenges are highlighted in relation to implementation:

Working with adventure equipment requires specific training; personal experience with outdoor activities is not sufficient when facilitating groups.

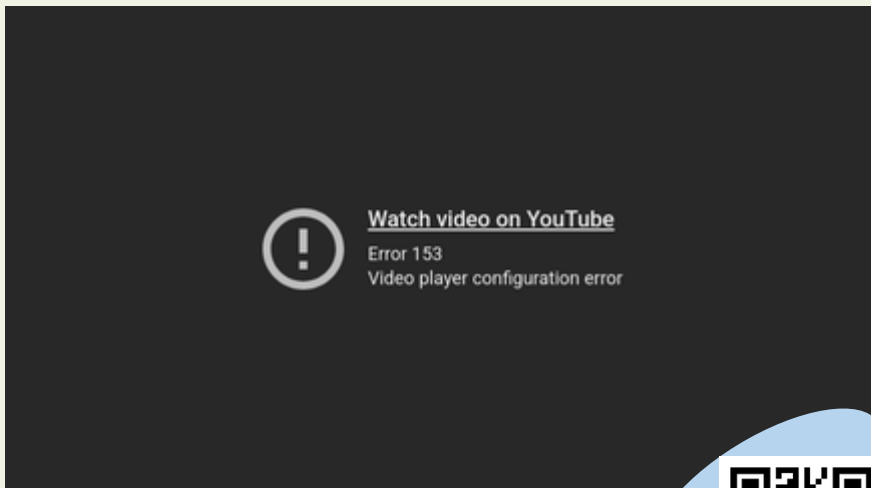
Risk often arises from misuse of equipment or from participants not following instructions.

Another challenge lies in understanding group dynamics and individual limits. Participants may hide difficulties by remaining silent, withdrawing, or refusing specific activities. Such moments require individual attention to determine whether the issue relates to confidence, trust, past experiences, or physical limits, and to decide whether adaptation or withdrawal is appropriate.

Training pathways in adventure education are described as uneven. While opportunities exist, particularly through established outdoor education organisations, not all learning experiences lead to professional competence. A clear distinction is made between certificates of participation and certificates of qualification. Participation alone does not guarantee the skills needed for safe and responsible facilitation. Erasmus+ activities can provide exposure and motivation, but their quality varies significantly, and they do not automatically ensure competence in safety, educational design, or working with people.

Across all aspects of practice, attitude is identified as a critical factor. Technical skills can be learned through training, but an inappropriate attitude increases the likelihood of problems, including non-physical harm. Responsibility, awareness, and mindset are therefore considered foundational for adventure education, with skills development built upon this basis.

Watch the interview with Bogdan Imre here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview



Interview 2: Marko Boyko - Accessibility, and Integration Through Practical Cooperation

Marko Boyko is an experienced practitioner in outdoor and adventure-based education, working primarily in integration and community-building contexts with migrants and refugees. He co-founded a Berlin-based social enterprise using outdoor & non-formal education and integration projects and has extensive practical experience facilitating activities with diverse groups.


(The following text is based on the interview conducted with Marko, as part of the project “First Journey”, the full version of the interview can be watched on the video below.

Outdoor education is described as a broad category that includes any educational activity taking place outside the classroom, including low-intensity formats such as sitting in a circle outdoors or simple games in a school yard.

Adventure education, by contrast, is distinguished through several specific criterias.

Central among them is the presence of challenge, understood as a situation that requires effort or adaptation from participants. Participation in this challenge is voluntary (“challenge by choice”), meaning that individuals consciously decide whether to engage. Challenge is not uniformed across participants; what constitutes a challenge varies significantly. Distance, physical load, group exposure, sleeping outdoors, or cooking can each represent meaningful thresholds depending on individual experience and background.

Learning is understood to occur when participants move outside their comfort zone without entering a panic zone. Maintaining this balance is described as a key responsibility of facilitation. Proper facilitation includes preparation, situational control, and structured debriefing. When these elements are present, challenge functions as a learning opportunity rather than a source of distress.




While the challenge can also be designed in indoor settings, outdoor education is described as offering a different level of immersion. Outdoor programmes operate continuously (“24 - 7”), requiring constant presence, preparation, and engagement. Participants are exposed to unfamiliar environments, landscapes, and conditions, which differ from everyday settings. This sustained exposure activates multiple sensory channels and requires physical, mental, and technical readiness. The learning experience is characterised by strong focus combined with a sense of relaxation, distinguishing it from time-limited classroom-based activities.

Outdoor education is described as particularly accessible, especially in the form of hiking. Hiking requires minimal infrastructure, is often free, and can be implemented across diverse terrains, including flat areas, mountains, forests, wetlands, or coastal environments. This accessibility makes it adaptable to different geographical and social contexts.

At the same time, participation is shaped by cultural background and prior exposure to outdoor practices. In some contexts, outdoor education does not exist or may be perceived as unnecessary or lacking social prestige. Sleeping outdoors or camping may be experienced as uncomfortable or embarrassing rather than attractive. Such perceptions are linked to cultural norms rather than individual motivation.

Another recurring challenge concerns preparation and equipment. Participants may underestimate the physical and technical requirements of outdoor activities, particularly in demanding European environments. Insufficient equipment, such as inadequate backpacks or footwear - can increase difficulty and introduce safety risks. Addressing this requires organisational capacity, including access to equipment storage and the ability to supply participants when necessary.

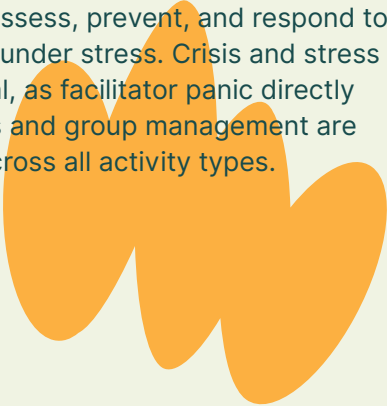


Despite these challenges, mixed groups are described as particularly effective learning environments. Outdoor activities create situations in which cooperation does not depend on shared language. Practical tasks such as making a fire, cooking, navigating terrain, or managing camp life enable collaboration through action. Limited internet access and reduced digital distraction increase presence and focus on the group. Through shared practical situations, stereotypes are confronted directly, and relationships develop through experience rather than discussion.

The role of the facilitator is described as central. Technical outdoor skills alone are not sufficient. Competence in adventure-based work requires an interdisciplinary profile combining pedagogical experience, outdoor skills, and sensitivity to group context. Professional guides or mountaineering instructors may possess high technical expertise but may not be prepared to work with diverse or vulnerable groups without additional pedagogical and social competencies.

Training pathways in outdoor and adventure education are described as limited and uneven. Formal degree programmes are rare, and many practitioners enter the field by combining personal outdoor experience with professional backgrounds in youth work, human rights, or adult education. Competence develops through integrating pedagogical knowledge with technical skills acquired outside formal educational settings.

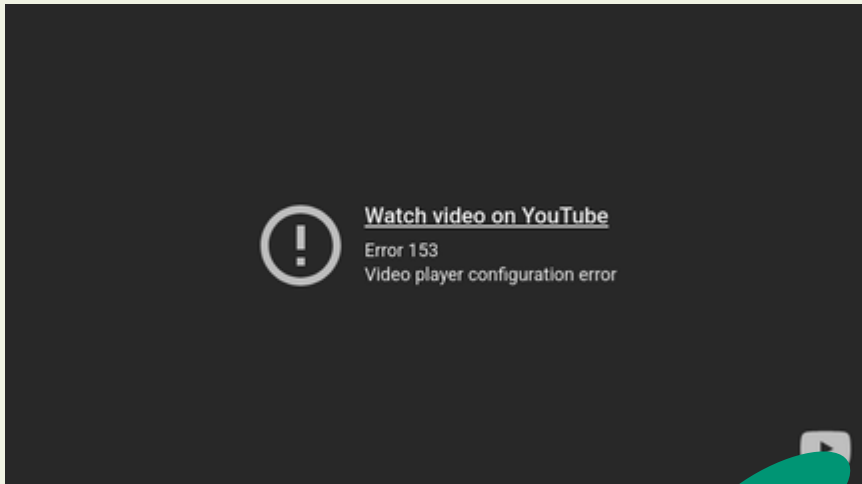
Key elements of professional preparation include structured risk management systems, the ability to assess, prevent, and respond to risk, and the capacity to remain calm under stress. Crisis and stress management are considered essential, as facilitator panic directly affects group safety. Group dynamics and group management are identified as primary competences across all activity types.



First aid is emphasised as first of all, facilitators responsibility, but also as a shared competence within the group. Ensuring that participants possess basic first aid awareness is seen as a safety measure. Logistical competences, such as food planning, supply chains, hygiene, and sanitation for large groups, are also identified as critical, as failures in these areas can undermine both safety and learning.

Attitude is identified as a decisive factor. While practical skills enable activities to take place, attitude shapes the quality and safety of the experience. Poor attitude can lead to negative or unsafe outcomes even when technical competence is present. For this reason, co-facilitation is described as a preferred model. Working in pairs allows responsibilities to be shared, combining positive attitude, pedagogical leadership, and technical oversight. One facilitator can focus on challenge and engagement, while the other ensures safety and situational control.

Watch the interview with Marko Boyko here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview



Interview 3: Vera Goriunova - Adventure Education, Risk, Group Diversity, and Shared Responsibility

Vera Goriunova is an experienced trainer and Gestalt psychologist working in the field of outdoor and adventure-based education. She has extensive experience delivering learning programmes in international contexts and facilitates adventure-based processes focused on personal development, group learning, and cooperative practice across diverse participant groups.

(The following text is based on the interview conducted with Vera, as part of the project “First Journey”, the full version of the interview can be watched on the video below.

Adventure education is described as a component of outdoor education rather than a separate field. Outdoor education functions as an umbrella concept, while adventure education represents one of its specific elements. The defining feature that distinguishes adventure education within this broader framework is the presence of risk as an integral part of the learning process. Risk is not treated as an accidental or secondary element, but as a factor that actively shapes learning by increasing its intensity and impact. The learning process becomes more demanding and meaningful precisely because it unfolds under conditions of uncertainty.

Beyond individual learning outcomes, adventure education is characterised by its strong group dimension. Alongside personal or professional development, it supports group development and the creation of a cooperative learning environment. Cooperation is perceived not as a single skill but as a mindset that develops through shared experience, joint problem-solving, and mutual support in challenging situations.

Participants approach adventure-based experiences differently depending on their cultural background, prior exposure to outdoor activities, and their relationship to risk and ambiguity.

Comfort zones vary significantly: what may be perceived as a minor challenge by one group can represent a major step beyond familiarity for another. This variation becomes particularly visible in mixed groups, where different attitudes toward organisation, uncertainty, and outdoor living coexist.

Access to appropriate equipment is a key factor influencing participation in outdoor activities. For some participants, especially those in more vulnerable situations, the lack of suitable clothing or gear can limit their ability to take part in more demanding outdoor experiences. In such cases, the main barrier is not the activity itself, but the absence of adequate equipment.

This underlines the importance of adapting activities to the actual conditions of the group and ensuring that learning experiences remain inclusive even when participants have unequal access to equipment. At the same time, diversity of backgrounds is seen as enriching, as participants can support one another and contribute different experiences and strengths to the group.

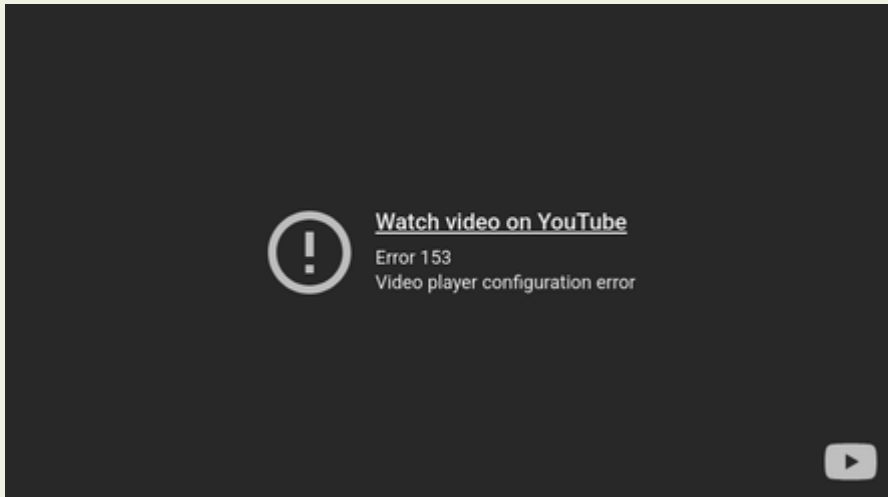
Safety considerations strongly influence whether educators choose to use adventure-based methods. Perceived risk is often described as a barrier, leading some educators to avoid such approaches altogether. Instead of avoiding risk, the emphasis is placed on preparation and professional responsibility. Adequate training is considered essential, particularly in contexts where specific activities require formal certification. Practical measures such as scouting routes, testing activities in advance, and anticipating possible difficulties are described as effective ways to reduce uncertainty and increase facilitator confidence. Although uncertainty cannot be fully eliminated in outdoor environments, careful preparation helps educators remain calmer and more responsive during implementation.

Alongside preparation, shared ownership of the process is identified as an important factor in managing both safety and group dynamics. While educators remain responsible for participants' safety, involving participants, especially adult groups, in elements of planning,

decision-making, and practical organisation can reduce facilitator anxiety and strengthen engagement. This shared approach supports learning and makes facilitation more manageable. The appropriate balance between educator responsibility and participant ownership depends on the composition of the group, particularly whether participants are minors or adults.

At a systemic level, adventure-based education is perceived as insufficiently recognised and sometimes misunderstood. It is often associated with stereotypes or viewed as primarily recreational, which can obscure its educational potential. In some cases, this perception is reinforced by programmes that focus largely on outdoor activities without a clear learning focus. At the same time, there are examples of highly structured and educationally robust adventure-based programmes that demonstrate strong learning outcomes. Increased visibility, clearer educational framing, and better promotion of such practices are seen as necessary to strengthen the field.

Watch the interview with Vera Goriunova here:



Scan QR Code to watch the interview



Recommendations for Youth Organisations and Practitioners

The findings of this National Index indicate that adventure-based outdoor education can be a valuable method in youth work with young migrants, provided that it is applied deliberately, professionally, and with attention to context. Based on the focus group with young people, the survey of youth workers and educators, and the expert interviews, the following recommendations are proposed.

First of all, the adventure-based activities should start with simple, accessible formats that help participants feel comfortable taking the first step. Fear of not being fit enough, uncertainty about expectations, and hesitation toward unfamiliar group settings - were recurrent barriers identified by young participants. Beginner-friendly formats, like short hikes, clearly communicated routes and goals, and gradual increases in challenge, can potentially reduce these barriers. Facilitators should make expectations explicit and emphasise voluntary participation “challenge by choice”, to support engagement without pressure.

Secondly, integration should not be assumed to occur automatically through shared activities. While outdoor settings create opportunities for interaction, the focus group and expert interviews indicate that social connection requires intentional facilitation. Mixed-group formats benefit from structured cooperation tasks, clear roles, and opportunities for interaction that do not rely on language alone. Practical collaboration (e.g. cooking, navigation, shared logistics) supports interaction through action, but facilitation remains essential to ensure inclusion across cultural and social lines.

Thirdly, equipment availability must be addressed as a core inclusion factor. Limited access to appropriate clothing or gear can restrict participation and increase safety risks, particularly in more demanding outdoor contexts or with vulnerable groups. Organisations are encouraged to adapt activities to the actual equipment situation of participants or to develop lending systems and partnerships that allow equipment to be shared. Inclusion depends not only on motivation, but on whether participants can safely take part under real conditions.

Fourth, risk has to be managed through preparation, rather than avoided. Across all expert interviews, perceived risk emerged as a key reason why educators hesitate to use adventure-based methods. The findings suggest that professional preparation, e.g.: route scouting, testing activities in advance, and clear risk management procedures - reduce uncertainty and support calmer facilitation. Training in safety management, first aid, and group management is essential, especially when working with diverse youth groups.

Fifth, facilitation should be understood as an interdisciplinary competence. Technical outdoor skills alone are insufficient. Effective practice requires the combination of pedagogical competence, sensitivity to group dynamics, risk awareness, and hard skills and competences. Co-facilitation models, where responsibilities are shared between several facilitators, and in some cases with participants, could increase both safety and educational quality of the group.

Finally, continuity should be prioritised over one-off activities. Confidence, trust, and social connection develop gradually and are unlikely to emerge through isolated events. Repeated participation helps participants become familiar with both the activity format and the group, reducing hesitation and supporting deeper engagement.


Regular programmes and sustained partnerships with local organisations create predictable and accessible opportunities, which is particularly important for young migrants who are new to local networks. Over time, this continuity increases the likelihood of ongoing participation and contributes to stronger community building.

Conclusion

This National Index examined the role of adventure-based outdoor education in supporting the well-being and social participation of young migrants in Germany. Drawing on qualitative data from a focus group with young people, a survey of youth workers and educators, and in-depth interviews with experienced practitioners, the analysis highlights both the potential and the conditions of this approach.

Across all data sources, adventure education is not understood as a set of outdoor activities, but as a learning process defined by experiential action, reflection, managed challenge, and social interaction. Participants consistently associated outdoor experiences with reduced stress, increased presence, and social connection. At the same time, barriers related to confidence, access, language, equipment, and organisational capacity were clearly identified.

The expert interviews reinforce that quality in adventure-based education depends on facilitation, preparation, and attitude, rather than on the activity itself. Risk, physical engagement, and uncertainty are not viewed as problems to be eliminated, but as elements that require professional handling and thorough management. Importantly, all experts emphasised that participants' experiences cannot be predicted based on the background labels alone; individual observation and adaptive design are central to inclusive practice.

The page features a light cream background with a dark teal mountain range silhouette at the bottom. On the left and right sides, there are vertical decorative bands with orange and blue circular and abstract shapes. A large orange circle is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the page.

The findings do not support viewing adventure education as a universal solution. Instead, they point to its value as a complementary method within broader youth work practice and integration contexts, particularly when language barriers are present and when learning through action offers alternatives to discussion-based formats.

In conclusion, adventure-based outdoor education can meaningfully contribute to youth work, when it is purposefully designed, responsibly facilitated, and integrated in sustained local practice. Its effectiveness lies not in the outdoors itself, but in how learning, challenge, and cooperation are structured within it.



National Index - Germany

First Step is Half the Journey:

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