



STATE OF THE ART REPORT

March, 2023



Content

1 Introduction	5
2 Meet the partners	6
3 National desk research	6
3.1 Austria	6
3.1.1 Introduction	6
3.1.2 Legal framework	7
3.1.3 Methodology	8
3.1.4 Educational offers	8
3.1.5 Identifying gaps	13
3.1.6. References	14
3.2 Greece	15
3.2.1 Introduction	15
3.2.2. Legal framework	16
3.2.3. Methodology	17
3.2.4. Educational offers	17
3.2.5. Identifying gaps	19
3.2.6. References	20
3.3. Romania	21
3.3.1 Introduction	21
3.3.2. Legal framework	23
3.3.3. Methodology	25
3.3.4. Educational offers	25
3.3.5. Identifying gaps	31
3.3.6. References:	33
3.4. Serbia	35
3.4.1 Introduction	35
3.4.2. Legal framework	36
3.4.3. Methodology	37
3.4.4. Educational offers	38
3.4.5. Identifying gaps	41
3.4.6. References	42
3.5. Slovenia	43
3.5.1. Introduction	43
3.5.2. Legal framework	44

3.5.3. Methodology	45
3.5.4. Educational offers	45
3.5.5. Identifying gaps	52
3.5.6. References	55
3.6. Conclusion	57
4 National competences survey	58
4.1 Austria	58
4.1.1. Introduction	58
4.1.2. Results	58
4.1.3. Discussion	68
4.2. Greece	70
4.2.1. Introduction	70
4.2.2. Results	70
4.2.3. Discussion	80
4.3. Romania	81
4.3.1. Introduction	81
4.3.2. Results	81
4.3.3. Discussion	91
4.4. Serbia	91
4.4.1. Introduction	91
4.4.2. Results	91
4.4.3. Discussion	104
4.5. Slovenia	105
4.5.1. Introduction	105
4.5.2. Results	106
4.5.3. Conclusion	123
4.6. Conclusion	124
5 Focus Group reports	125
5.1. Austria	125
5.1.1. Introduction	125
5.1.2. Discussion	126
5.2. Greece	127
5.2.1. Introduction	127
5.2.2. Discussion	127
5.2.3. Conclusion	129
5.3. Romania	129

5.3.1.	Introduction	129
5.3.2.	Discussion	130
5.3.3.	Conclusion	132
5.4.	Serbia	132
5.4.1.	Introduction	132
5.4.2.	Discussion	132
5.5.	Slovenia	134
5.5.1.	Introduction	134
5.5.2.	Discussion	135
5.5.3.	Conclusion	141
5.6.	Commonalities and differences	142

1 Introduction

OECD (2021) reports that mental health of young people has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. In most countries, mental health issues among this age group have doubled or more - young people were 30% to 80% more likely to report symptoms of depression or anxiety than adults. Young people feel an overwhelming sense of isolation due to limited social interactions in a time where socializing is especially vital for their normal development. Even with the partial re-opening of the economy, prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression in the youth population remains higher than pre-crisis levels. The worsening of mental health can also be attributed to disruptions to access to mental health services.

According to research, optimistic thinking, ability to trust family and friends, and daily physical activity are all protective factors of mental well-being. We can do a lot for our mental health ourselves by using simple strategies to manage our stress levels on a daily basis. In stressful situations, it is good to pay attention to them and express them without hesitation, since suppression of emotions only deepens mental distress. Because we as humans are social beings, it is also essential to stay positively connected with the society, which is especially true for young people, who are most affected by isolation and lack of social contacts.

With adequate support and timely intervention, young people experiencing mental distress may be able to bounce back as we recover from Covid. This will, however, require a scaling up of existing mental health support, also including the use of digital tools and outdoor activities, since indoor socializing might still be limited. YOUHEAL represents a key long-term investment in human capital and capacities in many coming years and answers current societal needs by supporting the psychological resilience of young people, even in uncertain times. We will achieve the set project goals by providing easy access and open-source learning content for self-care, based on flexible learning approaches as well as developing a local learning environment and empowering young individuals and society for positive changes.

In this context, the YOUHEAL partners organised 5 focus groups in all partner countries with 100 individuals in total to develop 1 list of common challenges that identify current issues young people are facing in the post-Covid era, improving their digitalisation capabilities within lifelong learning for prosperous personal progress, as well as changing their mindset. An online survey was also sent out to 250 young people to observe the needs and existing competencies of young people. Based on the gathered knowledge an e-course using micro-training and storytelling will be developed, ensuring that individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and competences for personal growth, as well as an interactive learning possibility (preferably 1 web application) that includes attractive and innovative training materials. Additionally, an e-guidance or e-textbook for self-learning will be developed.

This project addresses young people between the age of 18 and 26 to strengthen their mental resilience. The produced learning materials can also be used by trainers, professionals, NGOs, self-development organizations and so on. Networking will foster better collaboration between institutions and further development of project outputs. The project will provide an interactive learning experience, based on innovative methods and approaches, suitable for staff and youth.

2 Meet the partners

Behind this project there are six partner organisations from five different countries. Timis County Youth Foundation (FITT) is an umbrella organization for youth NGOs in the west part of Romania. The Programmes and activities implemented by FITT range from educational to cultural programmes, active citizenship and policy development, both on local and national level. MIITR is a private NGO, established in 2017 in Maribor, Slovenia. Its main activity is research and development in the fields of sustainability, comprehending environmental, economic, social, and lately smart and digital dimensions. The Innovation Hive is a private non-profit organization, located in Larissa, Greece. Its main mission is bringing open innovation in different areas of the applications, based on the large partnership of stakeholders. LEVILO is a private non-profit organisation located in Graz, Austria. LEVILO was founded in 2021 and started its work with the two co-founders. They have extensive experience in the planning, developing, and implementing of European research programmes and projects. Pokret gorana Vojvodine is a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 1960. The organisation is based in Sremski Karlovci, Serbia. Main aim of the organisation aim is creating space for active and responsible participation of local communities in sustainable development through education, volunteering, promotion and advocacy. Zavod Moc za spremembo (Power For Change Institute) is a private NGO, based in Slovenia, founded at the end of 2020. Its main aim is to empower individuals in society with mindset, knowledge, skills and active action for changes, for themselves, and for active participation and co-creation in society.

3 National desk research

In each of the five partner countries, a national desk research was conducted to identify gaps concerning learning offers, topics covered, didactical material used, digital competences etc.

3.1 Austria

- **3.1.1 Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has left its traces in Austrian society. During the pandemic, in 2020, 571,477 people were without a job, more than ever before in the history of the Second Republic. However, in December 2022, a total of 374,871 people were officially without gainful employment in December 2022. This is 27,507 fewer people than in December 2021, which means that unemployment is well below pre-crisis levels. Unemployment is lower than it has been for almost 10 years, many vacancies are registered with the AMS and some industries report a shortage of skilled workers.¹

However, it has taken a much bigger toll on the mental health of Austrians. A recent study by Danube University Krems shows that depressive symptoms have risen from about four percent to over 20 percent in Austria. A similarly strong increase can be seen in anxiety symptoms, which rose from five

¹ <https://arbeitplus.at/statistiken/entwicklung-arbeitslosigkeit-aktuelles-monat/>

percent to 19 percent. In addition, around 16 percent currently suffer from a sleep disorder. Especially at risk are adults under 35, women, singles and people without work.²

The problem is not only the high number of Austrians affected by a mental illness (39% of people in Austria have been affected in the past or are currently affected) but also the care provided. Only 13% of respondents from a recent study are very satisfied with the care provided to people with mental illness and only 10% believe that people with mental illness in Austria receive sufficient help. Only 31% believe that people with mental illnesses receive as much support as people with physical illnesses. For 65% of people, a necessary treatment for a mental illness would not be affordable. Another problem is the social stigma: not even three quarters of respondents (63%) would tell family/friends about a mental illness, and only 21% would tell work colleagues.³

So, even though the unemployment rate got back to pre-pandemic levels, mental health did not. Alarming are the social stigma and lack of sufficient support that Austrians observed.

3.1.2 Legal framework

Mental illness and disorders of mental well-being account for 20-25% of the so-called burden of disease in the European Region and represent one of the greatest public health challenges for each country. Therefore, living and working conditions should be designed to promote psychosocial health at all stages of life, helping to prevent psychosocial illness. Psychosocial burdens and stress should be reduced as far as possible. In addition, there is a need for continuous improvement in mental health care and increased awareness of mental health and illness to reduce prejudice and prevent exclusion. The Austrian Ministry of Health is implementing numerous measures to improve mental health. One of Austria's ten health goals is also dedicated to this important area. The ten health targets were developed in a broadly coordinated process involving numerous representatives from politics and society. They form the framework for action for an overall health-promoting policy up to the year 2032. Health goal 9 is "Promote psychosocial health". The "Advisory Board for Psychosocial Health", which emerged from the former "Advisory Board for Mental Health" and the "Working Group on Health Goal 9: Promoting Psychosocial Health", accompanies the corresponding strategies and activities. It is a body under section 8(1) of the Federal Ministries Act 1986 and advises the Federal Minister for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection on all issues relating to mental health⁴.

The Advisory Council for Mental Health of the Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMSGK) has also a ten step plan as a national mental health strategy⁵:

- 1) Promote mental health and emphasize its central importance
- 2) Preventing mental illness and suicide
- 3) Effectively combat stigmatization and discrimination against people with mental illness
- 4) Provide fair and adequate funding
- 5) Ensure good primary care for people with mental disorders
- 6) Promote appropriate services for vulnerable phases of life

² <https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/aktuelles/news/2020/deutlicher-anstieg-an-psychischen-symptomen0.html>

³ https://www.boep.or.at/download/5ef991483c15c8588f00001a/BOEP-Studie_Psychische_Gesundheit_in_Oesterreich.pdf

⁴ <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Nicht-uebertragbare-Krankheiten/Psychische-Gesundheit/Beirat-f%C3%BCr-Psychische-Gesundheit.html>

⁵ <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Nicht-uebertragbare-Krankheiten/Psychische-Gesundheit/Nationale-Strategie-zur-psychischen-Gesundheit.html>

- 7) Provide effective care to people with serious mental illness
- 8) The involvement of patients and their relatives in planning and decision-making processes must be ensured
- 9) Reliable data on the mental health of the Austrian population and the psychosocial care landscape
- 10) Assess effectiveness and gain new insights

3.1.3 Methodology

The main goals of this desk research are to describe the situation in Austria concerning educational offers concerning mental health and/or self-empowerment in the context of young people. More detailed, this desk research should identify the present conditions in Austria related to mindfulness/mental well-being and self-empowerment for young people and list the training options that exist for them. This can include formal and non-formal education as well as seminars, workshops, trainings or online offers. So, it will be important to see what different kind of offers there are. The legal framework is also important to show the national context and importance of educational offers concerning mental health and/or self-empowerment.

Another important point in this desk research is the review of an integration of mindfulness/mental health topics/issues into youth education. The question what kind of courses are offered and what the concrete topics of those courses are is being followed.

The existing training materials regarding mindfulness/mental health in Austria will be identified. This also includes the didactical methods that are used for teaching and which literature the training is based on. It will be also interesting to see in what way the training is carried out, for example if there are face-to-face trainings, online trainings what kind of materials are being used, like for example PowerPoint presentations or books. If there are curricula, the content will be analysed.

The desk research is being carried through a thorough online research in the month of January of 2023. To find the results, the keywords “mindfulness”, “mental health”, “self-empowerment”, “trainings”, “courses” and “Austria” are put into the search engine Google in different combinations and with the use of synonyms. The search is carried out in English as well as in German to make sure no important information is lost. To verify the quality of the results, trusted sources like for example governmental websites or news outlets are being preferred.

The results of this desk research will help us identifying gaps that the YOUHEAL project can fill and give us insight in helpful tools/materials that can be used for the YOUHEAL online course.

3.1.4 Educational offers

This chapter will list examples of educational offers concerning mindfulness/self-empowerment/mental health in Austria.

Austrian Health Fund - Time for me: Switching off when under multiple stresses

The Austrian Health Fund organized a lecture with the title “Time for me – Switching off when under multiple stresses” which is online available. It mostly focused on stress relief.

The content of the course focused on simple tools and methods suitable for everyday life and how to make time for oneself and gaining new strength through it. One also learns tips, practical examples

and assistance for dealing with multiple workloads. People are also taught how to identify their own so-called time guzzlers and how to save time on them. Important take aways are to observe and live self-care, as well as learning strategies and exercises to be able to switch off better.⁶

Diploma Course Mental Training

The further education institution WIFI offers a diploma training course for mental coaches. Even though our target group are not coaches but rather their clients, the curriculum is still relevant for the YOUHEAL project. The course addresses the close relation between psyche and body. It offers a combination of mental training and basic knowledge of health aspects. Participants learn basic mental concepts and their use. Physical relaxation and training methods are used to treat clients holistically.

The content of the course is the following:

Module 1

- Introduction
- Explanation of terms
- Scientific background of mental training
- delimitation of the application
- thoughts - power of thought

Module 2 (Practical training)

- relaxation techniques
- Breathing / breathing techniques
- Visualization and perception training
- Fantasy journeys
- Formulation examples
- Avoiding mistakes that can happen when formulating
- Use of relaxation music

Module 3

- Use of mental training to achieve goals and promote motivation
- Mental training in coaching
- Coaching skills
- non-violent communication

Module 4

- Possible applications of mental training
- Supervision of practical cases

Module 5

- Summary, open discussion/reflection, group feedback and reflection on diploma thesis
- Examination

⁶ <https://www.gesundheitskasse.at/cdscontent/?contentid=10007.882793&portal=oegkportal>

Even though the WIFI course is for trainers, consultants, psychotherapists, teachers, managers, supervisors, fitness trainers, stress-less trainers, especially module 2 and module 3 can be considered when making a course plan for the YOUHEAL e-learning course.

Mental health in focus

In response to the urgent need of employees and vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents, who are exposed to increased mental stress due to the Covid 19 pandemic, Hilfswerk Kärnten, with the support of the Carinthian Health Fund and the Austrian Health Fund Carinthia, has launched the project "Mental Health in Focus".

The low-threshold measures and programs for the promotion of mental health at the workplace (and for children at school) are offered free of charge to the participants within the framework of the project and are intended to intercept negative effects on mental health with the background of the Corona pandemic and its influence on the ability to work or on the diverse living environments (work, family, school, etc.).

The program offers workshops to companies to give working people a sense and awareness of their own mental health, so that employees know how they can preventively and actively maintain their mental health.

The goals of the project are to recognize and strengthen psychological resources, psycho-hygiene, stress and burnout prevention, and how to provide oneself with psychological relief and maintain the ability to work, especially in times of crisis. In addition, there is awareness of how to integrate work life well into one's own life and what it takes to have a fulfilling work life-all of which contributes to maintaining mental health and motivation in the workplace. The main target group is working people aged 25-65 years, as well as children and teenagers of school age 6-15 years as an additional target group⁷.

The target group of the YOUHEAL project is directly between the target group of this, so this is a gap that can be filled.

Workshops by the Youth Service of the state and the Upper Austrian Student Council

The Youth Service of the state and the Upper Austrian Student Council (LSV OÖ) are jointly developing a workshop offering on the topic of mental health. This will be offered to school classes, youth clubs and communities starting in the fall. These workshops are meant to be creating spaces where young people can talk openly about the topic.

The Upper Austrian regional student council supports the state's action, because mental health is also a central concern for the student representatives and was therefore also the subject of their own "Mental Health" referendum. Awareness raising and strengthening of self-esteem as focal points of the workshops

The goals of the workshop are divided into six sub-areas and are conveyed to young people between the ages of 14 and 19 (from the 9th grade):

- Expanding knowledge & dealing with the topics of health and illness.
- Examination of own feelings, needs and resources
- Reduction of stigmas regarding mental illnesses

⁷ <https://www.hilfswerk.at/psychische-gesundheit-im-fokus/>

-
- Strengthening self-esteem and sense of belonging
 - Getting to know local support services

Yet again, the content of the course is relevant to the YOUHEAL project but they do not serve our target group, so this gap can be filled by the YOUHEAL e-learning platform.

Success through mental strength

Another WIFI course is an online offer to strengthen mental abilities. It is a live-online course that is planned over 6 items. The costs of the course are 195 euro.

The teaching goals of the course are:

- How to use method training from top sports in your work and achieve your personal peak performance
- How to balance stress loads with a sense of achievement
- How to use your strengths and potentials in a targeted way and thereby push yourself mentally to the next level
- How to master your 60,000 thoughts per day and your subconscious mind
- How to develop solution and success thinking
- How to master extreme situations with simple tools

In the workshop, people will acquire the ability to positively influence performance, success, attitude, well-being and health. Everyone is exposed to strong stresses both at work and in everyday life. In the seminar one learns the secrets of top performance and the key sources of inner strength.

In the course, concrete tools on how to increase performance, health and satisfaction at work are taught through a daily 5-minute training program. Mental strategies and tools how to cope with difficult situations are taught, as well as tools on how to develop enthusiasm, joy and passion.⁸

This shows that courses on self-empowerment and stress relief do exist, even as an online format which justifies our online offers. However, for this course, there is a fee which could be an obstacle for young people.

Healthy out of the Crisis

The project "Healthy out of the Crisis" is implemented by the Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists (BÖP) in close cooperation with the Austrian Federal Association for Psychotherapy (ÖBVP). The aim of "Gesund aus der Krise" ("Healthy out of the Crisis") is to offer psychosocial care throughout Austria, at a low threshold and without long waiting times. A hotline will refer people to appropriate counseling and treatment centers. This is intended to (re)empower affected children, adolescents and young adults up to and including the age of 21.

"Healthy out of the crisis" offers 8000 therapy places for affected children, adolescents and young adults up to 21 years of age throughout Austria, 15 free clinical psychological, health psychological or psychotherapeutic treatment units in individual or group settings per affected person.

The treatment program is designed to help young people out of their crisis free of charge - as close to home as possible and individually adapted to the client's circumstances. 15 counseling/treatment sessions are offered free of charge. A weekly frequency of therapy units is recommended, the

⁸ <https://www.wifiwien.at/kurs/1331x-erfolg-durch-mentale-staerke>

treatment thus lasts about three and a half to seven months. In direct consultation with the therapist, further therapy or counseling can be arranged and taken over if necessary.

The offers are individual treatment of 50 minutes each or group treatment as close to home as possible. People can have their sessions face-to-face or online/telephone, including discussions with parents, depending on age and stage of development.

“Healthy out of the crisis” also offers group therapy sessions concerning self-esteem and self-empowerment. Most of the are in person and for young people between the ages of 14 and 21. Some also are gender-specific to ensure a safe space.⁹

Istokay.at

Istokay.at is a website by a team from the Danube University Krems in cooperation with the University Clinic for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the Medical University of Vienna. The website offers information around the topics of depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, stress and even suicidal tendencies. The methodological material are videos by professionals in a frontal presentation that is visually aided. Each topic is divided into general information about the problems, what one can do about it in the style of self-help and even a test for people to see how serious their problem is.¹⁰

Even though the site focuses mainly on mental health problems and less on self-empowerment, it can still be of help to the YOUHEAL project. The general accessibility of the site and good structure of the individual problems can be used by our project as well. The approach of fostering self-help is very important in the YOUHEAL project as well.

Home-Treatment

Home-Treatment was created in 2021 as an outreach service that accompanies young people with mental illness and their families in their everyday environment - at home - and offers a comparable intensity to inpatient or day clinic treatment. However, by working on-site, the children's and adolescents' everyday lives are included in the treatment and there is no disruption of important social relationships in the family, school or care environment. This pioneer project of the University Clinic for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (MedUni Vienna/AKH) and the Psychosocial Services in Vienna (PSD) not only relieves the burden of inpatient services, but also opens up the possibility of reacting quickly and without waiting times to emerging crises and emergency situations.

Based on individual needs, seamless transitions between different forms of treatment are created when necessary. The home treatment teams represent the interface between the inpatient and outpatient areas, as well as the care structures in private practice. Within the framework of the Psychiatric and Psychosomatic Care Plan of the City of Vienna (PPV), continuity of care is guaranteed in this way, with the aim of achieving the best and safest care for children and adolescents in psychosocial emergencies.

Children and adolescents are thereby cared for in the context of their families for an extended treatment period (3 to 6 months) in their immediate living environment. In accordance with the standards of child and adolescent psychiatry, the home treatment teams have a multidisciplinary structure and are made up of experts from a wide range of fields, thus offering important therapeutic

⁹ <https://gesundausderkrise.at/>

¹⁰ <https://www.istokay.at/>

diversity. A total of 11 experts from different professional groups are involved in the home treatment teams.¹¹

3.1.5 Identifying gaps

Austria has recognized the urgency of the mental health situation that was partly caused by the pandemic. The numbers of young people suffering from mental health problems is rising drastically. So, the government has made it an important point in their national health campaign to make sure that people suffering from mental illnesses are cared for. They also recognized the financial obstacle that many Austrians face when they want to get professional help.

There are a lot of educational offers that recognize the impact that the pandemic had on the mental well-being of Austrians, especially young people who are at a higher risk. Many of those offers are from official institutions in the context of mental health or psychiatry, like hospitals, associations or medical universities. There are also multiple workshops on self-empowerment, often provided by respected institutions like WIFI. Even though the problem of the mental health situation of young people is recognized and there are good offers to help them, there are still some gaps that the YOUHEAL project can fill, as well as offers that the project can be inspired by.

The biggest obstacles to self-empowerment training and mental health-help are money, time, to few offers and location. While psychiatric help is partly covered by health insurance in Austria, psychotherapy and self-empowerment trainings are not. Offers with good quality, such as the WIFI workshops, often cost a lot of money. That is a big obstacle for financially weaker people but since the prices are quite high for those kind of offers (an hour of psycho-therapy costs between 80-100 euros), the price is an obstacle for most people. Especially for our target group – young people between the ages of 18 and 26 - money is often sparse. By offering a free online course, the YOUHEAL project can fill this gap and young people with not a lot of money to spend can partake.

Taking part in workshops, like the self-empowerment workshops mentioned above, are often spreading over weeks, which can be an obstacle for working people. And then of course, there's the problem with location. Most offers and workshops are in the cities and therefore not easily accessible for people in the countryside. There again, the online-learning materials come in handy since the courses can be taken anywhere and on their own time. Especially when the individual subtopics are divided in short lessons. The online nature of the YOUHEAL offer also helps people that are not taking up help in fear of stigmatisation. It is a bigger step to go somewhere and talk in person than using online learning materials.

Now, most of the offers listed above have at least some sort of online-materials that are accessible for everyone. The YOUHEAL project can be inspired by the very well-structured content and help to self-help since we cannot help in person.

Another gap that the YOUHEAL project can fill is that most stress relief trainings are offered in the context of work related stress. Most of them are directed at employees or even employers to ease the stress of their workers. While some people in our target group might already be working and are probably familiar with work related stress, it is not the only angle that the factor of stress should be looked at. Stress can have many sources and the YOUHEAL project should offer help to ease the stress

¹¹ <https://psd-wien.at/home-treatment>

in general or even go into deeper detail to the multiple stress sources and not just focus on stress in the workplace.

The biggest and one of the most important gaps that the YOUHEAL project can fill is the age gap. While there are a lot of offers in Austria - be it online or in person, one on one or in groups – there are hardly any that cater specifically to our target group. There are offers in the work-related context that offer trainings and courses for people older than our target group. Most educational offers that are specifically for young people however are for school children. Young people between the age of 18 and 26 are laying in between those two groups. They might have finished school or started university or a new job during the pandemic. They are confronted with different problems than school kids, like moving out or financial independency. They might worry about their future or struggling to adapt to “real life”.

So, after analysing the existing legal framework and educational offers in the context of mental health and self-empowerment, gaps have been identified that the YOUHEAL project can fill – especially concerning the age of the target group of the project. Additionally, the research showed that choosing the online format for the learning material of the YOUHEAL project was the right idea and can complement existing offers. The desk research also showed that Austria recognizes the urgent need for self-empowerment and mental health self-help.

▪ 3.1.6. References

Arbeitplus (2023). Entwicklung Arbeitslosigkeit. Retrieved from <https://arbeitplus.at/statistiken/entwicklung-arbeitslosigkeit-aktuelles-monat/>

Berufsverband Österreichischer PsychologInnen (2020). Psychische Gesundheit in Österreich. Retrieved from https://www.boep.or.at/download/5ef991483c15c8588f00001a/BOEP-Studie_Psychische_Gesundheit_in_Oesterreich.pdf

Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz (2022). Beirat für psychische Gesundheit. Retrieved from <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Nicht-uebertragbare-Krankheiten/Psychische-Gesundheit/Beirat-f%C3%BCr-Psychische-Gesundheit.html>

Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz (2020). Nationale Strategie zur psychischen Gesundheit. Retrieved from <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Nicht-uebertragbare-Krankheiten/Psychische-Gesundheit/Nationale-Strategie-zur-psychischen-Gesundheit.html>

Donau-Universität Krems (2020). Deutlicher Anstieg an psychischen Symptomen. Retrieved from <https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/aktuelles/news/2020/deutlicher-anstieg-an-psychischen-symptomen0.html>

3.2 Greece

The coronavirus pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental health of people of all ages, but particularly on young people. With schools and universities closed, social distancing measures in place, and job losses and financial uncertainty affecting families, young people are facing a range of challenges that are taking a toll on their mental health and wellbeing.

This desk research aims to explore the impact of coronavirus on mental health in young people, focusing on the ways in which the pandemic has affected their mental health and the types of interventions and support that have been put in place to address these issues. It will review the existing literature and research on this topic, including studies conducted in Greece and other countries, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing young people in the wake of the pandemic. Through this research, we will identify similarities to the YOUHEAL project as well as gaps and develop learning materials according to the gathered information.

3.2.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Greek economy, leading to a rise in unemployment rates. According to data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Greece increased from 16.4% in the fourth quarter of 2019 to 16.8% in the fourth quarter of 2020.

The pandemic has had a particularly severe impact on certain sectors of the Greek economy, such as tourism and hospitality, which have traditionally been major drivers of employment and economic growth. The lockdown measures and travel restrictions introduced to curb the spread of the virus have resulted in a sharp decline in tourism activity and related industries, leading to job losses and income reductions for many Greeks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the mental health of professionals in Greece. There are studies suggest that burnout and mental health are important issues for professionals in Greece, particularly those in the mental health and healthcare sectors. Organizational factors, such as workload and salary, are important predictors of burnout. Some of these studies are: A study published in the Journal of Mental Health in 2021 examined the prevalence and risk factors of burnout among mental health professionals in Greece. The study found that 42% of the participants reported high levels of burnout, and that organizational factors such as low salaries and high workload were significant predictors of burnout.

A study published in the Journal of Affective Disorders in 2019 examined the relationship between burnout and depression among Greek mental health professionals. The study found that burnout was a significant predictor of depression, and that interventions to reduce burnout could potentially prevent or alleviate depression in this population.

A study published in the Journal of Affective Disorders in 2020 examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health professionals in Greece. The study found that the pandemic had a significant negative impact on the mental health of these professionals, and that interventions to support them were needed.

A study published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology in 2021 examined the relationship between burnout and job crafting among Greek healthcare workers. The study found that job crafting, which involves proactively changing one's job tasks and relationships to increase meaningfulness and personal growth, was associated with lower levels of burnout.

According to several scientific studies, the Coronavirus pandemic has also had a significant impact on young people's mental health in Greece, as it has in many other countries around the world. Some of the effects on young people's mental health in Greece include Increased anxiety and stress: The pandemic has caused many young people to worry about their own health and the health of their loved

ones. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation have also led to increased anxiety and stress. Moreover, the pandemic has led to social distancing measures that have restricted social interactions and limited opportunities for young people to socialize with their peers. This has led to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which can have negative effects on mental health. What is more, the pandemic caused disruption to education as it has forced schools and universities to close or switch to online learning, which has disrupted the educational experiences of many young people. This has led to feelings of frustration, disappointment, and uncertainty about the future. The pandemic has also led to economic hardship for many families, which has had a significant impact on young people's mental health. Young people may be worried about their own financial futures and the futures of their families. Last but not least, the pandemic has led to an increase in domestic violence cases, which can have a significant impact on the mental health of young people who are exposed to or affected by this violence.

▪ 3.2.2. Legal framework

The EU has established a number of regulations and guidelines related to mental health and self-empowerment training, including the provision of online services. These regulations aim to ensure that mental health services are safe, effective, and accessible to all citizens, while also promoting best practices and quality standards.

In Greece, mental health professionals and trainers are required to adhere to these regulations and guidelines in order to provide high-quality services to their clients. Some of the key regulations and documents that may be relevant to mental health and self-empowerment trainings in Greece include:

-The EU Mental Health Action Plan which provides guidance and recommendations for improving mental health services and promoting mental health awareness in the EU member states, including Greece.

-The EU Framework for Psychosocial Support which provides guidelines for the provision of psychosocial support services in the aftermath of emergencies and disasters, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

-The Greek Mental Health Policy which was launched by the Greek Ministry of Health in 2019, aims to improve access to mental health services and promote mental health awareness in the country.

-The Greek National Health System which provides guidelines and regulations for the provision of health services in Greece, including mental health services.

Online Services

In Greece, mental health professionals who provide online services are required to adhere to the regulations and guidelines established by the EU. This may include obtaining appropriate licenses and certifications, using secure and reliable platforms for delivering services, and ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of patient information.

Overall, while the specifics of the legal framework for online mental health training in Greece may vary, mental health professionals who provide online services are expected to adhere to high standards of quality and safety to ensure that patients receive the best possible care.

▪ 3.2.3. Methodology

The major objectives of this desk study are to describe the situation in Greece regarding educational opportunities for young people that focus on mental health and/or self-empowerment. More specifically, this desk study includes the training alternatives available and describe the current circumstances in Greece regarding youth empowerment, mental health, and mindfulness. This might involve both official and informal education, as well as conferences, training sessions, workshops, and internet deals. For this reason, the educational options existing in each country will also be researched. The legislative framework is essential for demonstrating the significance of educational opportunities for mental health and/or self-empowerment within the context of the country.

The study of how mindfulness and mental health topics and issues have been integrated into youth education is another crucial aspect of this desk research. It is being asked what kinds of courses are available and what the specific subjects covered in such courses are.

Once the research questions were defined, sources that will help in answering them were gathered such as academic journals, research reports, books, news articles, and government publications. Search engines such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and Scopus were used to find relevant sources. After gathering the sources, their relevance and credibility were evaluated in order to be relevant to the research questions. Once the sources have been gathered and evaluated, they were analysed to identify patterns and themes related to the research questions. Tools such as content analysis and thematic analysis were employed to identify key themes and patterns.

3.2.4. Educational offers

There are a variety of mental health trainings and programs available for young people in Greece. These programs aim to promote positive mental health, prevent mental health problems, and provide support and resources to young people who may be struggling with mental health issues.

School-based mental health programs

Many schools in Greece offer mental health programs that aim to promote positive mental health and prevent mental health problems among students. These programs may include educational sessions, group activities, and counseling services.

Youth mental health first aid

Mental Health First Aid is a program that teaches young people how to recognize and respond to mental health emergencies. The program is offered in many countries, including Greece, and provides participants with the skills and knowledge needed to provide support to someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

Counseling services

Counseling services are available to young people in Greece through a variety of channels, including schools, mental health clinics, and private practices. Counselors may offer individual or group therapy sessions to address a range of mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Some example of these services are Elliniko Kentro Psixologikis Iatrikis kai Psixikis Ygeias (EKPPY): EKPPY is a Greek mental health clinic that provides a range of services to children and adolescents, including counseling, psychotherapy, and medication management. The clinic has a team of licensed psychologists and psychiatrists who work with young people to address a variety of mental health concerns. Athens Child and Adolescent Guidance Center (KESAY): KESAY is a Greek government-funded organization that provides counseling and support services to children and adolescents in Athens. The

center has a team of psychologists and social workers who work with young people to address a variety of mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues.

Private practice: There are many private practices in Greece that offer counseling and psychotherapy services to young people. These practices may specialize in working with children and adolescents and may offer a variety of evidence-based treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and play therapy.

Peer support programs

There are several peer support programs available in Greece that focus on mental health. Peer support programs provide young people with opportunities to connect with others who have similar experiences or concerns. These programs may be offered through schools, community organizations, or online platforms, and can help young people build social connections and develop coping skills.

Hellenic Mental Health Youth Network: The Hellenic Mental Health Youth Network is a peer support group for young people in Greece who have experienced mental health challenges. The group provides a safe space for young people to share their experiences, connect with others who are dealing with similar issues, and learn coping skills.

Synapse: Synapse is a Greek non-profit organization that provides support and resources to people with mental health concerns. The organization offers a peer support program that connects people with trained peer supporters who have lived experience with mental health challenges. Peer supporters provide one-on-one support, as well as facilitate support groups and educational workshops.

Mental Health Greece: Mental Health Greece is an online platform that provides information and resources related to mental health in Greece. The platform offers a peer support program that connects people with trained peer supporters who can provide emotional support and share their own experiences with mental health challenges.

Klimaka Peer Support Program: Klimaka, a Greek non-profit organization, offers a peer support program for people with mental health concerns. The program connects people with trained peer supporters who have lived experience with mental health challenges. Peer supporters provide one-on-one support and facilitate support groups.

Athens Mental Health Center Peer Support Program: The Athens Mental Health Center offers a peer support program for people with mental health concerns. The program connects people with trained peer supporters who can provide emotional support, share coping strategies, and offer guidance on navigating the mental health system.

Youthnet Hellas: Youthnet Hellas is a Greek non-profit organization that provides support and resources to young people with mental health concerns. The organization offers a peer support program that connects young people with trained peer supporters who have lived experience with mental health challenges. Peer supporters provide one-on-one support and facilitate support groups.

Psychiatric Reform Programme PSYCHARGOS

The Psychiatric Reform Programme PSYCHARGOS was a major mental health reform initiative launched in Greece in 1984. The program was designed to overhaul the country's mental health system, which

at the time was heavily centralized and institution-based, with a focus on improving the quality of care and promoting community-based mental health services.

The PSYCHARGOS program was based on several key principles, including the importance of integrating mental health care with general health care, promoting the rights of people with mental health concerns, and encouraging the development of community-based mental health services. The program aimed to achieve these goals through a range of activities, including the establishment of community mental health centers, the development of new mental health legislation, and the training of mental health professionals.

The PSYCHARGOS program led to significant changes in the Greek mental health system. The program helped to shift the focus of mental health care from institutionalization to community-based care and led to the closure of many large psychiatric hospitals. Community mental health centers were established across the country, and mental health professionals received training in evidence-based practices, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and family therapy.

However, the PSYCHARGOS program was not without its challenges. The implementation of the program was hindered by a lack of funding, staffing shortages, and resistance from some mental health professionals and service users. Additionally, there were concerns about the quality of care provided at some of the community mental health centers and the adequacy of resources provided to support people with mental health concerns in the community.

3.2.5. Identifying gaps

As seen from above, there are some gaps in mental health practices and educational options for people seeking help in Greece. These gaps include:

Limited access to mental health services: There is a shortage of mental health professionals and facilities in Greece, particularly in rural areas. This can make it difficult for people to access the care they need.

Stigma surrounding mental illness: There is still significant stigma surrounding mental illness in Greece, which can make it difficult for people to seek help and for mental health professionals to provide effective care.

Limited public education and awareness campaigns: There is a lack of public education and awareness campaigns in Greece that focus on mental health and mental illness. This can contribute to a lack of understanding and awareness among the general public, which can perpetuate stigma and make it difficult for people to seek help.

Limited funding for mental health services: Mental health services in Greece are underfunded, which can make it difficult for mental health professionals to provide high-quality care and for people to access the care they need.

Limited integration of mental health into primary care: There is a need for better integration of mental health into primary care services in Greece, as many people seek help for mental health issues from primary care providers.

All in all, Greece has not yet completely grasped the severity of the pandemic's contribution to the current state of mental health. The number of young individuals experiencing mental health issues is

rapidly increasing. As a result, the government has taken some steps to ensure that those with mental problems are taken care of. Several educational programs acknowledge the negative effects the epidemic had on Greeks' mental health, particularly on vulnerable young people. Even while the issue of young people's mental health is acknowledged and there are commendable efforts to assist them, there are still certain holes that the YOUHEAL project may address and initiatives from which it might draw inspiration.

The most significant difficulty, however, is the high cost of self-empowerment training and mental health care. While psychotherapy and self-empowerment trainings are not covered by health insurance in Greece, psychiatric assistance is. Yet, there are rare circumstances in which governmental initiatives and institutions offer workshops or sessions for no charge at the municipal level. The YOUHEAL project can close this gap by providing a free online education, allowing young people without a lot of money to participate.

3.2.6. References

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. (2020). Mental Health and COVID-19 in Greece. Retrieved from https://www.med.uoa.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mental-Health-and-COVID-19-in-Greece_20200506.pdf

Kostikidou, S., Katsanou, N., Kontodimopoulos, N., & Niakas, D. (2019). Mental health services in Greece: A narrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(23), 4728. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16234728>

World Health Organization. (2020). Greece: Mental health Atlas 2020. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/atlas/profiles-2020/GRC.pdf?ua=1

World Health Organization. (2016). Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789241506021>

Greek Ministry of Health. (2019). National Policy for Mental Health. Retrieved from <https://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/health/dieythynsh-ygieinhs-dhmwn/kentro-ekpaideushs-kai-katharismoy-twn-pshyxiatrikwn-noshlwn-k-ek-twn-neurologikwn-noshlwn/nomosxedio-ygeias-dhmwn-ygieinhs-dhmwn/nomosxedio-ygeias-dhmwn-ygieinhs-dhmwn/nomosxedio-ygeias-dhmwn-ygieinhs-dhmwn-4fd27d7b-28b6-4b7f-96ed-61aa7c3e6e3c>.

Thornicroft, G., & Tansella, M. (2013). *The Mental Health Matrix: A Manual to Improve Services*. Cambridge University Press.

Sarafis, P., Tsounis, A., & Malliarou, M. (2016). Psychiatric reform in Greece. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 19, 96-97. doi: 10.1016/j.ajp.2016.03.022

Lykouras, L., & Michopoulos, I. (2018). Psychiatry in Greece. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 30(6), 188-193. doi: 10.1080/09540261.2019.1565304

Psaltopoulou, T., & Michopoulos, I. (2021). The evolution of mental health policy and services in Greece: A narrative review. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 56, 259-269. doi: 10.1007/s00127-020-01949-5

3.3. Romania

The purpose of this desk research is to identify existing mental health programs, projects, materials and all kinds of opportunities and services that young people in Romania can access and benefit of. Before this, we will explore resources to identify the post-pandemic situation in Romania, but also the effects and impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had for Romanians. We will use this information to identify similarities and gaps to the YOUHEAL project, and therefore to develop new useful learning materials, to contribute to what young people can access and use for their mental health.

3.3.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had huge impacts in Romania at all levels, whether we are talking about the socio-economic situation along with the growing unemployment rate, or the physical or mental wellbeing of the population.

The unemployment rate in Romania in 2020 was the highest in the last 3 years, since 2016. The effects of the pandemic on the socio-economic status and specifically unemployment in Romania are obvious if we compare it with the year before cases of COVID-19 started to be registered in Romania and the state of emergency was declared. According to the International Labour Office (BIM), in June 2019, the unemployment rate in Romania was of 4,8%, with a number of 393959 unemployed people, increasing to 6,9% in June 2020 (seasonally adjusted), with 560837 unemployed people. June 2020 seems to still have the highest rate in the last 3 years. After 2020, the unemployment rate started decreasing very slowly, and for December 2022 it was at 5,6%. Besides the negative impacts on the economy, many studies show the impact that unemployment has on an individuals' mental health. One meta-analysis, consisting of more than 300 studies focusing on this topic showed that overall, unemployed people experience more distress than employed people, with more negative effects on the mental health of unemployed people from countries with a weaker level of economic development, weaker unemployment protection systems and unequal income distributions, compared to other countries. We can specifically mention mixed symptoms of distress, depression, anxiety, subjective wellbeing, self-esteem, psychosomatic symptoms. Besides highlighting a correlational relationship between unemployment and distress, many studies which are longitudinal or based on natural experiments are also confirming a causal relationship between these two. Therefore, it can be affirmed that unemployment can cause distress. This decrease in mental health is also relevant for young people who finished studies and were unemployed after that. (Paul & Karsten, 2009). This can be the case of the young people who graduated or finished studies in the times of pandemic.

As unemployment is just one of the many results that the COVID-19 pandemic had, it has also taken a toll on the Romanians' mental health. Objectively, people had to isolate themselves not only from their friends and/or family and loved ones, but also from some of their daily responsibilities, hobbies and daily routines. People had to make a lot of changes in their life to protect themselves and their loved ones and to restrict themselves from one of the most important things for us as humans – socialization and closeness to others. If we're adding to this the personality, values and morality and all other differences between ourselves as humans, we can understand the different and multiple challenges that everyone faced through the pandemic.

A number of studies have been done to understand the impact that the pandemic had on the lives and mental health of the Romanian people, from which we will highlight some important and relevant findings.

Many of these studies reported that Romanians' mental health status was overall affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. One longitudinal study assessed mental health during and 6 months after the first lockdown in Romania and found that the negative mental health impact that the lockdown had didn't change (Vancea & Apostol, 2021). According to the same study, approximately 1 in 4 people experienced moderate to severe anxiety symptoms; approximately 1 in 5 experienced moderate to

severe depressive symptoms and approximately 1 in 3 experienced high or very high dissociative symptoms, with younger people likely to be two times more anxious and more than twice as depressed as older ones. Attention should also be on dissociation (which has an important percentage), as it is a defensive process, through which emotions or thoughts don't get to the consciousness or memory. The data of the study also suggests that slightly over half of the population was affected during the pandemic, regarding mental health issues, with women and young people experiencing overall more distress. Some other studies (Dumitrache et al., 2021; Silișteanu et al., 2022) also found that women faced more stress, fear and/or panic attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic than men. Regarding the youth population, most studies are focused on college student, which represents just one part of the youth community in Romania. We also found two studies from Constanța city, focusing on the COVID-19 impact differences regarding the mental health of young people in rural and urban areas. Therefore, there are some limitations in having a comprehensive understanding about the impact that the pandemic had on the mental health of young people in Romania, as we cannot generalize these results, but it is a starting point. For the youth community who was involved in some kind of educational programs in Romania in 2020, online classes were a big challenge, involving the pressure to perform academically, for some of them going back to their home where they would meet their family again, limited interaction with their peers, frustration and boredom, a significant time spent in front of screens, lack of face-to-face collaboration (Dumitrache et al., 2021). For young people from rural areas, this implied a more difficult time, due to poor infrastructure, high modernization deficit and for some, digital illiteracy issues. After October 2021, many schools and universities returned to face-to-face classes, which implied other challenges for young people, such as finding accommodation, concerns about the risk of infection, complying to sanitary rules, limited opportunities for social contact and so on (Sălceanu & Călin, 2022). These aspects along with all of the restrictions in general generated stress, boredom, frustration, fear and anxiety, feelings of isolation and loneliness, irritability, intolerance, aggression, panic (Dumitrache et al., 2021; Gavriluță et al., 2022; Silișteanu et al., 2022).

As the situation in Romania regarding mental health and the populations' perception on mental health is not great, the negative impacts of the pandemic and the general issues of mental health that Romanian people have are far to be solved, even though the social distancing and sanitary restrictions have been over for a while in Romania. According to a study from 2017, 2 out of 3 Romanians have a direct or indirect relation with mental disorders, either that they have friends or family that have been diagnosed, or they have been diagnosed themselves. Even so, 68,9% of Romanians would not agree to live with someone who has been diagnosed with a mental disorder, 45% would not accept to have a friend or coworker who has been diagnosed and almost 30% would not accept to live on the same street as someone with a mental disorder. With Romanians having few information on how to access mental health services, financial issues, stigma and many other aspects that stay between them and psychological support, we expect that the number of people who experience distress or issues regarding their mental health in Romania is way higher than the reported cases, and that the situation is far from good.

When speaking about burnout in times of COVID-19, studies that have been made on the Romanian population involve mostly medical students or medical staff, due to the sanitary crisis and high demand of health services that was caused by the high number of infections and deaths. As many medical college students have been volunteering in Romanian hospitals along with the medical staff and also turned to online education, many of them reported self-perceived burnout, low professional efficacy, emotional exhaustion and stress (Dimitriu et al., 2020; Armean et al., 2021; Silistraru et al., 2021).

So, even though the lockdowns, restrictions and sanitary requirements are not still a part of our day-to-day life in Romania, the effects and impacts that the pandemic had on Romanians' mental health' and wellbeing are still present and something that people have to live with.

3.3.2. Legal framework

EU Youth Strategy 2019 - 1027 aims to tackle the challenges that young people are facing all over Europe, through a framework of objectives, principles, measures and core areas for youth policy cooperation for all relevant stakeholders, with the main goal of involving and empowering all young people. Out of the 11 European Youth Goals, we will focus here on the 5th, which is “Mental health and wellbeing”. The goal here is to achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatization of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people. Targets:

- Encourage the development of self-awareness and less competitive mindsets by fostering appreciation for individual skills and strengths;
- Safeguard the rights to work and to study of people with mental health issues both during and after illness to ensure their ability to pursue their own ambitions;
- Develop an inclusive intersectional approach to mental health provision for all, especially marginalised groups;
- Provide all professionals working with young people as well as family and friends with quality mental health first aid training;
- Provide inclusive, respectful and well-funded treatment by incorporating high quality mental health provision across all medical institutions;
- Focus on prevention measures that ensure young people are equipped with the knowledge and the skills required for better mental wellbeing;
- Fight stigma about mental health issues by developing awareness programmes.

WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021 - 2025 comes as a response to the current mental health challenges arising from the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had. The EFAMH (European Framework for Action on Mental Health) identified three priority initiatives to be pursued:

- The creation of a mental health data platform aiming at routinely collected information on mental health systems' performance and on mental health status of the population;
- A focus on building resilience for the mental health and well-being of children and young people (includes adolescents aged 10–19 years and youth aged 15–24 years), especially following mounting evidence on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the socioemotional functioning of younger people;
- Provision of support for the mental health of older people, especially considering the devastation on lives and well-being caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on this age group.

EFAMH is providing specific goals structured in:

- Mental health services transformation;
- Integrating mental health into emergency preparedness, response and recovery;
- Mental health promotion and protection over the life course;
- Building leadership and a pan-European Coalition for Mental Health.

The Resolution of the European Parliament regarding mental health in the digital working environment (5th of July 2022) also supports the implementation of EFAMH and is providing other information and recommendations on supporting mental health and mental health services improvement, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic impact.

The legal framework of the mental health services in Romania:

- The law regarding the practice of the profession of psychologist with the right to free practice, the establishment, organization and operation of the College of Psychologists in Romania

(213/27.05.2004) is providing the legal framework of the psychological and mental health services in Romania and the professions of mental health professionals, with a focus on:

- Practicing the psychologist profession in Romania;
- The College of Psychologists of Romania;
- Financing the activities of the College of Psychologists of Romania;
- Disciplinary liability.

This document is particularly important for the mental health services in Romania, as it is providing the framework of the mental health professionals' attributions and responsibilities.

- The law regarding the protection of mental health and people with mental or psychiatric disorders in Romania (487/11.07.2002), with a focus on:
 - Providing the definitions of important terms of mental health services and people with mental disorders;
 - Promotion and defense of mental health and prevention of mental illness;
 - Mental health assessment and diagnostic procedures for mental disorders;
 - Medical and mental health care services;
 - Admission to a psychiatric unit;
 - Sanctions;
 - Financing mental health services.

The National Health Strategy (2022 - 2030) also involves a section focused on mental health, with the main goal of increasing the capacity to respond appropriately to major mental health problems. It is based on 11 specific goals to be reached.

The Resolution of Young People from Romania - a document that aims to improve the quality of life for the young people of Romania, with the following general objectives:

- Increasing the level of information among young people about the European Union;
- Increasing the budget and impact of EU youth programs;
- Creation of the framework for the participation of young people and organizations of/for youth in the taking process of decisions at the European level.

The 5th section - Mental health and wellbeing, is providing another set of objectives to be reached by the end of the year 2027:

- Updating assessment methods and increasing accessibility to vocational and psychological counselling;
- Creating collaborations between experts and the Romanian government to launch campaigns where it is discussed in the public space about mental health, developing empathy and fighting bullying, destigmatization and misinformation;
- Developing e-mental health initiatives, empowering early detection of mental disorders signs and the promotion of correct information;
- Creating risk prevention tools and processes and addressing the topics considered taboo.

3.3.3. Methodology

The main goals of this research are:

- To identify the present conditions in Romania regarding mindfulness/mental wellbeing for young people and training options for them, which can be formal, non-formal, informal and in various formats, such as workshops, seminars, training - face-to-face or online formats;

- To review an integration of mindfulness/mental health topics/issues into youth education. This research is listing different kinds of educational offers, courses, topics and explores how they are being delivered or involving Romanian people, through formal or informal methods;
- To identify the existing training materials regarding mindfulness/mental health in Romania. It explores how the materials have been developed and how they are used - which methods, what literature, materials used, ways of delivering (face-to-face/online), etc.

For exploring the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts in Romania, we searched different combinations of some key words in Google Scholar. These key words were "youth", "young people", "Romania", "mental health", "COVID-19", "COVID", "post-COVID", "stress", "burnout", "mental issues", "mental disorders".

To identify and explore educational offers, we searched different combinations of the following words: "young people", "youth", "Romania", "mental health", "self-empowerment", "self-help", "mindfulness", "project(s)", "program(s)", "training(s)". English and Romanian were both used when searching on Google. We also looked directly on official sites, such as the Romanian College of Psychologists and Romanian Psychologists Association.

We are hopeful that the results of this research will help us identify gaps for the YOUHEAL project to fill, to contribute to the accessing of mental health and self-empowerment trainings and educational offers for Romanian young people.

3.3.4. Educational offers

This chapter will explore examples of educational offers, programs and projects that have been implemented in Romania for people to access for self-help, self-empowerment and psychological support.

Programul „Din grijă pentru copii” / The “Care for children” program

This initiative came as a response to the negative impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children and families. The program includes the involvement of the government and other social partners (NGOs, private actors, institutions and local authorities) to implement measures on two main components: psychological support and children safety.

The project is focusing on some measures, which are in different stages of implementation:

- Psychological support through therapy and counselling for children with psychological or emotional issues generated by the pandemic;
- Introducing topics as psycho-emotional education, online safety, emotions management in schools;
- Training sessions of emotions management, crisis interventions and human relationships for experts;
- Training module for teachers regarding psycho-emotional competences;
- Designation of school inspectors dedicated to the management of inclusion and psycho-pedagogical support;
- Creating hearing rooms intended for child victims of crimes in each county;
- Fighting against child pornography and online child exploitation and abuse through developing an integrated computer system for intuitive analysis and sorting of images and videoclips of an abusive nature against children;
- Implementing a real time alert system mechanism for missing children;
- Developing an unique national hotline for emergencies related to children;

- Developing the online platform (dingrijapentru copii.gov.ro) with educational resources for children, parents and specialists; which will have guidelines, materials and procedures, created by specialists.

The online platform already has resources for parents, children and specialists.

This project is relevant in the context of mental health access for young people, as even though the target group is children, the definition for a child here is "a minor person between 0-18 years old".

Campania de voluntariat „Oameni pentru oameni, psihologi dedicați pentru o Românie solidară” / The volunteering campaign “People for people, dedicated psychologists for a solidary Romania”

In March 2022, the Romanian College of Psychologists started contributing to the volunteering campaigns happening in the context of the pandemic, happening all over Romania. Therefore, lists of specialists who wanted to provide free psychological support have been made for each county in Romania. The lists, which contained the specialists name, specialty(es), contact information and a program for the services, have been posted on the Romanian College of Psychologists website (copsi.ro), in a special section called „SUPPORT PSIHOLOGIC – COVID-19” / “PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT – COVID-19”.

Mentaid

Mentaid is an online platform which aims to provide information and training on mental health first aid. Starting from the idea that there are many resources in Romania focusing on physical health first aid and almost no resources for mental health, the Mentaid project wants to make mental health accessible for the community. The online platform contains several modules on psychoeducation, focused on the most common emotional disorders, to have a better understanding about them, but also more practical modules, aimed at providing emotional first aid, through exercising techniques and developing certain skills.

The Mentaid team is also organizing workshops and trainings for adolescents, adults and older people, on the topic of providing mental health first aid.

At this time, the online website contains 6 modules:

- .Therapeutic skills – learning about how to approach someone who is struggling and exercising techniques
- .Positive and negative emotions – about functional and dysfunctional emotions, how to understand the relationship between thoughts and emotions
- .Depression – this module costs 149 RON (around 30 euros) or 249 RON (around 50 euros) (depending on the variety of topics approached and quantity of information)
- .Anxiety – appearance, manifestations, maintaining, manifesting and intervention techniques
- .Recommending treatment – differentiating specialists and type of treatments and how to approach someone who needs treatment
- .First aid in mental health in different contexts – different approaches and important mental health topics for different purposes – school, work, etc.

There are also three different modules, all part of the “#supportastudent” category, focusing on career, relationships and emotionality. All three of these have prices varying from 99 to 189 RON (around 20 – 40 euros).

Some of the 6 modules are not available on the platform just yet, but the ones that are available have a structure of explanatory videos, written information and applications that can be verified.

The platform also consists of events (past and future – which if people want to be informed about, they can subscribe for news).

Proiectul „Sănătatea mintală are nevoie de empowerment” / The “Mental health needs empowerment” project

The “Mental health needs empowerment” project happened between 01.02.2021 – 30.01.2023. The aim of the project was placing people with mental health issues in the center as main actors in decisions that are being taken in this domain, through improving their self-representation skills. The project was run with the help and main involvement of mental health specialists and experts. Because every decision that is involving people has to be based on those peoples’ real needs, the objective was to build a real bridge between people with mental health issues and local and central political decision makers. In other words, the project was all about empowering people with mental health issues, to integrate them and to raise awareness of the necessity of access at social and health services, along with the inclusion in the community. The project was implemented by the Estuar Foundation, an ONG activating in the mental health area.

Estuar Foundation and online platform

The online platform of the Estuar Foundation is another online resource for people who are struggling with their wellbeing or mental health and want to ask for help. It informs people about their services (psychological, vocational, social counselling, protected housing, emotional support, empowerment through improving ones self-representation skills, art therapy workshops, sports and leisure time activities).

Besides individual services and support, mental health information, advocacy and education are available. The friendly website is presenting the following:

- Which services are available;
- How people can access the services;
- Projects that have been or will be implemented;
- A Q&A section;
- Resources – guidelines, reports, articles such as “How to face emotional stress associated with a disaster”, “Psychiatric medicine guide”, “Surviving in highschool guide” and many more.

4mind

The 4mind online platform offers psychological support for employees, through many diverse ways. For 10 RON (approx. 2 euros)/month/employee, companies can provide their employees with subscriptions, through which they can access different services. A subscription can get the employee the following services:

- 4 individual counselling sessions with a specialist;
- Intelligent assistant Serena (online), available 24/7, which the employee can access and speak about - wellbeing, a positive mind and stress managing techniques;
- Articles (online resources) and wellbeing activities and exercises;
- Webinars.

The website also lists specialists who can provide psychological support, their contact info and prices which are outside the subscription (if someone doesn’t have a subscription).

The #selfhelp section also doesn’t need a subscription, and it contains many resources and articles with specific questions, like “Why do I only choose wrong partners?”, “How do get over difficulties in the relationship with your child?”, “Stress techniques for leaders” and many more.

Proiectul „Hai să vorbim” / “Let’s talk” project

The “Let’s talk” project is aimed at improving the mental health and psychological wellbeing of preadolescents and adolescents (10-19 years old), equipping them with adaptive coping mechanisms and helping them in taking the right decisions for their future and in the process of transitioning to their future career.

The project is based on a program of weekly meetings with them, which will stimulate interaction, expressing needs and opinions, and focused on their own individual needs. Because the project wanted to reach many people, the meetings are online. Students from partner schools can also benefit of online educational modules on a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle.

The online weekly meetings consist of:

- Group sessions of counselling, coaching and personal development;
- Group sessions of vocational counselling;
- Psychoeducation workshops on different topics.

The project website also consists of some educational modules for students, on topics such as nutrition, emotional intelligence, stress management, depression, anxiety; but also for teachers, with topics like how to motivate students, how to use technology in teaching, etc.

The beneficiaries of this project can access the services for free, and online registration through a formular is needed.

Minți deschise / Open minds

This project started its implementation on 30.03.2020 and will continue until 29.03.2023. The main objectives are to raise awareness regarding the mental health of children and adolescents and to develop and improve the competencies of parents, teachers, members of the community and mental health specialists to support and provide help for children and adolescents with a high risk and/or suffering of a mental health disorder or mental health issues. It also focuses on improving the access that children and adolescents have to mental health services.

Specific activities that will be implemented are:

- A campaign of raising awareness regarding the stigmatization of mental health;
- Developing positive parenting skills;
- Developing/improving the competencies of mental health specialists;
- Developing a national study on the mental health of children and adolescents;
- Developing 8 standards for community mental health services;
- Improving the technical capacity of 6 community mental health centres.

The online website of the project also has resources for specialists (how to work with children and adolescents) and parents (family relationships and dynamics).

Depreter

This is an online platform for people looking for help or support, mental health specialists and doctors. Besides resources in the form of written articles which are free for everyone accessing it, there are a few services for these three categories, some of them being for free, and some which need to be paid for. People looking for support can access for free information about depression, burnout and treatment and psychoeducational modules on depression, burnout and anxiety and can also get free initial diagnostic evaluation. For an advanced assessment done by a specialized person, complete standard or personalized treatment, monitorization and assessment or therapy sessions with a

specialist, anyone who wants to access them has to pay. Specialists in mental health also can benefit from more general information or content for free and have to pay to be able to have access to assessment and develop personalized treatment.

The Depreter platform is mostly focused on depression and burnout, and not the general topic of mental health or a wider approach. Assessment, treatment development and therapy sessions are all happening online.

Paxonline

Paxonline is an online platform which is built and structured the same as Depreter. It is similar in the target groups that it focuses on (people asking for help/support, mental health specialists and doctors), the same services and resources that can be for free or not, the online implementation and even the team of specialists that developed it.

The only difference is that Paxonline is focused on anxiety and stress, while Depreter places its focus on depression and burnout.

Mental health for Romania

Mental health for Romania is an organization aiming to raise awareness and improve the access of the community to mental health services.

The organization has an online website, which provides people with many educational resources, on topics like "How to face stressful and uncertainty situations?"; "How to use breathing in managing anxiety"; "Perfectionism or fear of failure", and many more.

Besides different articles, the platform also contains an online magazine (journal), which aims to raise awareness on mental health and be a space of discussion for people who experience mental health challenges or disorders, people who used to experience them, and people who never experienced them. The magazines are mostly full of personal stories about experiences of people who struggled with mental health.

The website has a very friendly graphic and provides a map of specialized mental health professionals based on the counties and cities where they can be found, some of them offering free services or applying discounts.

Other services from the platform are:

- Guidelines on how to benefit of free mental help health;
- Hotlines;
- A Discord community;
- Facebook support groups;
- A podcast section, focused on mental health.

They have also started and are currently still implementing a project on mental health education in schools. Teachers can apply using an online formular to facilitate workshops on mental health in schools.

CCOC - Centrul de Consiliere și Orientare în Carieră / Counselling and Career Guidance Centre

In Romania, many universities from different counties have Counselling and Career Guidance Centers. These centres offer vocational and career guidance counselling, but are also providing help for people who are struggling (on a non-clinical level) and go through times in which they need guidance or support. Counselling can also happen along with psychological testing.

For the students of the universities that have these centres, all of the services are free of charge.

Besides individual counselling for career or personal development, counselling and career guidance centres might also organize various workshops or webinars.

This list might not be exhaustive, as we cannot make sure that we did not miss any program or project, online or offline, but it is useful to identify the services and types of support that Romanian people can access for mental health education, support or self-empowerment.

Mindfulness Romania

Mindfulness Romania is an online website, which is a useful tool for people interested in practicing or learning about mindfulness and wellbeing. First, it provides its visitors with resources on how to practice mindfulness, written by specialized people. Besides the free resources on how someone can practice mindfulness by themselves, there are some other resources on information about mindfulness and wellbeing.

It also has a special section about mindfulness programs, where we can find the programs/trainings available. Right now, the section shows three available programs:

- .Master your mind - a 4 weeks program, focused on building a resilient and positive state of mind, while letting go of stress, anxiety and "negative" emotions. The program is structured in 4 online sessions, at the price of 600 RON (around 122 euros);
- .Online meditation courses - this subsection consists of many offers for self-paced programs (where people can access the platform and materials by themselves) or online courses guided by a trainer - both of them for a price, starting with 150 (around 30 euros) RON, and reaching 800 RON (around 162 euros). These can vary from mindfulness individual sessions, to mindfulness techniques routines or other types of techniques for self-love, relaxation or inner calm;
- .Individual mindfulness sessions.

Another course that the website provides is an MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) course, online, for the price of 1550 RON (around 315 euros), structured in 8 weeks, starting with the 6th of April.

ReConnect, Retreat, described as a journey that can help with finding balance and connection. It is based on a 5 days program, face-to-face, in a place in nature from Romania. It focuses on being present, paying attention to body and senses, mental clarity, emotions and resilience and cultivating happiness and kindness. People can take part in this for the price of 2200 RON (approx. 447 euros).

EQUI-LIBRE

EQUI-LIBRE is another online website focused on mindfulness and wellbeing, that is offering free resources and mindfulness based programs and trainings. The programs that people can access are:

- MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) - 8 weeks training course, online, starting with the 3rd of May and face-to-face, starting with the 18th of October. It focuses on stress management through mindfulness practice;
- 1-Day Silence Retreat - a mindfulness practice which will be held online (for 290 RON - 59 euros) and face-to-face (for 420 RON - 85 euros);
- Mindful weekend in nature - in the Romanian mountains, a weekend full of mindfulness practices, for 920 RON (187 euros), with the participant also having the responsibility to pay for accommodation and food;
- "Here and now" 4 days retreat - 4 days in nature of mindfulness and yoga practice for mind clarity and peace, wisdom and compassion;

-
- Individual mindfulness sessions with one of the specialists;
 - Mindful leader - 72 hours of trainings, distributed in one year, for mindfulness practice and integrating mindfulness in ones' life, described as an opportunity for the people who want to be "the masters of their own lives"
 - Inner compass - a program which aims to offer MBSR training to teachers (with a 65% discount - for the price of 486 RON - 99 euros), with the goal that MBSR can be used in education.

3.3.5. Identifying gaps

As mental health was already a challenge in Romania before the COVID-19 pandemic, it now represents an even bigger challenge, due to the impacts that the pandemic had. The Romanian government focused and implemented a lot of safety measures for physical health, but little attention was given to the mental health of Romanian people. However, non-governmental organizations, psychology associations, institutions, students and private actors stepped in and had a positive impact - resources and informative campaigns, specialists who volunteered and courses and programs started to appear as a response to the impact that the pandemic might have on mental health. Even though some solutions started to appear, accessing some of them was still a challenge for some people, whether it was for financial reasons, stigmatization, fear, insufficient or ineffective promotion or other reasons. Reaching out for help has always been challenging for most people, so of course it would have been a challenge in crisis situations like the pandemic too.

A large number of studies and researches show that people are facing a lot of challenges regarding mental health now, they have faced them during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns and even before that. Therefore, developing and implementing useful and well documented programs, resources, trainings or any kind of help is crucial for the wellbeing of people.

In Romania, some steps have been made towards helping by the official institutions, like the Romanian College of Psychologists, who had mental health professionals volunteer for individual sessions as a response to the pandemic situation and is also now implementing the "Care for Children" program for children and adolescents until 18 years old. However, there is no information regarding the availability of free online therapy or psychological support sessions now, after the lockdown and restrictions ended in Romania. Online websites and platforms were developed, a lot of them based on self-help and self-empowerment. However, most of the free self-help that anyone can get off of these are the free resources that can be read. For other things, like professional help and meetings with specialists, the prices are quite high, especially for Romanian people, and it is important not to let out of sight the fact that most people who face mental health challenges are not the ones with a great economic situation, especially young people.

On the other hand, although there are some programs that are free for their beneficiaries, most people are not well informed about them and don't really know how to access them. Promotion and popularity is an issue not only for the long-term programs or projects, but also for other platforms, trainings or websites. And even if people get to find and access them, the lack of information that people have on mental health doesn't make it easy for them to find and access what is really useful to them. There are also a lot of people who are engaging in a therapy or psychological support journey in one kind of therapy and discover (after some time and expenses) that the kind of therapy or help or professional that they are accessing is not suited for them. Therefore, helping people to improve their mental health requires also educating them on it and on what they can access.

Another problem that people (especially young people) are facing due to the pandemic restrictions is the time spent online. Besides the fact that most online trainings or courses on self-help or self-empowerment are not free, they also need 100% online connection, which most people are already tired of. Online trainings are also an issue for people with fewer opportunities or from rural areas which

are not so developed, where online connection is still a challenge, as it was for education in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ones which are not online, for example some of them which we found to be mindfulness trainings in nature, are very expensive, but also pretty far for some people, which can also be a challenge.

Most of the platforms and programs are also very general and don't seem tailored to the needs of the people. If we're searching for mindfulness or mental health articles on google, we can find a lot of information (not necessarily correct and well documented), but any program or training is as effective as it is based on the needs of the people, meanwhile most free resources that are available online in Romania are very general. It might not give people the opportunity to feel understood and helped. Maybe a way through which we can help people more is to have a timeline, as actual help comes after understanding what kind of help they need. Someone who needs psychological help on a clinical level will not benefit from real help only from reading some resources, just as mindfulness is not effective for everyone, as people have different needs, personality and backgrounds. Another issue with the free resources that people can find on the internet is that a lot of people are not prepared and equipped to discriminate between good and well documented and bad information, which is again a matter of education. Therefore, for any well-made program or training, it is important to have professionals to develop and deliver evidence-based information.

Although the quantity of information, resources, trainings and platforms is not low, there are many challenges in accessing or benefitting them. These challenges involve education, financial resources, time spent online or difficulty to get to certain places, the generality of the information and the challenges in verifying if the information is correct or not and the matter of people not being informed about the services and resources that they can access and where they can access them. The stigma that is in Romania regarding asking for psychological help or facing mental health challenges is also not helping. Besides the fact that people might be ashamed or scared to ask for help, they might also not be able to recognize and accept that they need help, due to the mental health stigma, which can make someone internalize (or externalize) everything, without being aware of their inner state. Also, it is important for the way that these are delivered to be in an easily-understandable way, and not in a professional, "difficult" language, that can make people even more confused.

The YOUHEAL project might be able to fill some gaps that exist in the Romanian society regarding mental health services and trainings, mindfulness and self-help and self-empowering programs.

3.3.6. References:

[National Statistics Institute of Romania - Unemployment rates of International Labour Office;](#)

Armean, K. A., Popescu, C. A., Armean, S. M., Covaliu, B. F., Armean, P., & Buzoianu, A. D. (2021). Perceived Stress, Burnout and Anxiety and Fear Related To Covid-19 in Romanian Medical Students– Experience from the State of Emergency in Romania. *Acta Medica Transilvanica*, 26(2), 5-10;

Dimitriu, M. C., Pantea-Stoian, A., Smaranda, A. C., Nica, A. A., Carap, A. C., Constantin, V. D., ... & Socea, B. (2020). Burnout syndrome in Romanian medical residents in time of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Medical hypotheses*, 144, 109972;

Dumitrache, L., Stănculescu, E., Nae, M., Dumbrăveanu, D., Simion, G., Talos, A. M., & Mareci, A. (2021). Post-lockdown effects on students' mental health in Romania: Perceived stress, missing daily

social interactions, and boredom proneness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8599;

Gavriliuță, C., Dalban, C. M., & Ioan, B. G. (2022). Educational, emotional, and social impact of the emergency state of COVID-19 on Romanian university students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 3990;

Paul, K. I., & Moser, K. (2009). Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational behavior*, 74(3), 264-282;

Salceanu, C., & Calin, M. F. (2022). Emotional Distress, Attitudes and Beliefs of Youth in Pandemic Context. The Case of Constanta County. *Technium Soc. Sci. J.*, 28, 451;

Silistraru, I., Ciureanu, A. I., Ciubara, A., & Olariu, O. (2021). Prevalence of burnout in medical students in Romania during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (preliminary data). *Archiv Euromedica*, 11(5), 12-15;

Silișteanu, S. C., Totan, M., Antonescu, O. R., Duică, L., Antonescu, E., & Silișteanu, A. E. (2022). The impact of CoViD-19 on behavior and physical and mental health of Romanian college students. *Medicina*, 58(2), 246;

Vancea, F., & Apostol, M. Ș. (2021). Changes in mental health during the COVID-19 crisis in Romania: A repeated cross-section study based on the measurement of subjective perceptions and experiences. *Science Progress*, 104(2), 00368504211025873;

[Studiu InoMed-IMAS despre percepția românilor asupra bolilor mintale;](#)

[EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027;](#)

[WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021–2025;](#)

[LEGE \(A\) 213 27/05/2004 - Portal Legislativ;](#)

[LEGE 487 11/07/2002 - Portal Legislativ;](#)

[STRATEGIA NAȚIONALĂ DE SĂNĂTATE 2022 – 2030;](#)

[Rezoluția Tinerilor 2020-2027: Viitorul începe astăzi;](#)

[Despre – „Din grijă pentru copii” – Program Național de Suport destinat copiilor în contextul pandemiei de COVID-19;](#)

[Romanian College of Psychologists - #psychological support for COVID-19;](#)

[MentAid;](#)

[Fundatia Estuar;](#)

[Mental health needs empowerment;](#)

[4Mind;](#)

[Centrul Armonia - Dezvoltare personală, consiliere & psihoterapie;](#)

[Minti Deschise;](#)

[DEPRETER;](#)

[Paxonline;](#)

[Consiliere – CCOC - Educație;](#)

[Mental Health for Romania;](#)

[Mindfulness Romania;](#)

[EQUI-LIBRE.](#)

3.4. Serbia

This research aims to gain information about existing learning materials, training and offers concerning self-empowerment and mental health in Serbia. Through the research, we will identify similarities to the YOUHEAL project and gaps and develop learning materials according to the gathered information.

- **3.4.1 Introduction**

The epidemiological crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic impacted all spheres of social life, leaving numerous sociodemographic, economic, health, political, psychological and other consequences. Specific consequences in some of the mentioned areas can be seen through changes in unemployment rates in the general population of Serbia. Data collected from reports of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia¹² (on a sample of 15-year-olds and up) shows a continual increase in unemployment

¹²[Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia – Labour market](#)

rates from the third quarter of 2020 (9,8%) until the first quarter of 2021 (12,8%), after this until the end of 2022, a slight improvement is noticed. Research showed mild/moderate depressiveness is on the rise, but not severe depressiveness – very intensive symptoms are stable in the population (0.4%)¹³. On the other hand, symptoms of "reactive" mental health issues during the pandemic are more present among the Serbian population. As a particular social category, young people were significantly affected during the pandemic. Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia from 2023 to 2030¹⁴ states that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, adverse effects among young people were primarily reflected in education, employment, health, especially mental health and activism. The National Youth Council researched the pandemic's impact on youth in different areas. In employment, the results showed that the largest number of young people worked as before the state of emergency (53.7%), followed by those who occasionally worked (24.7%). The state of emergency caused dismissal and return to work for 9.1% of young people, and 12.6% of young people were permanently fired. The same research suggests that young people felt: concern for family and friends (57,5% of young people), uncertainty (51,5%), helplessness (48,5%), concern for the future (45,7%), anxiety (43,1%), anger (36%), fear (34,5%), depression (33,9%), and panic attacks (21,5%)¹⁵.

As seen from conducted data, employment is slowly recovering from pandemics, but it is still affected by other socio-economic issues present in a global society. However, the changes in the state of mental health among the population of Serbia are different. The impact of pandemics on mental health in Serbia is visible, emphasising that the consequences of the pandemic might have had a more significant impact than the pandemic itself.

3.4.2. Legal framework

The EU Youth Strategy 2019 - 2027¹⁶ aims to encourage social and civic engagement, as well as participation in the democratic life of all young people, in accordance with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. The fifth European Youth Goal aims to achieve better mental well-being and end the stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting the social inclusion of all young people. Targets within this goal:

- Encourage the development of self-awareness and less competitive mindsets by fostering an appreciation for individual skills and strengths.
- Safeguard the rights to work and study people with mental health issues during and after illness to ensure their ability to pursue their ambitions.
- Develop an inclusive, intersectional approach to mental health provision for all, especially marginalised groups.

¹³[Marić, N. P., Knežević, G., Terzić-Šupić, Z., Mihić, L., Pejović-Milovačević, M., Lazarević, L., Vuković, O., Tošković, O., & Todorović, J. \(2021\). The Research Team of the cov2soul.rs Project, Reports the results on depressiveness in Serbia on the Occasion of the World Mental Health Day](#)

¹⁴[Government of the Republic of Serbia - Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030](#)

¹⁵[Stojanović, B., Vukov, T. \(2020\). Život mladih u Srbiji: Uticaj pandemije KOVID-19. Beograd: Misija OEBS-a u Srbiji, Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije.](#)

¹⁶[EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)

-
- Provide all professionals working with young people, family, and friends with quality mental health first aid training.
 - Provide inclusive, respectful and well-funded treatment by incorporating high-quality mental health provisions across all medical institutions.
 - Focus on prevention measures that ensure young people have the knowledge and the skills required for better mental well-being.
 - Fight stigma about mental health issues by developing awareness programmes.

The Programme on Mental Health Protection in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2019 to 2026 (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 84/19)¹⁷ is a harmonised system of measures, conditions and instruments of public policy that should be implemented to protect mental health by preventing mental disorders, improving mental health, analysis and diagnosis of mental condition, treatment and rehabilitation of persons with mental disorders, as well as suspicions of the existence of mental disorders while respecting human rights and strengthening the dignity of persons with mental disorders and the application of the least restrictive forms of treatment. Young people (15–24 years old) are recognised as one of the most vulnerable populations, and it is envisaged that the work on the prevention of mental disorders and the improvement of mental health will be primarily focused on young people and that the development of a network of specific services will be supported. Adoption of the Mental Health Protection Programme in the Republic of Serbia from 2019 to 2026, with an action plan, states as a general goal: Improved mental health care system for prevention, treatment and provision of comprehensive, integrated services in accordance with the best international practice.

Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia from 2023 to 2030¹⁸ defines a specific goal- Create conditions for a healthy and safe environment and social well-being of young people. This goal is defined using the definition of The World Health Organisation, which has defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease or disability. To achieve this goal, five measures are planned:

Measure 5.1 Support to programmes that contribute to the development of healthy lifestyles and mental health of young people;

Measure 5.2 Support to existing and new youth safety improvement programmes;

Measure 5.3 Support to the development of youth and youth programmes in the field of environmental protection;

Measure 5.4 Support to youth housing independence;

Measure 5.5 Support programmes that contribute to the improvement of social inclusion of young people.

¹⁷[Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia \(2019\), the National Programme for Mental Health Protection 2019-2026, Belgrade: Official Gazette, no. 84/19.](#)

¹⁸[Government of the Republic of Serbia - Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030](#)

3.4.3. Methodology

The main goal of this desk research is to describe the situation in Serbia concerning educational offers concerning mental health and/or self-empowerment for young people. This desk research has included the following:

- Identifying the present conditions in Serbia related to mindfulness/mental well-being for young people and training options for them (formal, non-formal, informal – seminars, workshops, training, online formats, etc.
- Reviewing an integration of mindfulness/mental health topics/issues into youth education (courses, topics, educational offers), are there any formal/informal learning courses?
- Identifying the existing training materials regarding mindfulness/mental health in Serbia (which didactical methods are used for teaching, what literature, how the training is carried out, e.g., face-to-face, e-trainings, what materials are used, e.g. ppt, books, ...)

The desk research is being carried out online in January and February of 2023. To find the results, the keywords: “mental health”, “youth”, "mindfulness", "mental health", "self-empowerment", "workshops", "training", “courses”, and "Serbia" are put into the search engine Google in different combinations and with the use of synonyms. The search is carried out in English as well as in Serbian. The resources were found, read and then again referenced in the process of writing this research. To verify the quality of the results, trusted sources like, for example, governmental websites or news outlets were preferred.

The results of this desk research will help us identify gaps that the YOUHEAL project can fill and give us insight into helpful tools/materials that can be used for the YOUHEAL online course.

3.4.4. Educational offers

This chapter will list examples of offers concerning mindfulness/self-empowerment/mental health in the Republic of Serbia.

Phone lines for psycho-social support during Covid-19

To reduce the rate of anxiety and depression in conditions of social isolation and stigmatisation in connection with the COVID-19 virus, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia has opened national telephone lines to provide psychosocial support to all citizens who need it. Still active and open lines for psychosocial assistance for citizens are: as well as separate telephone numbers of the Institute of Mental Health: for young people and parents of children up to 18 years old and people over 18 years old. Through the above phone numbers, professionals are contributing to the preservation of mental health in the conditions of the epidemic (and after) and by providing counselling to all interested parties (persons in isolation and quarantine, families of infected persons,

health workers and associates) and providing support as well as adequate information on ways to overcome stress and anxiety—state of emergency.

Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day is the most important annual global campaign to raise awareness about the importance of mental health. It is celebrated globally and in almost all countries through local, regional and national events and programs. In Serbia, in 2022, it was celebrated under the slogan "Make mental health and well-being a priority for everyone" and allowed everyone to act to protect and improve mental health. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that one in eight people lived with a mental disorder. The pandemic has created a global mental health crisis, with estimates showing an increase of more than 25% in anxiety and depressive disorders during the first year of the pandemic. At the same time, the availability of mental health services was threatened. City Institute for Public Health of Belgrade recognised this information and has organised, among other activities, an online webinar on the topic: "Emotions - how to recognise and manage them?". This webinar included information about the development of emotions in children, emotional regulation in children and adolescents, and adults, but also in personality disorders, how to distinguish emotions, how to understand mental health in a social context, etc.

Together for Public Health

In the course of 2022, the Institute for Public Health of Vojvodina implemented the project "Together for Public Health" for the 4th time, supported by funds from the City Health Administration of the City of Novi Sad, which aims to modernise communication channels in health education for the population, through the creation of new five episodes of a video podcast, increasing the accessibility of health and educational resources published by the Institute for Public Health of Vojvodina in electronic form and improving the content of social networks of the Institute for Public Health of Vojvodina. Among activities regarding different aspects of health, the Mental Health Festival was organised.

Mental Health Festival

Events (workshops, interactive lectures, panels and round tables, award contests, film screenings with discussion, exhibitions, interactive performances – online and offline) during the festival aimed to educate and encourage participants to create resources in the community and society, which can contribute to the protection and improvement of mental health and well-being. The festival's slogan is "Culture and mental health", with the intention of the Institute for Public Health of Vojvodina and partner organisations to raise awareness of the connection between culture, mental health, the well-being of individuals and the community in which they live.

Together towards improving mental health in the community

In October 2022, Psychological Innovation Network started implementing a project to create conditions for introducing sustainable free mental health and psychosocial support services in Užice, Prijepolje and Kosjerić. The goals of the project are aimed at continuing the provision of psychosocial support services in communities through the implementation of Psychosocial Support Programs in these three local communities, strengthening their capacities for a more systematic approach to planning and implementing mental health and psychosocial support services, as well as defining proposals for improving the normative framework for providing counselling and therapy services. The project is being implemented until the end of March 2023 within the support program "Dialogue of Change", coordinated by the Belgrade Open School, and with the financial support of the European Union.

A constellation of support

As a response to COVID-19's effects on mental health and to reduce to empower young people and provide them with assistance in nurturing their mental health, OPENS launched the "CONSTELLATION OF SUPPORT" campaign in cooperation with the following organisations: SOS Women's Center; Iz kruga VOJVODINA - Novi Sad Humanitarian Center; Subsidiary for the Južnobački district of the Society of Psychologists of Serbia and the Institute for Public Health of Vojvodina; Group "COME OUT"; Center for providing emotional support to people in crisis and suicide prevention "Srce"; JAZAS youth Novi Sad; Patrija Citizens' Association; EDIT center, and The Red Line Association. Some of the issues this campaign addressed: balancing school and family obligations in the changed daily functioning of young people, dealing with feelings of loss of any kind, providing support in a situation of isolation, connecting different organisations that deal with the topic of mental health to improve it in changed circumstances. Many organisations have found a way to react and continue their work by adapting to the circumstances and specifics of the situation caused by the pandemic. Thus, organisations dealing with psychosocial support continued their work, now adapted to the needs of citizens, among whom are often young people.

Healing networks: Comprehensive approach in mental health protection for children and youth from refugee and local population

With the support of the International Organisation for Migration, in the period from November 2022 to September 2023, Psychological Innovation Network is implementing the project focused on the provision of comprehensive mental health support to refugee and local children and youth, including specialised psychological services, psychoeducational Program for children and youth, and peer-to-peer activities. Moreover, project activities include capacity building of service providers, focusing on guardians, social workers, and educators, and research activities to ensure reliable data for creating evidence-based practice. The project activities aim to reduce psychological distress, rebuild coping mechanisms and resilience, and improve the well-being of refugee and local children and youth through a comprehensive mental health protection approach and enhancement of intercultural sensitivity.

Together towards improving mental health in the community

According to Psychological Association Network's research on mental health in Serbia, slightly more than a third of the population copes with psychological problems, while individual counselling services and services for young people are recognised as the most needed. To respond to recognised needs, Psychological Association Network is actively working to improve local services to protect mental health. More specifically, until the end of March, free psychosocial support programs for young people and adults will be available in Užice, Prijepolje and Kosjerić. PIN - Psychosocial Innovation Network implements the project "Together towards the improvement of mental health in the community" with the financial support of the European Union.

Initiative - application against depression

A team of ten psychotherapists from Niš designed an application to help users overcome depression, anxiety, fears, obsessive-compulsive, panic, and other disorders. It is assumed to be ready next year and will contain breathing exercises, quizzes, and a diary. It will function with the help of artificial intelligence as if the user were corresponding with a therapist. The application is very complex, has been worked on for over a year, and must undergo scientific research to prove it works. Developers, designers, and lawyers are helping them in the process, and the team will also need translators. Users will be able to communicate with it as a therapist and have a thinking part, i.e., cognitive therapy and techniques. It should work by offering a list of disorders when the user installs it, so everyone will be

able to choose a specific one, and clinical tests are also available to determine the diagnosis. Each category will have techniques from the most basic education, where the disorder is taught, and where the text is to be read. The following techniques are arranged as a person usually receives them in psychotherapy. It starts with the most accessible techniques, breathing, and relaxation exercises learned, then they go more complex, where you work with thoughts.

However, the application cannot be a substitute for classical psychotherapy, although based on people's experience, schemes will be recognised by which it will be further developed.

Let's support each other

This project was supported by the Swiss Government project "Together for an active civil society - ACT", implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and Civic Initiatives. In cooperation with organisations dealing with mental health, the leaders of this project intended to shed light on a topic that is not talked about enough in public. This project aimed to end the stigmatisation and isolation of people with mental health problems and provide them with recovery support. Among many activities, specific full-day workshops for young people were held in collaboration with the Youth Council of Serbia. The goal of this workshop was to work using a specially tailored methodology to open up the topic of the mental health of young people in local communities and to devise actions that can be taken to continue working on it.

"Talk to me" - a project for improving and protecting young people's mental health

The new Youth Project of JAZAS and the Office for Youth, under the auspices of the City of Kragujevac, began with the "Talk to me" panel intended for high school students and college students in the Student Cultural Center. The project aims to improve and protect young people's mental health by establishing a support system in crises and reducing prejudices, stereotypes and stigmatisation of people who need help. After the project's official opening with a panel discussion, the activities continued with more panels that were moved to locations appropriate for young people. All the young people had the opportunity to sign via email for individual consultations with a mental health professional from the project's team.

Everything is OK

At the end of 2021, an internet platform called "Everything is OK" was launched, supported by UNICEF in Serbia in cooperation with EYC OPENS, NALED, and experts from Serbia's Institute of Mental Health. The platform's primary goal is to provide young people with relevant and accurate information about mental health and how to access existing services and online counselling. The platform is also a valuable source of information for parents, teachers, social workers, and everyone who supports young people.

3.4.5. Identifying gaps

As seen from the research and educational offers listed above, Serbia has partially recognised the needs of its citizens for mental help support and empowerment. In times of crisis, state of emergency, and afterward, Serbia's institutions were mainly focused on providing immediate support regarding controlling the spread of the virus and the physical health of its citizens.

Looking at the educational offers listed above, we can see that most of them are provided by non-governmental subjects. Summing them with educational offers by the state, we can say that there are not enough of them in the mental health field.

Considering the presented effects on mental health produced during covid-19, it's essential to provide the necessary support to everyone. This is not achieved if the state doesn't offer its citizens comprehensive mental health system support, which was the situation with Serbia. The above-listed educational offers by non-governmental subjects worked on finding resources and developing programs, projects, and activities to support mental health, empowerment, and awareness of different groups of people, including young people. Even though these efforts were positive, it's essential to notice that they were not available to all the young people of Serbia. These educational offers were mainly limited to cities and places where these non-governmental subjects worked, which led to leaving behind young people living in places without access to this type of support.

Participating in workshops, like the self-empowerment workshops, projects, programs, etc., provided by non-governmental subjects is often a long-lasting process that can be an obstacle for working people (especially young people who work and study simultaneously). Adding to this, there is again the already mentioned problem with location - educational offers and workshops are in the cities and therefore not easily accessible for people in the countryside. Again, the online-learning materials are helpful since the courses can be taken anywhere and on their own time. Mainly when the individual subtopics are divided into short lessons. The online nature of the YOUHEAL offer also helps people not take up help for fear of stigmatisation. Going somewhere and talking in person is a bigger step than using online learning materials.

Besides these issues, there is the issue of money and the cost of mental health support, empowerment workshops, and seminars. Even though psychologists' and psychiatrists' help is covered by health insurance in Serbia, distrust and stigma exist among young people. An hour of psycho-therapy costs between 20-30 euros; this price is considered high in Serbia and an obstacle for most people. Especially for our target group – young people between 18 and 26 - money is often an issue. The YOUHEAL project can fill this gap by offering a free online course, and young people with different financial backgrounds can partake.

Researching educational offers showed that the topic of mindfulness is one of the gaps in Serbia that needs and can be filled by the YOUHEAL project. The topic of mindfulness is not covered enough, and workshops that are sometimes covered are usually too expensive and not accessible to our target group. The YOUHEAL project can fill a significant gap by providing resources for this topic to young people and having a role in prevention.

To conclude, gaps that can be filled with YOUHEAL project are ones regarding:

- too few options in the field of mental health, empowerment, and mindfulness
- the inaccessibility of location of educational offers
- the high costs and money of educational offers in the field of mental health, empowerment, and mindfulness
- fear of stigmatisation which is usually connected when using services provided by mental health professionals
- awareness of the importance of mental health and lowering stigma around it, as mentioned before
- continuously available mental health support according to each individual's needs and wants

3.4.6. References

[Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia – Labour market](#)

[Marić, N. P., Knežević, G., Terzić-Šupić, Z., Mihić, L., Pejović-Milovačević, M., Lazarević, L., Vuković, O., Tošković, O., & Todorović, J. \(2021\). The Research Team of the cov2soul.rs Project, Reports the results on depressiveness in Serbia on the Occasion of the World Mental Health Day](#)

[Government of the Republic of Serbia - Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030](#)

[Stojanović, B., Vukov, T. \(2020\). Život mladih u Srbiji: Uticaj pandemije KOVID-19. Beograd: Misija OEBS-a u Srbiji, Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije.](#)

[EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)

[Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia \(2019\), the National Programme for Mental Health Protection 2019-2026, Belgrade: Official Gazette, no. 84/19.](#)

[Government of the Republic of Serbia - Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030](#)

3.5. Slovenia

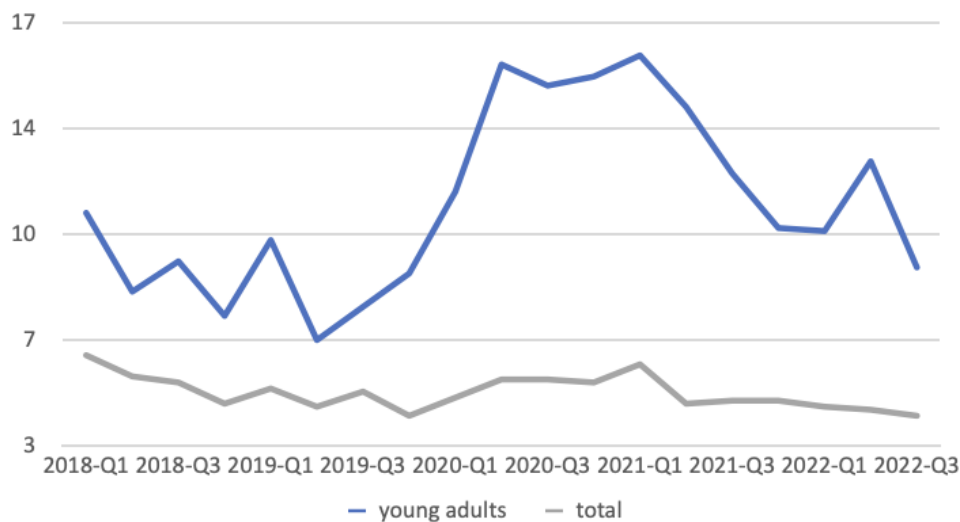
This desk research serves the purpose to gain information about existing learning materials, pieces of training and offers concerning the topic of self-empowerment and mental health in Slovenia. Through the research, we will identify similarities to the YOUHEAL project as well as gaps and develop learning materials according to the gathered information.

▪ 3.5.1. Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, the unemployment rate among young adults in Slovenia surged. Figure 1 shows two peaks when the youth unemployment rate rose to almost 16%. This is worrying from the perspective of mental health since unemployment has a detrimental effect on mental well-being and the mental scars from this experience can last years after starting a new job (Eberl, 2022). Unemployment causes stress, but there can also arise other negative consequences for people's mental health, including depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Wilson & Finch, 2021).

However, the relationship between mental health and unemployment is not merely one-sided. Good mental health is a key influence on employability, finding a job, and remaining in that job (Wilson & Finch, 2021). We can also discern from figure 1 that unemployment is not distributed evenly across society and that the covid epidemic hasn't impacted all age groups the same. In the second quarter of 2020 when policy measures to help reduce the COVID-19 pandemic started, the unemployment rate in the total active labor force increased by 1,2 percentage points from the previous quarter, while in the age group 15-24 it increased by 5 percentage points.

Figure 1: The unemployment rate in Slovenia



Young adults mean people aged between 15 and 24.

(Eurostat, 2023).

Kavčič et al. (2021) assessed mental health among people in Slovenia five days after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that women, younger, and less educated participants had higher odds for less favorable psychological functioning during the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, a study by Benatov et al. (2022) found that having children was a risk factor for coronavirus-related PTSD and high stress. Being a student was a predictor of depression and suicidal ideation. A younger age (20–29 years) predicted coronavirus-related PTSD risk, whereas the female gender predicted high stress. In Slovenia, the groups that are most prone to mental health problems were single individuals, students, and parents in young adulthood. In Slovenia Benatov et al. (2022) detected insufficient physical activity among respondents in the survey in Slovenia because of the COVID-19 epidemic and containment measures.

Benatov et al. (2022) assessed the mental health of people, including those from Slovenia, two times. An important finding was that the mental health indices improved over time or remained stable.

▪ 3.5.2. Legal framework

Based on the available official website and relevant data on the topic (gov.si Portal, and www.nijz.si), mental health is one of the basic pillars of general health and well-being for every individual and their loved ones. In Slovenia, the field of mental health is regulated by Act on Mental Health¹⁹. This law determines the system of medical and social welfare care in the field of mental health, the carriers or carriers of this activity, and the rights of a person during treatment. The acceptance of the Act on Psychotherapy is foreseen for 2023/2024. The area of in-person and online training, coaching, and other techniques and methods on soft skills, mindfulness, stress release, and such is not legally regulated.

The main strategic framework document in the area of mental health is a Resolution on the National Mental Health Program 2018-2028 (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, and National Institute for Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia - NIJZ, 2018). The national program contains the strategy for the development of mental health protection, an action plan for the protection of mental

¹⁹ Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 77/08, 28. 7. 2008

health, goals, organization, development, and tasks of the contractors, a network of providers of mental health programs and services, bearers of tasks for the implementation of the national program. The innovation introduced by the MIRA Program is the establishment of Centers for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents and Centers for the Mental Health of Adults²⁰. The program focuses on 6 priority areas with measures: Priority Area 1: Community-based approach to improving mental health; Priority Area 2: Mental health promotion and the prevention and destigmatization of mental illness; Priority Area 3: Mental health network; Priority Area 4: Alcohol and mental health; Priority Area 5: Suicide prevention; Priority Area 6: Education, research, monitoring, and evaluation.

The action plan of activities in the area of mental health for 2022-2023 (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, and National Institute for Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia - NIJZ, 20122) focuses on ensuring as easy as possible access to quality resources of help in the field of mental health and envisages ways to prevent mental disorders, protect human rights, and provide holistic care for people with mental health problems. The action plan realizes the goals in the area of community approach and reduction of the stigma of mental problems, development of preventive activities, and network of mental health centers.

▪ 3.5.3. Methodology

The main goals of this desk research are to describe the situation in Slovenia concerning educational offers concerning mental health and/or self-empowerment in the context of young people. More detailed, this desk research should identify the present conditions in Slovenia related to mindfulness/mental well-being and self-empowerment for young people and list the training options that exist for them. This can include formal and non-formal education as well as seminars, workshops, training, or online offers. So, it will be important to see what different kinds of offers there are. The legal framework is also important to show the national context and importance of educational offers concerning mental health and/or self-empowerment.

Another important point in this desk research is the review of the integration of mindfulness/mental health topics/issues into youth education. The question of what kind of courses are offered and what the concrete topics of those courses are is being followed.

The existing training materials regarding mindfulness/mental health in Slovenia will be identified. This also includes the didactical methods that are used for teaching and which literature the training is based on. It will be also interesting to see in what way the training is carried out, for example, if there is face-to-face training, or online training what kind of materials are being used, like for example PowerPoint presentations, other online facilitation tools, or books. If there are curricula, the content will be analyzed.

The desk research is being carried out through thorough online research in the month of February 2023. To find the results, the keywords “mindfulness”, “mental health”, “self-empowerment”, “training”, “courses”, “youth and “Slovenia” are put into the search engine Google in different combinations, in English and Slovenian language, and with the use of synonyms. The search is carried out in English as well as in Slovenian to make sure no important information is lost. To verify the quality of the results, trusted sources like for example governmental websites, news outlets, websites and data provided by authorized relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, available

²⁰ It is planned to establish 50 centers with interdisciplinary teams of experts who will ensure accessibility of services to all residents of the area in which the center will operate.

verified research and other relevant project outcomes, expert and other stakeholders panels, and expertise are being used and preferred.

The results of this desk research will help us identify gaps that the YOUHEAL project can fill and give us insight into helpful tools/materials that can be used for the YOUHEAL online course.

3.5.4. Educational offers

This chapter will list examples of educational offers concerning mindfulness/self-empowerment/mental health in Slovenia.

National Mental Health Program MIRA

A key component of the National Mental Health Programme MIRA (MIRA Program) is its attempt to expand mental healthcare from treatment alone, to encompass activities and measures aimed at preventing mental illness. It emphasizes the importance of promoting mental health as a key aspect of health, one that fosters the well-being and prosperity of the individual, their loved ones, their immediate environment, and society as a whole. MIRA Program offers online information on mental health improvement activities and support for different periods of life; relevant to this project, it offers a program of activities for youth (until 19), and a program of activities for adults (above 19).

MIRA Program²¹ and National Institute for Public Health website²² provide among others relevant information and content on how people can help themselves, and how they can help others, with tips for:

- the improvement of mental health and well-being in adolescence: how to establish a healthy lifestyle; how to relax with techniques of relaxation; how to show and express emotions; the importance of socializing and extracurricular activities; how to establish and keep a daily routine; how to face problems, and avoid thinking traps;
- well-being; dealing with challenging issues and distress (stress, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, self-harm behavior, grieving, family violence, addictions, etc.); how to relax.

It provides also relevant links to portals and programs with additional information and services, and to experts and organizations who can provide additional help. We cover this in the following.

Youth Mental Health Program This is me

The To sem jaz/This Is Me Youth Mental Health Program²³ was established in 2001 at the National Institute of Public Health. It is aimed at strengthening the mental health and psychological resilience of young people by developing skills and competencies that support young people as they grow up and act as protection in crisis situations. It is based on the working approaches of online counseling and preventive work in schools (primary, and secondary schools).

It works as an online youth consulting service. Young people can use the portal to get relevant information by subscribing to their newsletter, asking questions, and/or getting help in the form of advice, guidance, or counseling on how to help themselves and their peers. The program is also active on social media like Instagram where youth is more frequently present.

²¹ <https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/>

²² <https://www.nijz.si>

²³ <https://www.tosemjaz.net>

National Campaign Nisi okay? Povej naprej. (You're not okay? Go ahead.)

Due to increased mental distress and disorders during the covid-19 pandemic, especially among young people, a national campaign Not okay? Go ahead²⁴ was launched. This is the first national campaign against the stigmatization of mental health in Slovenia. The main aim of the campaign is to reduce the level of mental health stigma and encourage people to seek help.

In this campaign, the central role belongs to Ambassadors. These are people who have experience or are relatives of a person with experience of mental health problems. The program is supported also by the City Municipality of Ljubljana, and volunteers. The portal offers among others relevant information, stories, and online chat if someone needs immediate help/support.

Other online portals for self-help and help on mental health

The National Institute for Public Health²⁵ offers:

- Online content on relevant topics under the categories of Mental health, Nutrition, Healthy Lifestyle, Different sorts of Addiction, etc. There is a specific category of Children, but not Youth, or Mental Health for Youth;
- Some relevant content on mental health and youth is available under Podcast²⁶, for example, an episode on How to prevent mental health issues and stigma, How to better take care of your mental health state of being;
- Some Videos²⁷ content for example on Mental health during a pandemic;
- Publication Slabemu počutju sem kos - 10 ideas on how can adolescents help themselves to feel good²⁸ that can be downloaded.

Med.Over.Net²⁹ is an online portal on the topic of health, mental health, and other areas.

NebojSe³⁰ is an online portal of the Society for Helping People with Depression and Anxiety Disorders DAM.

Online station ZivZiv.si³¹ for understanding suicide and help.

Platform Najdi.se (Find yourself)³² for the mental health of youth (primary and secondary school). The so-called Samo Iskalknik ensures that the contents of the platform are truly tailored to the individual. It first presents you with some short stories of your peers, and your task is to use the slider to indicate to what extent you can find yourself in them. Then you get information, tips, and useful links tailored to you. They offer also workshops and motivational cards. Via their Instagram account, @dusozlom youth can directly connect by direct messaging, and receive needed guidance for the next steps.

²⁴ <https://nisiokajpovejnaprej.si/>

²⁵ <https://www.nijz.si>

²⁶ <https://nijz.si/audio/>

²⁷ <https://nijz.si/videoteka/?kategorija=229>

²⁸ <https://nijz.si/publikacije/slabemu-pocutju-sem-kos-3/>

²⁹ <http://www.med.over.net>

³⁰ <https://www.nebojse.si>

³¹ <http://www.zivziv.si>

³² <https://www.najdi.se>

ZDAJ - Zdravje danes za jutri

The website of the Program ZDAJ - Zdravje danes za jutri (Now - Health today for tomorrow)³³ offers:

- Rich source of content, news, and information in the field of prevention in physical and mental health;
- Handbook What can I do to make it easier for me? is available as an online read and practice.³⁴

It's been created to help young people recognize the signs of potential distress and their reactions to distress. It helps them understand what affects their experience, well-being, and behavior. The manual offers universal skills that help make life easier. The links take young people to online content about anxiety, fear, anger, and sadness, as well as interesting audio clips. It includes audio material and guided exercises for self-help within 2 topics: I want to understand what's happening to me, I want to change my thoughts and behavior; I want to relax.

Program OMRA - With Greater Mental Health Literacy to Manage Mood Disorders

OMRA³⁵ is an acronym for a program called With Greater Mental Health Literacy to Manage Mood Disorders. The main goal of the program is to inform the population about mental health and how to deal with and manage mood disorders. By raising people's awareness of mental health and problems, it wants to overcome some challenges in the field of mood disorders, such as quick recognition of problems, finding appropriate treatment, reducing stigma, and informing about various forms of self-help. The program is intended for everyone, but especially for more vulnerable groups, such as children, adolescents, the elderly, people with mental health problems and their relatives, Roma, dropouts, and residents of diverse rural environments.

The website offers:

- information on various forms of mental health problems and disorders (stress, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, addiction, and stigma),
- records of personal stories,
- contacts of various sources of help,
- educational materials: information about free workshops on various topics in the field of mental health (mood disorders, stress, personality disorders), and e-classroom with a questionnaire and content on stigma and getting help, depression, anxiety, stress resilience, bipolar disorder, and personality disorder.

Mental health networks, Experts, and Educational programs

As part of the Mira program, a network of mental health centers has been established, in which teams of different experts work. The guiding principle of mental health centers is to ensure equal access to services and programs for all groups of people in a given area. Currently, the following works in health centers across Slovenia: 18 centers for the mental health of children and adolescents³⁶.

³³ <https://zdaj.net>

³⁴ <https://live.editiondigital.com/e/221cpgqsc/prirocnik-kaj-lahko-naredim-da-mi-bo-lazje#!page1>

³⁵ <https://www.omra.si>

³⁶ 18 centres: Brezovica, Celje, Domžale, Jesenice, Ljubljana - Center and Vič-Rudnik units, Maribor, Murska Sobota, Nova Gorica, Ormož, Piran, Posavje, Postojna, Ptuj, Ravne na Koroškem, Škofja Loka, Trbovlje, Velenje

In the field of mental health, there are various experts such as a psychiatrist, (clinical) psychologist, social worker, special pedagogue, occupational therapist and speech therapist, who are connected to each other in a professional team. These professionals work both in the field of health and social care as well as in the field of education³⁷.

In order to make knowledge of psychological first aid as accessible as possible to everyone National Institute of Public Health prepared guidelines for psychological first aid in cases of depression, panic attacks, suicidal behavior, and excessive alcohol use. Psychological first aid³⁸ is people who complete this program can provide to a person with a mental problem or distress until professional help is available or the distress is resolved.

Psychological first aid skills cover three key steps recognition – how to recognize signs and symptoms of mental distress or illness in a person; approach - how to approach a person who is in mental contact and start a conversation with them; and help - how to provide the person with adequate support and encourage them to seek professional help. Psychological First Aid Program³⁹ is a four-hour online or in-person educational program. The program runs several times per year, with a max. of 20 participants per event. Participation is free of charge for participants. Within the program can people acquire various knowledge and skills, mainly:

- knowledge of how to recognize the key signs and symptoms of mental health problems and the risk factors for their development,
- skills in how to approach, provide basic help, and support to someone experiencing mental health problems or distress, and
- knowledge of where to go for (professional) help.

Youth organizations and mental health programs and support

Youth organizations or broader organizations in the youth sector and other non-governmental organizations (can) play a very important and positive role in the mental health of young people. These are organizations that enable young people to socialize, realize their potential, offer leisure activities, etc.; many of them include in their activity the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, which can refer to certain basics, such as eating and exercise (sports), and to activities specifically oriented, e.g. in strengthening the self-esteem and well-being of young people, which we understand as part of the promotion of mental health, in which it is very important to invest.

Youth organizations organize seminars, and workshops, or share information about relevant projects, training, and blog content on mental youth. As a good practice during covid-19 pandemic, or as a response to covid-19 pandemic, we can identify that also some faculties offer/-ed additional psychological support to their students, mainly in the form of counseling. Another good practice that we can identify is for example a service provided by Association Škatljica⁴⁰, which in the last two years focused their activities mainly on the field of mental health of young people under the project

and 16 centers for the mental health of adults (Celje, Domžale, Kočevje, Koper, Logatec, Maribor, Murska Sobota, Nova Gorica, Ormož, Posavje, Ptuj, Ravne na Koroškem, Šentjur, Tolmin, Trbovlje, Velenje

³⁷ They differ in whether they can make diagnoses of mental disorders, prescribe medication, provide psychotherapy or psychological counseling, and are qualified to perform psychological testing.

³⁸ NIJZ, Podcast Psychological first help <https://youtu.be/JECELHPPsAE>

³⁹ <https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/pomagam-drugemu/psiholoska-prva-pomoc/>

⁴⁰ <https://skatljica.si/>

Za/Upam.si (I trust/dare)⁴¹. In this regard, they provide free online psychological counseling and have a group of young female volunteers who write online articles and posts on social networks.

Training on Mental Health for Youth and Leaders of Youth Groups

- 1) National Training on Mental Youth Health⁴² was prepared by the MaMa network and other project partners⁴³. The training within the project took place in October 2021, as in-person training. The project defines three key areas, namely support for youth workers, social inclusion, and promotion of quality. The purpose of the project was to equip youth workers with general knowledge and skills for recognizing young people in mental distress through selected priority areas and to provide them with additional training and information and knowledge in the field of providing first psychosocial help to young people.

The training was created for experienced youth workers or those at the beginning of their careers who want to acquire new or upgrade existing knowledge in the field of mental health of young people. Within the project, they've conducted a pilot training for the use of protocols in one youth center in Slovenia. Youth workers of the selected youth center, and experts in the field of mental health of young people and young people were included in the pilot training.

The training⁴⁴ covered the following topics:

- expert view on the subject of mental distress among young people;
 - exchange of existing practices and sharing of experiences among youth workers;
 - getting to know the protocols that were created in the framework of the International Youth Mental Health training, within the Youth Centers for Youth Mental Health project.
- 2) Training for volunteers is provided by Društvo za preventivno delo - DPD (Association for Preventive Work)⁴⁵, as a non-formal education. It consists of 100 hours of training and education. This is a two-level intensive seminar and continuous monitoring and support by an expert mentor during the direct implementation of the "Youth Workshops" program, which, after the successful completion of the first-level seminar, the volunteer carries out for one school year and completes approx. 20 volunteer hours per month.

Thematic groups that are discussed at the seminar with the help of workshops, discussion groups, and lectures are:

- adolescence as a normative (developmental) crisis;
- communication, the formation, and development of a small group, the workshop as a method of work;
- primary prevention in the field of mental health.

⁴¹ <https://skatlica.si/zaupam-si/>

⁴² <https://www.mreza-mama.si/nacionalno-usposabljanje-dusevno-zdravje-mladih/>

⁴³ Project has been financed by the European Commission as part of the Erasmus+ program.

⁴⁴ The agenda of the training, available online <https://www.mreza-mama.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Nacionalno-usposabljanje-Du%C5%A1evno-zdravje-mladih-program.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.drustvo-dpd.si/usposabljanje-prostovoljcev/vsebina/>

The knowledge and skills they acquire in non-formal education include:

- knowledge and skills in educational and preventive work with young people, especially working with groups of young people (informing and advising young people, implementing various actions in the community);
- acquiring appropriate social skills, knowledge, and value orientations as well as behavioral patterns useful for successfully dealing with one's own life crises and hardships and for building a healthy lifestyle and deep involvement in the currents of one's own (family), one's professional (school and learning) and one's social (social community) of life;
- knowledge and skills in the field of mental hygiene, especially related to the thematic groups that we deal with (prevention, adolescents, small group...);
- personal competencies in the field of communication skills, dealing with and resolving conflicts, empathy and sensitivity for others, establishing, maintaining, and developing interpersonal relationships, regulating one's personal processes, etc.

- 3) Program Dobro sem (I am good)⁴⁶ has been designed in 2015 at the Association of Friends of the Youth of Ljubljana Moste-Polje. It is intended to raise awareness and educate individuals from vulnerable groups, with the aim of making it easier for them to influence, strengthen and protect their mental health and well-being.

Through the Dobro sem program, we develop and implement comprehensive preventive psychosocial support content and train volunteer trainers who run support groups in local environments. The Dobro sem program is free for all participants. This includes training of trainers and participation in workshops and materials.

The Dobro sem program is intended for those who need support and help in dealing with current hardships or who want to take care of their well-being and thus a better quality of life. Among the target groups of the program are also young people between the ages of 18 and 30 who are facing unemployment or social and financial insecurity, and vulnerable groups of individuals.

By engaging in meetings, individuals can gain the ability to choose the most appropriate strategies and skills for solving problems, and conflicts, or adapting to change. Through working with a group, they learn flexibility in behavior, thoughts, and emotions. They also acquire knowledge to protect their own mental health.

Information channels for Youth

Some examples of information on mental health and youth are available on youth information channels:

- Dostop.si: where can you receive help when in a mental health crisis or distress⁴⁷;
- Portal mlad.si⁴⁸ under the category Youth sector (about relevant projects, workshops, blog, etc.);

⁴⁶ <https://www.zpmmoste.net/dobro-sem/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.dostop.si/psiholoska-pomoc-mladim-kam-se-lahko-obrne-v-stiski/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.mlad.si/>

- Platform Mladi zmaji (Young Dragons), category mental health, offers among others free workshops with the title Uspelo mi bo (I'm going to succeed)⁴⁹ for personal growth;
- LMIT - Ljubljanska mreža into točk za mladinske organizacije (Network of Into points of Youth Organizations Ljubljana)⁵⁰ provides information about events on personal development and mental health, like Training for leaders of youth groups on mental health⁵¹.

Other available offers on the market on self-empowerment and mindfulness

There are several online platforms on self-empowerment and mindfulness, not specifically designed for youth, that offer this content and training for certain monthly membership or program fees. Two examples of synergies with the YouHeal project:

- 1) Courses on mindfulness offered by Društvo za razvijanje čuječnost (Association for Developing Mindfulness)⁵² - On their website, they offer free exercises on mindfulness that can be downloaded on a computer or smartphone. For the program fee, they offer beginners and advanced courses on mindfulness. For students, they offer their programs for a reduced fee (sponsored by Charity found)⁵³.
- 2) Online platform Ponos⁵⁴ offers services to reduce stress, and have more confidence and kindness towards oneself in the form of paid monthly or yearly online programs (with an option to have a free testing month):
 - Courses, and meditation on healing burnout (8 weeks course with weekly focused content: relaxation and peace, more energy, breathing, good sleep, feeling safe and secure, trust yourself, life energy and vitality, integration week from 1-7 week exercises; available free trial of 1 lesson from the course),
 - Course in 2 months to better self-confidence (8 weeks course with weekly focus - preparation, empowering the feeling of safety in yourself and being relaxed, releasing limiting beliefs, recognizing and releasing your harmful beliefs, away from perfection into self-acceptance, More acceptance, self-discovery, feeling proud of 2 months accomplishment);
 - Course on better self-image (8 weeks course with weekly focus - preparation, for good sleep, fear of making mistakes, comparing with others, taking care of your body, feeling safe and secure in yourself, harmful beliefs, happiness, and fulfillment, where am I now).

3.5.5. Identifying gaps

⁴⁹ <https://mladizmaji.si/program/?kategorija=75>

⁵⁰ <https://www.lmit.org/o-mrezi-lmit>

⁵¹ <https://www.lmit.org/mladinske-organizacije/usposabljanje-za-voditelje-mladinskih-skupin-dusevno-zdravje-mladih.html>

⁵² <https://www.cujecnost.org/>

⁵³ <https://www.cujecnost.org/dobrodelni-sklad/>

⁵⁴ <https://ponos.si/>

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia⁵⁵ declared the year 2023 as the Slovenian Year of Mental Health. The field of mental health has been set among the Government's priorities and plans to prepare and take a series of measures to improve access to mental health services. In this regard, many activities are intended to raise awareness among different target populations and to destigmatize mental disorders to educate about good mental health and to strengthen protective factors.

The YouHeal proposal goes well in line with the outcomes of the latest studies on the effect of social media on mental health. Referring to the article, published by the Institute Skatlica (2022)⁵⁶, there are four positive effects on mental health using social media: having an opportunity to communicate and engage with others, anonymity, motivation, and the potential to build and nurture relationships with others.

Analyzing existing educational and self-empowerment activities, programs, and training, available for young people on national, regional, and local levels in Slovenia, we can identify the potential for strong synchronization, and synergy with the YouHeal proposal's intention and aim from several perspectives:

- Recognizing the importance of mental health and overall well-being of young people by authorities and formal institutions on a national and local level, youth and other organizations on a national, regional, and local level; and by young people themselves.
- Strong recognition and presence with programs and activities to address the destigmatization of mental health issues, and to raise awareness about mental health and well-being among young people, and within society in general.
- The YouHeal proposal, as an online platform and app offering e-training and open source information and access to relevant content and service, goes very well in line with already existing online platforms and programs. In the last years, several online platforms have been launched and developed to provide online information and support with relevant and helpful information (in the format of guidelines, audio or video material, exercises, handbook, books, workshops, training, campaign, where to seek for help, online chat, counseling office for youth, etc.) on several common challenges and topics. During the project continuation, proper partnerships and agreements to connect these platforms and their content (information, training programs, educational material, e-classroom, etc.) with the YouHeal would need to be properly taken into an account and established. With this YouHeal can create additional added value by upgrading and complementing the existing offer, and creating a so-called 'one-stop-shop' platform and app on what's available and recommended for youth on the respective topic.
- There is a strong tradition embedded in Slovenian society and culture on solidarity and volunteering. There is for example an established training program for prevention work, which emphasizes also working with youth. There could be great synergy in connecting the YouHeal train the trainer working package with the existing network of trained volunteers, so we can assure proper implementation and follow-up activities of the YouHeal outcomes.
- There is a strong network of established and active youth organizations on national, regional, and local levels. Raising awareness, education, and empowerment of youth and youth leaders is among

⁵⁵ One of news clips addressing this information <https://english.sta.si/3129620/govt-puts-mental-health-in-focus-of-2023>

⁵⁶ Institute Skatlica, blog post, <https://skatlica.si/pozitivni-vplivi-socialnih-omrezij-na-dusevno-zdravje/>, 2022;

their core activities. In last years there is also more and more focus and emphasis on their activities on mental health among young people, students, and young adults. They are open to collaboration and further education/training. This could be another potential synergy with the YouHeal proposal, and important to consider within the train-the-trainer activities, implementation, and follow-up activities.

- Existing platforms, portals, and programs provide an opportunity for youth to experience and use online/in-person counseling. This goes well in line with the YouHeal proposal. If these platforms, the people who are managing these platforms, and those who provide counseling to young people would have the link to the information and service provided by the YouHeal, they could refer and advise young people also how to help themselves by using the Youheal platform/app.

- Competencies for trainers and others who are working with youth in the area of mental health received from existing programs for volunteers, youth leaders, psychological first aid offers, etc. can be complemented by the YouHeal, especially competencies on motivating and training youth to take care of their own mental health and well-being as a prevention, and not wait for the crisis and distress to emerge and further develop; on advising youth on time on what kind of help they need and how to best help themselves in a specific situation so they are not on their own with their search for the right help for themselves; on being equipped with several fast applicable and teachable techniques for well-being and mindfulness to help youth in need on the spot and at the time of need, and not (just) refer them further to other platforms/counselours. YouHeal initiative will also provide the opportunity to existing trainers, youth leaders, and youth workers to update, upgrade, further develop their skills, and equip those who are new in this area. With this, the YouHeal proposal assures the opportunity to have more trained, skilled, and better-equipped people/organizations in the area of mental health, wellbeing, and mindfulness who can provide help to young people.

- Regarding the existing self-education, self-help, and self-empowerment competencies provided for young people the YouHeal proposal will bring very needed complementary support and tools to practice and develop self-empowerment, self-leadership, and mindfulness, as well being exposed to peer learning and support, developing different social skills, experiencing different forms of training and support (therapy, coaching, training, guided meditation, visualization, and other guided (audio or video) exercises, individual and peer online practice, etc.). The online format and train-the-trainer concept of the YouHeal will provide the opportunity to address also the information and content that might show within the project as relevant, but is currently missing within existing platforms, portals, and programs.

Some of the synergies mentioned above show also potential gaps, and needs, that YouHeal will fulfill at our national, and regional levels, especially:

- Due to covid-19 and its consequences there is more focus and available information on mental health and the importance of health and well-being in general. However, it seems like a huge gap that there are programs, portals, and support for the youth of age 6-19 years old (primary and secondary school), and a lack of focused programs and support for the age group from 18-26 years old. The YouHeal proposal focuses specifically on this target group and can address and reduce this gap.

- Mindfulness courses, communication, different exercises on self-empowerment, better self-image, and better self-confidence, guided meditations, and similar techniques and tools are now mainly offered as a paid offer/service, and the fee might be too high for this age group. There are opportunities for a free trial, like 1 exercise from a program for free. This is good to test out what's available and what works for an individual, but not enough to make a sustainable change and develop

self-empowerment from it. The majority of the educational programs are offered in the form of in-person training, courses, workshops, or as a handbook and guidelines that can be read/downloaded. YouHeal proposal addresses two gaps, one between currently free accessible and payable service, and the other between in-person and online training and content.

- There is an opportunity to experience, use, and receive counseling, which is great in certain situations, but there seems to be a gap in providing a safe environment as a group/peer chat and guided groups for young adults in the age range from 18-26 years. After they are 19 years old, they fall under the 'adults' category, and there seems to be a gap to provide a proper environment, content, and support for these young adults, so they can better equip themselves for the specific challenges that they face in this period. The Youheal proposal is providing a safe space to specifically this group and is structured to hear them out about what they need, what they desire to have the access to, and which categories they'd like to have covered on this platform. Also, there is much information available and provided online on the topic, which can be used also within YouHeal/by youth, but not many programs/apps are available and adjusted to the needs only of this target group. This is an overall opportunity for YouHeal to be innovative, creative, and effective to address and reduce this gap.

- Youheal can also address and reduce the gap between formal and informal education and training programs. It can address the needed updating, upgrading, and constant improvement of training skills, and skills to work with youth in the respective topic.

- There might be a gap in available content and support on relevant social media for youth. There is some support and presence on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, but maybe not enough on other platforms that are more frequently used as a reference by youth. YouHeal proposal has the opportunity to explore and address also this potential gap.

- Training and relevant content are mainly available/offered either in-person, in the format of a book/handbook, and/or workshop. The YouHeal proposal covers an online format, which can be adjusted to the needs and desires of youth in the form of short audio and video clips with training, education, guidance, exercises, etc.

- YouHeal proposal addresses the gap that mental health support is not easily accessible for all, and it might be less available/more stigmatized in some local environments. YouHeal is an online platform that can be accessible to all equally, from different parts of Slovenia, and without in-person/personal exposure.

- YouHeal proposal also addresses the gap of received (free access, open learning resource) competencies for self-help, and self-empowerment as a prevention, and part of a personal and professional journey of each young individual in the age of 18-26, and helps them train needed social skills to address life's challenges in a more successful, fulfilling, and healthy way. These skills and competencies are in the area of health, nutrition, movement, healthy lifestyle, yoga, breathing exercises, successful mindset, emotional intelligence, managing their energy, good sleep and recharging energy, self-confidence, self-image, self-motivation, focus and result orientation, communication, relationship building, resolving conflicts, collaboration, self-initiative, self-leadership, types of professions and help in the area of mental health, and similar.

3.5.6. References

Benatov, J., Ochnik, D., Rogowska, A. M., Arzenšek, A., Bitenc, U. M. (2022). Prevalence and Sociodemographic Predictors of Mental Health in a Representative Sample of Young Adults from Germany, Israel, Poland, and Slovenia: A Longitudinal Study during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 19(3), 1334.

Eurostat. (2023). *Unemployment rates by sex, age and citizenship (%)*. Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSQ_URGAN_custom_4811353/default/table?lang=en.

Eberl, A. (2022). *Unemployment has a lasting negative effect on mental health*. FAU. <https://www.fau.eu/2022/03/28/news/research/unemployment-has-a-lasting-negative-effect-on-mental-health/>.

Kavčič, T., Avsec, A., Kocjan, G. Z. (2021). Psychological Functioning of Slovene Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Does Resilience Matter? *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 92, 207–216

Wilson, H., Finch, D. (2021). *Unemployment and mental health – Why both require action for our COVID-19 recovery*. The Health Foundation. <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/unemployment-and-mental-health>.

Portal gov.si, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Duševno zdravje, <https://www.gov.si teme/dusevno-zdravje/>, 2023;

Zakon o duševnem zdravju, pisrs.si, <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2157>, 2023;

Akcijski načrt 2022-2023 za izvajanje Resolucije on nacionalnem programu duševnega zdravja za obdobje 2018-2028, <https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/0-Akcijski-nacrt-2022-2023-celoten.pdf>, 2022;

Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje Republike Slovenije, Duševno zdravje, <https://nijz.si/zivljenjski-slog/dusevno-zdravje/dusevno-zdravje-v-sloveniji/>, 2023;

Duševno zdravje v Sloveniji, publikacija, Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje Republike Slovenije, 2009, https://nijz.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/dusevno_zdravje_publikacija.pdf;

Pogled nazaj, pogled naprej: hitra ocena sistema skrbi za duševno zdravje v Sloveniji, Poročilo misije Regionalnega urada SZO za Evropo, opravljene na daljavo (september 2020), <https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SZO-hitra-ocena-sistema-skrbi-za-dusevno-zdravje-v-Sloveniji.pdf>;

National Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia and Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, Nacionalni program druževnega zdravja MIRA, <https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SZO-hitra-ocena-sistema-skrbi-za-dusevno-zdravje-v-Sloveniji.pdf>, 2023;

Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and National Institute for Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia (NIJZ), National Mental Health Program MIRA, in English, 2020, https://www.zadusevnozdravje.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Mira_resolucija-ANG_splet-2020_FINAL.pdf

National Institute of Public Health of Republic of Slovenia, Duševno zdravje mladih otrok in mladostnikov v Sloveniji, <https://nijz.si/publikacije/dusevno-zdravje-otrok-in-mladostnikov-v-sloveniji/>, 2018;

WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021–2025, Draft for the Seventy-first Regional Committee for Europe, WHO Regional Office for Europe, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/344609/WHO-EURO-2021-3147-42905-59865-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>;

EU, European Commission, Public Health, Mental health, https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/mental-health_en, 2023;

EU, European Commission, Public Health, Mental health and Covid-19, https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/mental-health_en#mental-health-and-covid-19, 2023;

Health at a Glance, Europe 2020, State of health in the EU cycle, publication, EU, European Commission, https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/2020_healthatglance_rep_en_0.pdf, 2020;

EU Health Policy Platform, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/hpf/>, 2023;

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter is about the common gaps that have been identified in all the partner countries. The pandemic had a huge impact on young people all over Europe. Mental health problems are rising in all of the partner countries which is recognized by all the governments of the partner countries. However, while in Austria and Slovenia the government steps in with lots of offers, in Greece, Romania and Serbia governmental support could be better and mental health/mindfulness offers are in the hands of non-governmental organizations.

While every country has educational offers concerning mindfulness and mental health, many do not fit our target group. Self-empowerment workshops often run over weeks which can be an obstacle for working people. Most governmental and non-governmental offers are situated in the cities which makes it harder to partake for young people living in the countryside. The online character of the learning courses provided by the YOUHEAL project fills both of these gaps because the courses can be taken anytime and anywhere. Being offered online and anonymous, the access is not only easier physically but also mentally, as shyness or stigmatisation might be reasons not to get help in person. So, the methodology used by the YOUHEAL project is well chosen to fill existing gaps in educational offers surrounding mental health and self-empowerment.

The desk research in the five partner countries also showed that the target group was very well chosen. Not only are location, time and stigmatisation obstacles but money is a big one, too. Especially for our target group – young people between the ages of 18 and 26 - money is often sparse and self-empowerment training and mental health care is often very costly. In most of the partner countries, psychiatrist help is covered by health insurance but psycho-therapy is not and is very expensive. By offering a free online course, the YOUHEAL project can fill this gap and young people with not a lot of money to spend can partake.

Another reason that the YOUHEAL project can provide a useful addition to existing educational offers is that our content addresses young people between the ages of 18 and 26. There are offers in the work-related context that offer trainings and courses for people older than our target group. There is lots of support for the youth of age 6-19 years old (primary and secondary school) but a lack of focused programs and support for the age group from 18-26 years old. The content is often too general and therefore makes young people feel not seen or understood. This group might have finished school or started university or a new job during the pandemic. They are confronted with different problems than school kids, like moving out or financial independency. They might worry about their future or struggling to adapt to “real life”. With the YOUHEAL project we can create targeted content that will make them feel heard and caters to their problems.

In conclusion, the biggest obstacles that young people between the age of 18 and 26 face to partake in offers concerning mental health and self-empowerment are time, location, stigmatisation and money, as well as not being the primary target group of most of the educational offers provided. The YOUHEAL project can fill those gaps with the online nature of the learning platform as well as providing content that relates to problems faced in this age.

4 National competences survey

In each of the partner countries an online questionnaire was sent out to 50 young individuals from the projects target group. Altogether, 250 people between 18 and 26 were asked to fill out the survey to help us identifying their real-world needs, gaps and opportunities.

4.1 Austria

- 4.1.1. Introduction

For the national competencies report in Austria, the YOUHEAL team wrote a questionnaire to identify real-world needs, gaps and opportunities. This questionnaire was then translated into the national languages of the partners. The German version was translated via the help of the AI translation software DeepL and then put into Google Forms. The online questionnaire should reach 50 young individuals in Austria, to reach the number of 250 people altogether. The target group for the questionnaire was the same as for the project, namely young people between the ages of 18 and 26. To ensure inclusion, at least 20% of the respondents should be from deprived groups, like minorities and refugees, individuals with social or financial issues, and those living in rural areas.

The target group was contacted through a post on the social media channels of LEVILO to ensure impartiality and anonymity. Then, the private Instagram account of the author was used to send out the survey because it was more probable to reach more people from the target group. A few people were targeted directly to assure that enough people from the target group were included and asked to spread the questionnaire to their friends – the so-called snowball method.

The questionnaire was sent out in January of 2023 and then a second wave started in February to reach the agreed upon number of 50 people. Eventually, 58 people were reached, however two had to be excluded due to being too old to fall into the target group.

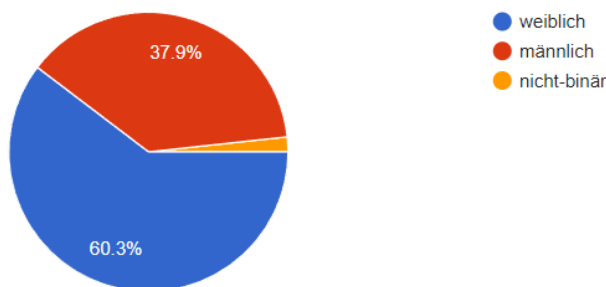
Since the topic is very intimate, at first, it was not easy to find enough people but by targeting people directly and asking them to send the survey to their friends, the number was reached easily. A problem

that occurred was that some people wished for more options to pick their answer from or to pick multiple answers. That was problem was solved by saying they should pick the most fitting answer since the questionnaire was already being send out.

4.1.2. Results

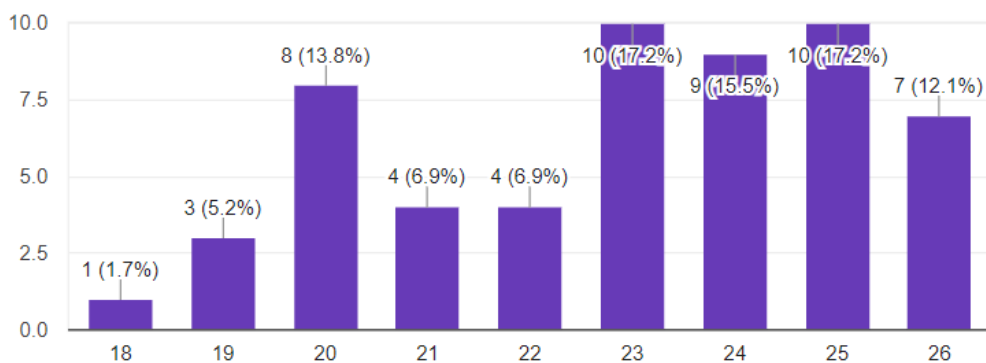
Socio-demographic data

The first part of the online survey concerned socio-demographic elements of the participants. 58 Austrians answered the survey of whom 60,3% were female. Because mixed methods of contacting were used, such as the snowball method, we couldn't guarantee a gender balance. One person considers themselves non-binary.



Graphic 1: gender

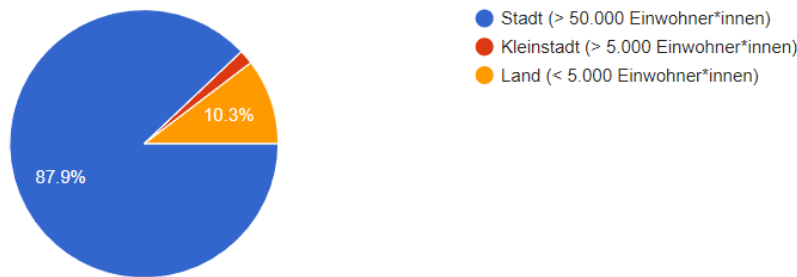
Since the target group are young people between the ages of 18 and 26 the participants also had to fall into that age group. The ages of the participants vary quite a lot with most people being in their early to mid-twenties, so the target group is represented quite nicely.



Graphic 2: age

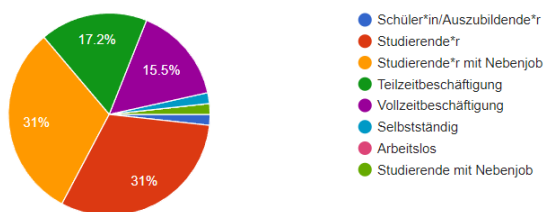
One weakness of the survey results that can be criticized is that most people answering the survey were

living in a city (87,9%) while 10,3% live in the countryside.

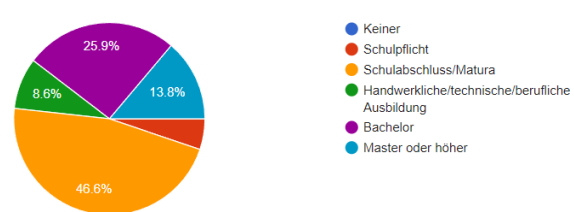


Graphic 3: place of living

As can be seen in graphic 4 and 5, the answers were more balanced. A majority of 62% is studying, with half of them also working on the side. 15,5% work full-time and 17,2% part-time. 39% have a university degree of which 13,8% finished their master's.

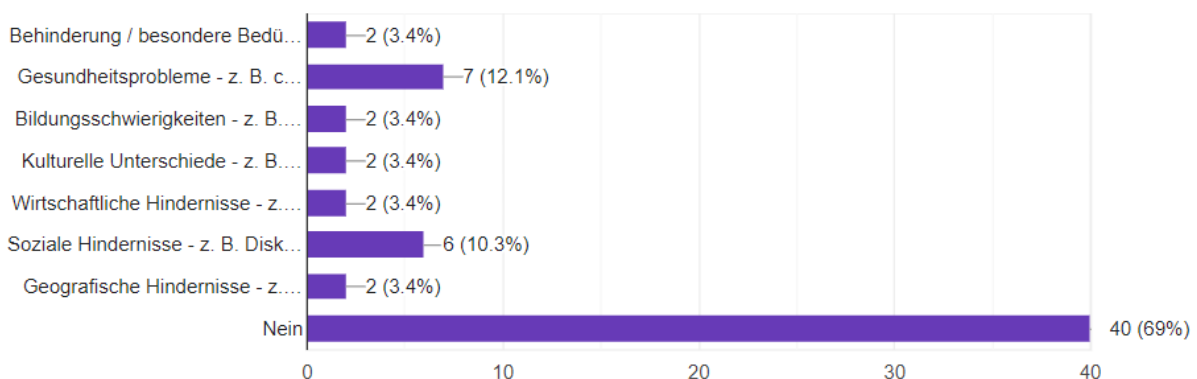


Graphic 4: occupation



Graphic 5: Educational level

31% of the participants consider themselves to be part of some sort of minority group which means our goal of representation is fulfilled. We had participants in almost every group; however, the most common ones were chronic health problems (12,1%) and social discrimination (10,3%). It is important to note that people could only chose one, so they had to choose the one they felt they belonged to the most.

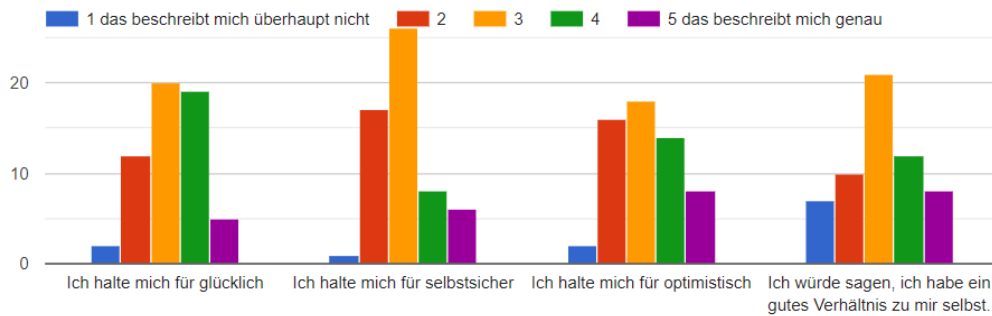


Graphic 6: minority groups

Mental health

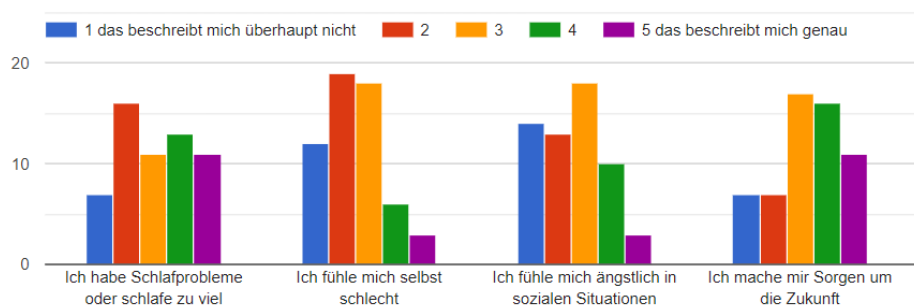
In this chapter, the questions surrounded the topic of mental health. When assessing the mood or state of mental health of the respondents, the timeframe of the last 3 months was used. It was

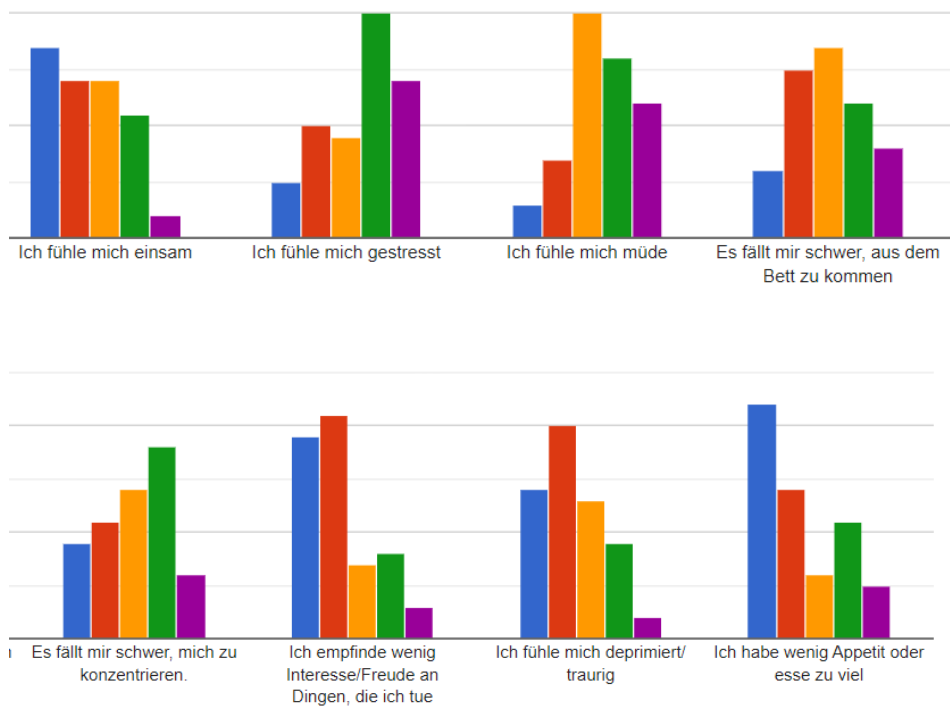
measured using a Likert scale going from 1 “it doesn’t describe me at all” to 5 “it totally describes me”. When asked about their general happiness, self-esteem, optimism and relationship to themselves, the most common answer was the middle ground. The only question where more respondents chose the negative options more was the question if they thought that they are confident in themselves. It is also interesting to see that the respondents seem to be quite ambivalent about their relationship to themselves because the answers were quite balanced out over the answer spectrum.



Graphic 7: self-assessment

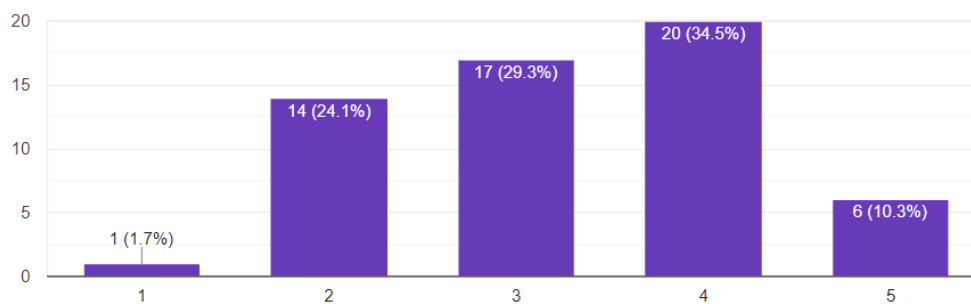
The next questions are symptoms of depression and even though we are in no place to give a diagnosis because we lack medical expertise, it is still relevant to see if our respondents show symptoms. It is interesting to see that the symptoms concerning feeling bad, depressed, lonely or not feeling interested in the things that they usually love doing show a clear tendency that the majority of the respondents do not experience these feelings. However, symptoms related to stress or worrying seem to be quite present. A majority of the respondents say that they feel stressed, tired and has a hard time concentrating. Also, a majority of the people worries about the future. So, it seems that the struggles some of the respondents face tend to not come from the inside but through outside influences.



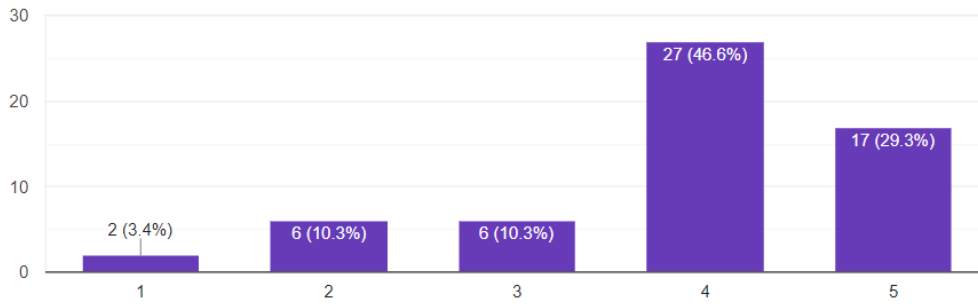


Graphic 8: symptoms of depression

The questions about self-empowerment (see graphic 9 and 10) were answered positively by the respondents (the scale was 1 totally disagree and 5 totally agree). While 44,8% claimed to have power to make meaningful changes, even more people (75,9%) think they have the power to change their own situation. It makes sense that more people think they can change their own situation rather than big changes in general but it seems like the Austrian respondents already feel quite empowered.

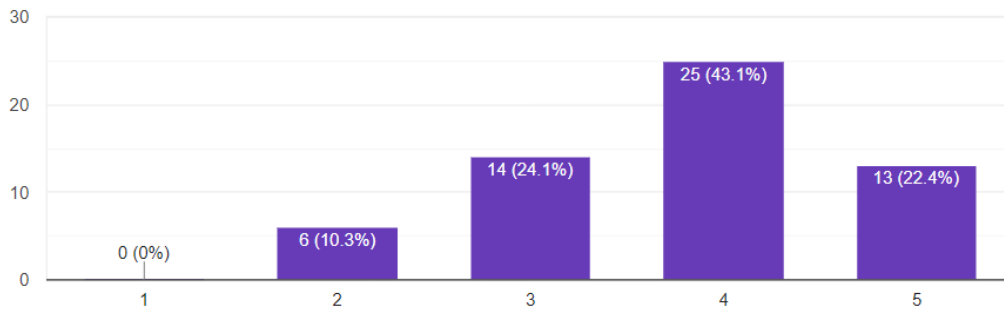


Graphic 9: power to achieve change



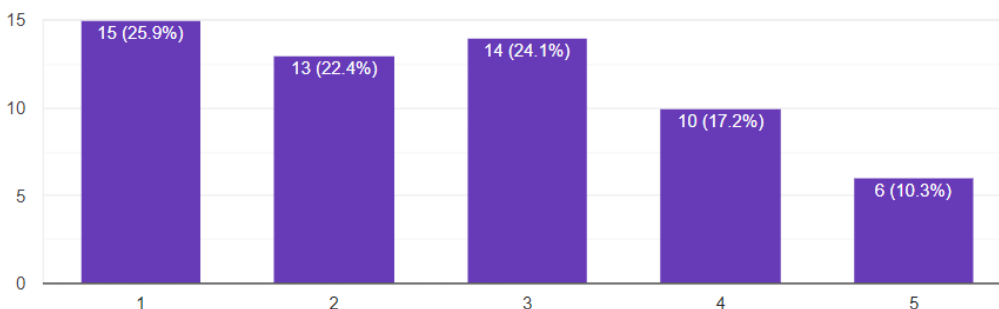
Graphic 10: power to change one's own situation

As can be seen in graphic 11, a majority (65,5%) of the respondents is actively setting goals for themselves.



Graphic 11: goal setting

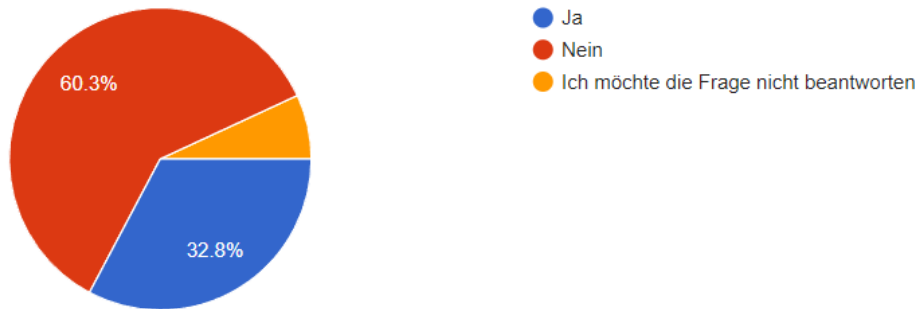
The question if mental health issues have influenced the job/uni/school performance the answers were ambivalent. Still, almost half said it doesn't influence their performance.



Graphic 12: work/uni performance

In the next question, the respondents were asked what makes them worry the most at the moment. It was an open question, so they could write whatever was on their mind. However, the answers can be broken down into 4 categories: 1) work/university stress, 2) heart break/relationships, 3) state of the world/climate change/war and 4) worrying about future (personal, financially and global).

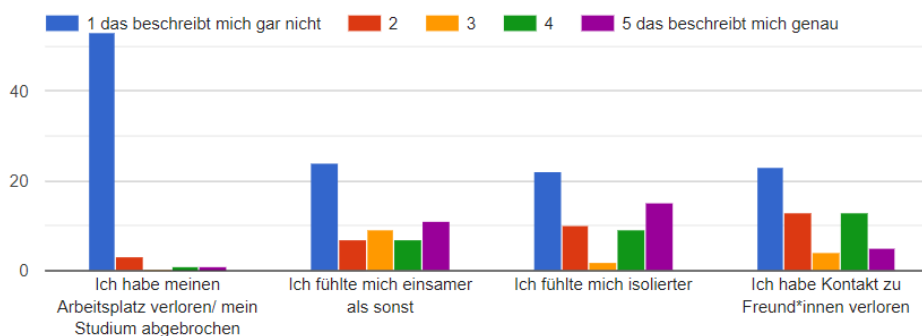
As can be seen in graphic 13, almost a third of the respondents have been diagnosed with a mental illness by a professional. However, one should be aware that it could be more because some people chose not to answer the question and just because no one has diagnosed it, doesn't mean they don't suffer from it. The respondents with a diagnosis were asked to elaborate on it. The most common mental illness among the respondents is depression, followed by anxiety, PTSD and ADHD.

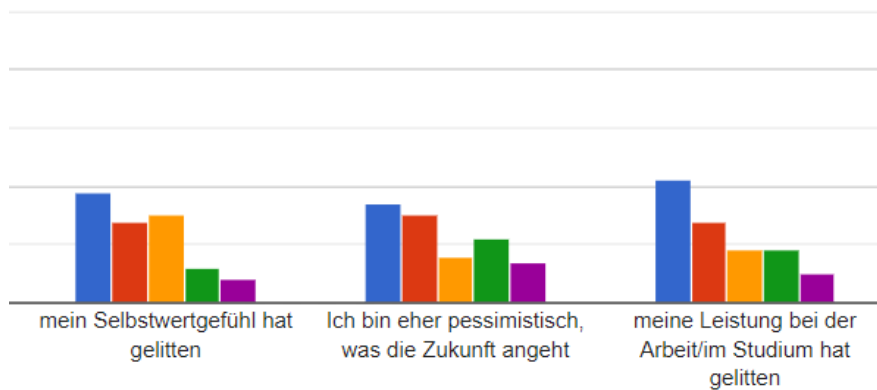


Graphic 13: diagnosis

Covid

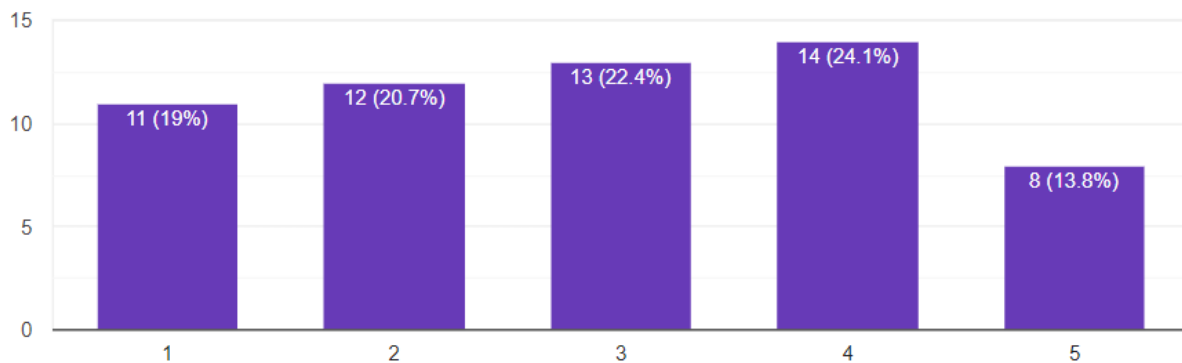
The next chapter of questions concerned the experience of the respondents of the pandemic and its influence on their life and well-being. It is quite interesting to see that the pandemic did not have such a negative impact on the respondents as one might have thought. A majority cannot relate to the negative influences such as feeling lonelier or more isolated than usual, losing friends or a job through the pandemic, or a worsening of self-esteem, university or job performance or becoming more pessimistic about the future. What is also interesting to note is that while prior, most people chose the middle ground option, in this question set it is not the case. For the questions if one felt lonelier and if one felt more isolated during the pandemic, the two most chosen options were the both extremes ("that does not describe me at all" and "that totally describes me"). It seems that either the pandemic did have a great impact on one's life or not at all.





Graphic 14: pandemic

As can be seen in graphic 15, the answers to the question if online courses/meetings were a good alternative to meetings in real life were quite balanced out.



Graphic 15: online meetings as alternative

The respondents were asked to name positive experiences connected to the pandemic. This question was open again, so the answers differed quite a lot. But again, the answers can be summarized into five categories: time for oneself/hobbies/self-reflection, no appointments/deceleration, societal cohesion/better relationship with loved ones, better ability to concentrate/learn through online courses and there were also people who said there was no positive experience connected to the pandemic at all. The follow up question was if there were any negative or positive impacts on the respondent's lives. The answers can be summarized in: "the pandemic did not have big impact on my life" and "relationships got better but my health got worse", especially when there were pre-existing conditions.

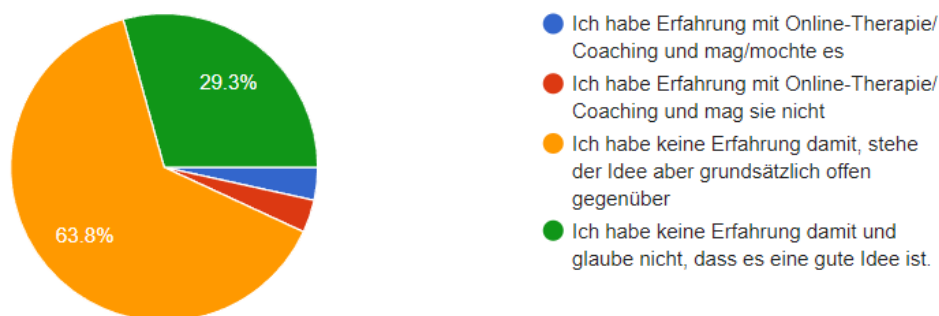
Professional help

In the following set of questions, the respondents were asked to answer questions concerning their experience and thoughts with and about mental health. The first question (graphic 16) was about therapy. 36,5% of respondents are currently in therapy or were at some point in their lives. 39,7% are not in therapy but generally open to the idea. It is interesting to see that no one has experience with self-empowerment workshops/trainings. Also, none of the respondents going to therapy claimed that it was because of the pandemic.



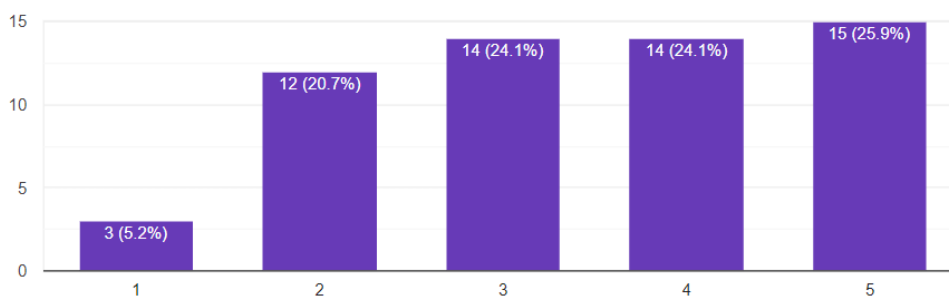
Graphic 16: therapy

Graphic 17 concerns the question if the respondents have experience with online therapy and if they think that it can be a good idea. 4 people have experience with online therapy/coaching and are split on it. 2 people of them say they liked it and 2 of them say they didn't like it. 63,8% do not have experience with it but are generally open to the idea while 29,3% do not think it is a good idea.



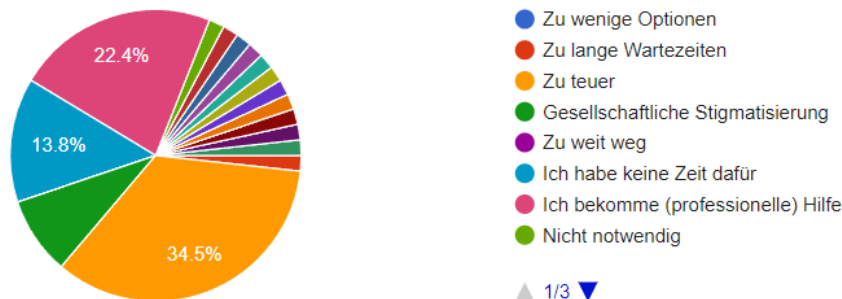
Graphic 17: Online therapy

When asked if it is easy to get professional help at the place where they live, half of the respondents claimed it was. A quarter of respondents said no but still the tendency is that the respondents feel that it is easy to get professional help where they live. This might have to do with the factor that a majority of the respondents live in a city.



Graphic 18: easy access to professional help

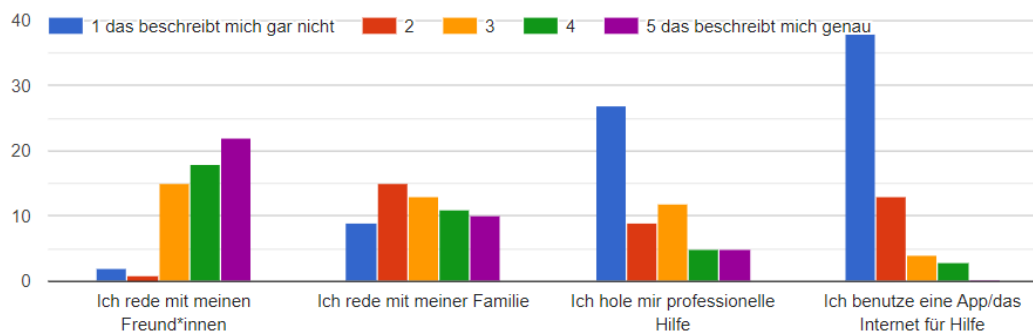
When asked what the reasons are to not seek professional help, most people say they do not need it or are not ready yet. The top three reasons according to the respondents to not seek professional help is that it is too expensive, followed by not having enough time for it. 8,6% of respondents say that societal stigmatisation is the main reason to not seek professional help.



Graphic 19: reasons not to seek help

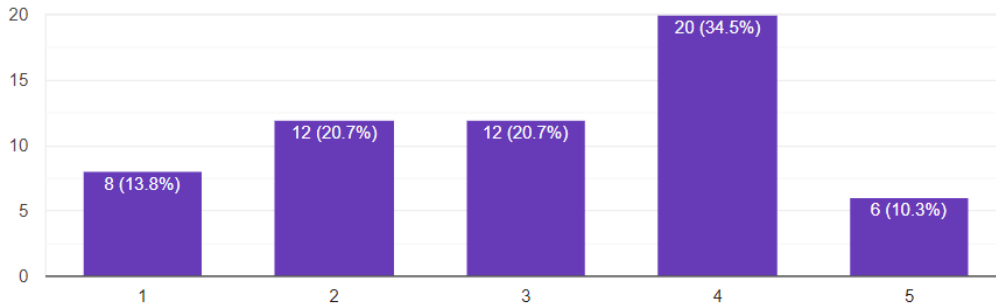
Self-empowerment, stress relief, goal setting

The last subtopic concerns self-empowerment, stress relief and goal setting. The respondents were asked where they turn to when they have problems. They were supposed to choose on a Likert scale between 1 “that doesn’t describe me at all” and 5 “that totally describes me”. Mostly, the respondents confide in their friends when they have problems. The responses to confiding in their family are quite ambivalent and no majority can be made out. The respondents mostly do not seek professional help for their problems and even less use the internet or apps (as can be seen in graphic 19). Then the respondents were asked to share their strategies for stress relief. The most common strategies are spending time with their friends and family, followed by spending time on their hobbies and then sport. Then the respondents were asked to share their strategies to grow their self-confidence/self-worth. Again, the answers were quite similar even though the question was an open question. Most people either do something that they are good in, like hobbies or their job. Another strategy is making themselves aware how far they have come in life. Another strategy that was named is external validation, which the respondents admitted was not the healthiest strategy. The strategies to better their own mood are quite similar. The respondents meet with friends, do their hobbies and listen to music. Music seems to play quite an important role in this. Interestingly enough, a few respondents like to isolate and stay at home to better their mood.



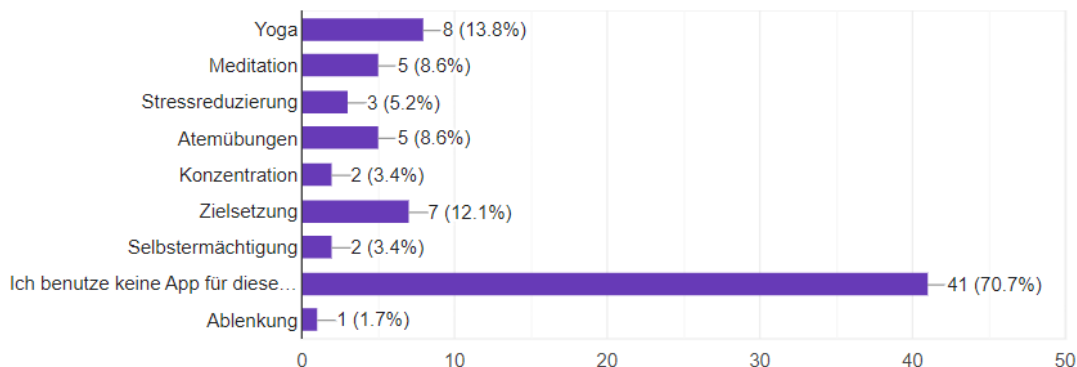
Graphic 19: when you have problems...

A majority of the respondents answered that they (somewhat) integrate strategies for their mental well-being into daily life like for example sport or meditation. However, if they are doing sports on a daily basis, they do not necessarily have to do it for their mental well-being but rather for their fitness or to lose weight for example.



Graphic 20: Strategies for mental well-being in daily routine

Then the respondents were asked if they use apps for certain strategies that help with their mental well-being or self-empowerment. 70,7% of people said that do not use apps for those kinds of things. The most common reason to use an app is for yoga, followed by goal setting. 8,6% use an app for meditation and/or breathing techniques but that might be in one app, related to yoga as well.



Graphic 21: app for self-empowerment, mental well-being

The respondents were asked how they would help their best friend with problems. They were quite unanimous in their answers (even though it was an open question). The most important thing is listening and simply being there. Then they offer to help with analysing the problem or providing advice. Then the respondents were asked to describe the fields in which they would like to better themselves in. The most common answer was to work on their self-confidence and their relationship to themselves. The second most common field was that of self-discipline, concerning their work, studies or even sport or eating. The third field that stood out was that of social interactions. A few respondents want to become better at emotional intelligence or being there for other people. The last question was what the respondents wished for in a self-empowerment/self-worth course. Lots of people didn't really know what they would want from such a course, however the most useful answers were easy strategies to do by themselves and learning how to more objectively observe themselves. It was also said that it is important that it is not a self-optimisation course.

4.1.3. Discussion

In general, it can be said that the young people in Austria partaking in this questionnaire are quite sensibilized to things concerning mental health. The YOUHEAL project works in a field where there is great need and great interest. This can also be shown by the willingness of so many people to fill out the questionnaire, even though the topic is quite intimate. Some respondents also answered how important the topic is when I reached out to them.

On the topic of self-confidence and self-worth, Austria's youth was split. On the one hand, they seem to feel quite empowered since a majority feels that they have to power for important change or at least to change their own situation. That being said, feeling the power does not mean that they know how to use that power. Maybe the YOUHEAL learning material could provide guides on how to change a situation, like for example how to change one's habits or even how to change one's thoughts about themselves. Even though they might feel quite empowered, the most common wish of the Austrian respondents was to work on their self-confidence and their relationship towards themselves. When asked about strategies, some respondents claimed that they reflect on how far they came or things they are good at. Maybe the YOUHEAL platform could include a tool where the respondents can write those reflections down and re-read it every time they need it. However, when it came to the open questions, it became clear that Austria's respondents do not want a "self-optimization course but rather learn how to build a good relationship to themselves. The YOUHEAL project should include a guide to building a good relationship with oneself into the learning materials.

A second common field where respondents wanted to get better at was that of self-discipline, concerning their work, studies or even sport or eating. Within the YOUHEAL platform, this can go hand in hand with goal setting. Maybe the people can learn how to break negative habits or to be more disciplined, maybe even through concentration activities.

It was interesting to see that a majority of respondents does not feel bad, depressed, lonely or not feeling interested in the things that they usually love doing which can all be symptoms of depression or depressive episodes. It has to be said that a lot of respondents have a diagnosis by a professional but maybe they are getting the help they need. However, symptoms related to stress or worrying seem to be quite present. A majority of the respondents say that they feel stressed, tired and have a hard time concentrating. Also, a majority of the people worries about the future. So, it seems that the struggles some of the respondents face tend to not come from the inside but through outside influences. Also, when asked what burdens them, stress at work or university and worrying about the state of the world as well as their own situation, were some of the most common answers. It can be said that the biggest struggle for Austria's youth is stress. Stress relief exercises should therefore be a big part of the YOUHEAL program.

A big focus of the young people in Austria seems to be their relationships. It is what burdens them but they also want to get better at being there for their friends. Maybe that is something that can be part of the YOUHEAL learning as well – not only self-help and self-empowerment but also tips on how to be there for other people or how to help and empower other people.

The YOUHEAL project is set in the post-COVID era. However, it is quite interesting to see that the pandemic did not have such a negative impact on the respondents as one might have thought. A majority cannot relate to the negative influences such as feeling lonelier or more isolated than usual, losing friends or a job through the pandemic, or a worsening of self-esteem, university or job performance or becoming more pessimistic about the future. In the open questions it was also said

that the pandemic did not have an impact on their lives. Also, none of the respondents going to therapy claimed that it was because of the pandemic. However, it was said in the open questions that the pandemic often worsened pre-existing mental problems.

When it comes to experience with professional help, it seems that Austrian's youth quite open to therapy, yet, none of the respondents has experience with self-empowerment workshops/trainings. Not a lot of people have experience with online therapy either. The reasons for not seeking professional help are money, time and societal stigmatisation. All these barriers do not exist for the YOUHEAL platform as it is going to be free of charge. Even though the young Austrian do not have a lot of experience with online courses concerning mental health or self-empowerment, the online nature can break down the barriers of time and stigma since it can be done anytime the young people want and no one will know that one is doing a course on the YOUHEAL platform.

The survey was conducted to understand the situation and needs from the young people but also to learn from them. The strategies of the young Austrians to relief themselves from stress are more or less the same strategies they follow to boost their self-worth/self-confidence. They like to talk to their friends or family, do sports or their hobbies, self-reflect and listen to music. A big majority of the young Austrians however does not use apps or the internet for those kinds of things. The most common apps are for yoga and goal setting. However, the YOUHEAL platform can still be assisting their strategies. While it cannot be a substitute for friends or hobbies, it can offer a place to self-reflect and act like an "open ear" – maybe in form of a daily check in, where people write down how they feel, what triggered them and so on.

In general, it can be said that Austria's youth is very interested in and open to the topic of self-empowerment and mental health. It will be an important task for the YOUHEAL project to help them build a good relationship to themselves. Especially the free online presence of the learning materials will help close gaps and cater to the needs of the Austrians. A special focus should also lie on stress relief since stress, whether through work or the state of the world, seems to be the biggest struggle Austrians face. With those findings, YOUHEAL will build a platform to assist the young people in their daily lives with their daily struggles

4.2. Greece

4.2.1. Introduction

The YOUHEAL developed a questionnaire to identify real-world needs, gaps and opportunities among young people affected by the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. The questionnaire was then translated into the Greek language and put into Google Forms. Each partner had to reach at least 50 individuals so as to gather 250 responses in total. Greece managed to reach 48 individuals. The target group for the questionnaire was young people aged 18 - 26.

The communication and Marketing manager of Innovation Hive disseminated the questionnaire through social media and through emails to all relevant stakeholders and managed to reach 48 individuals. People were also contacted directly by the project manager's social media as it was more probable to participate. To promote inclusiveness, at least 20% of the respondents had to be from disadvantaged groups, such as minorities, refugees, people who were struggling financially or socially, and people who lived in rural regions. Since the topic was sensitive, the questionnaire was anonymous.

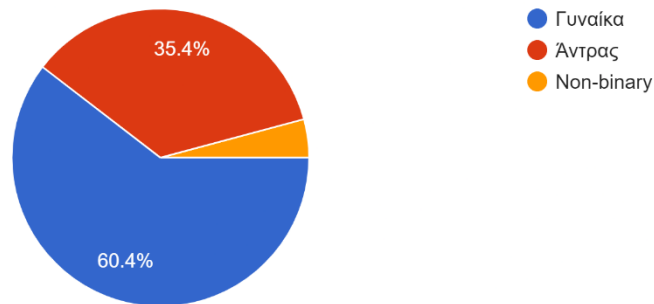
4.2.2. Results

Socio-demographic data

60,4% of the respondents were female while 2 of the participants identified as non-binary. Because mixed methods of contacting were used, gender balance couldn't be guaranteed.

1.2) Φύλο

48 responses

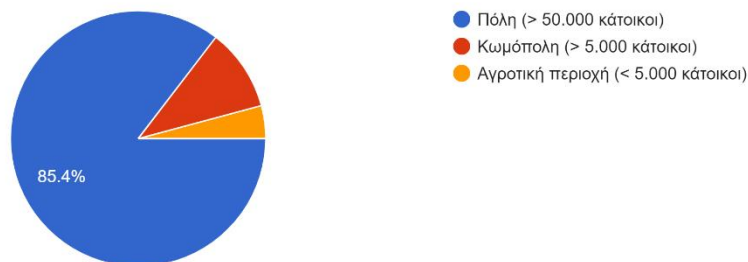


Grapheme 1: gender

Most of the respondents live in an urban area and only 7 of them live in rural areas. This could be considered a weakness of the survey since there are more opportunities for mental health support in cities.

1.4) Τόπος διαμονής

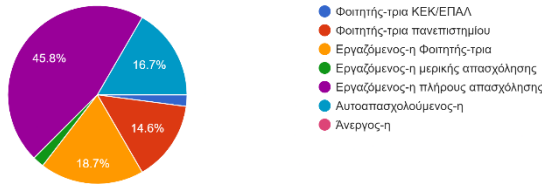
48 responses



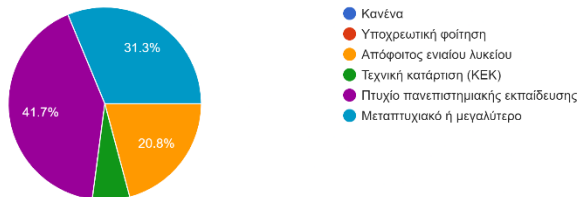
Grapheme 2: place of living

A majority of 45.8% is working full time, 33% are university students while almost half of them working on the side. 16.7% work as freelancers. Regarding the educational level, almost three quarters have a university degree of which 31.3% have obtained a master's.

1.5) κυρίως Επάγγελμα
48 responses



1.6) Ποιο είναι το υψηλότερο επίπεδο εκπαίδευσης που έχετε ολοκληρώσει;
48 responses



Grapheme 4: Occupation

Grapheme 5: Educational level

37.5% of the participants consider themselves to be part of some sort of minority group which means our goal of representation is fulfilled. We had participants in almost every group; however, the most common ones were social discrimination (10,4%) and financial difficulties (10,4%). It is important to note that people could only chose one, so they had to choose the one they felt they belonged to the most.

1.7) Θεωρείτε ότι ανήκετε στις ακόλουθες ομάδες ατόμων με λιγότερες ευκαιρίες; (σημειώστε όπου ισχύει)

48 responses

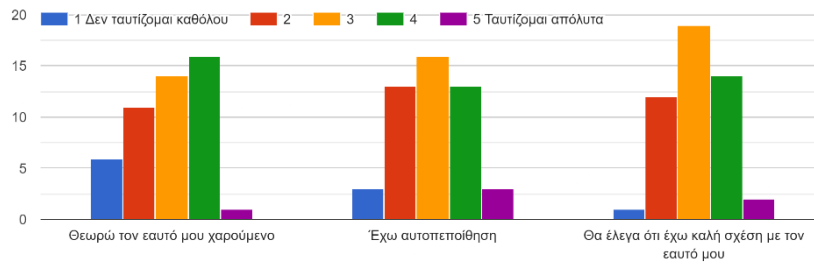


Grapheme 6: minority groups

Mental health

In this chapter, the questions targeted the topic of mental health. When assessing the mood or state of mental health of the respondents, the timeframe of the last 3 months was used. It was measured using a Likert scale going from 1 "it doesn't describe me at all" to 5 "it totally describes me". As it is seen below, when asked about their general happiness, self-esteem, optimism and relationship to themselves, the most common answer was the middle ground.

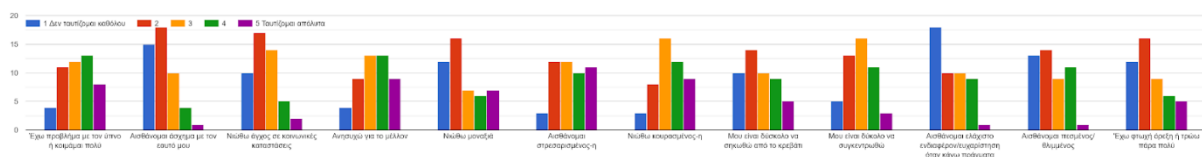
2.1) Σε τι βαθμό ταυτίζεστε με τις παρακάτω δηλώσεις όταν σκέφτεστε τους τελευταίους 3 μήνες;



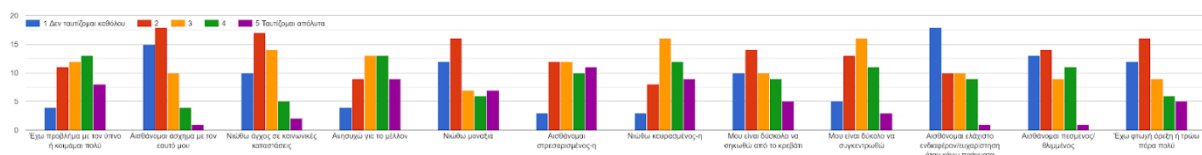
Graphic 7: self-assessment

Although they don't constitute a diagnosis, the following points are suggestive of a mental health disorder. A majority of the respondents say that they have trouble sleeping, they worry about the future, feel stressed and tired and has a hard time concentrating. It becomes apparent that the struggles mostly originate from external factors.

2.1) Σε τι βαθμό ταυτίζεστε με τις παρακάτω δηλώσεις όταν σκέφτεστε τους τελευταίους 3 μήνες;



2.1) Σε τι βαθμό ταυτίζεστε με τις παρακάτω δηλώσεις όταν σκέφτεστε τους τελευταίους 3 μήνες;

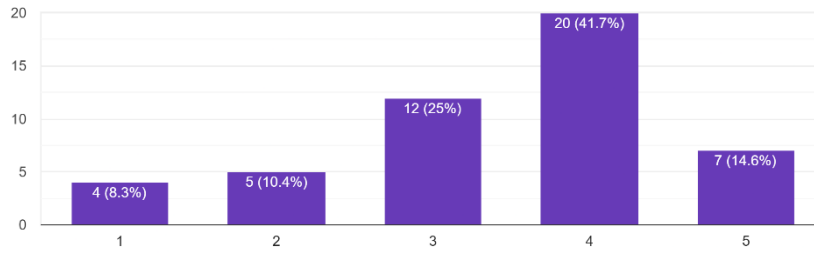


Grapheme 8: symptoms of depression

The questions about self-empowerment (bar charts 9 and 10) were answered positively by the respondents (the scale was 1 totally disagree and 5 totally agree). 27 respondents feel like they can achieve change and that they can change their own situation, while almost the same amount of people seems to be setting goals.

2.3) Νιώθω ότι μπορώ να πετύχω αλλαγή με τις πράξεις μου

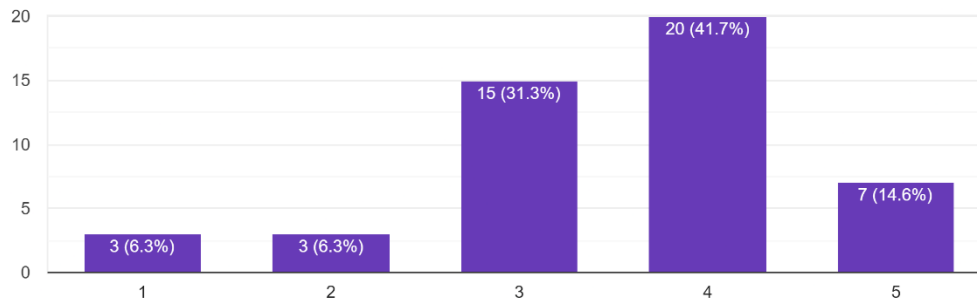
48 responses



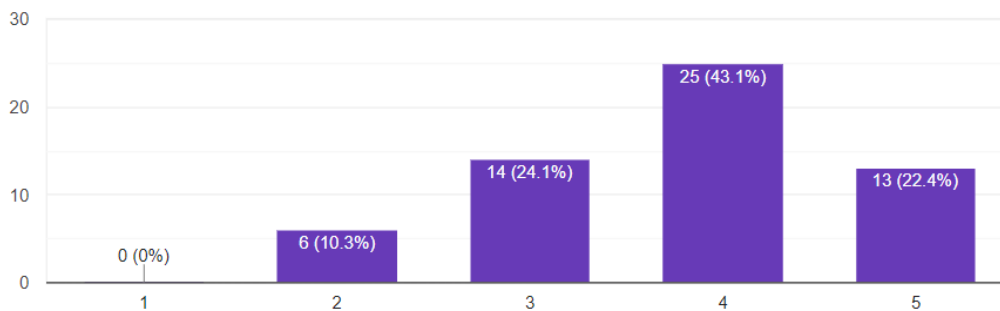
Grapheme 9: power to achieve change

2.4) Αισθάνομαι ότι έχω τη δύναμη να αλλάξω την κατάστασή μου

48 responses



Graphic 10: power to change one's own situation

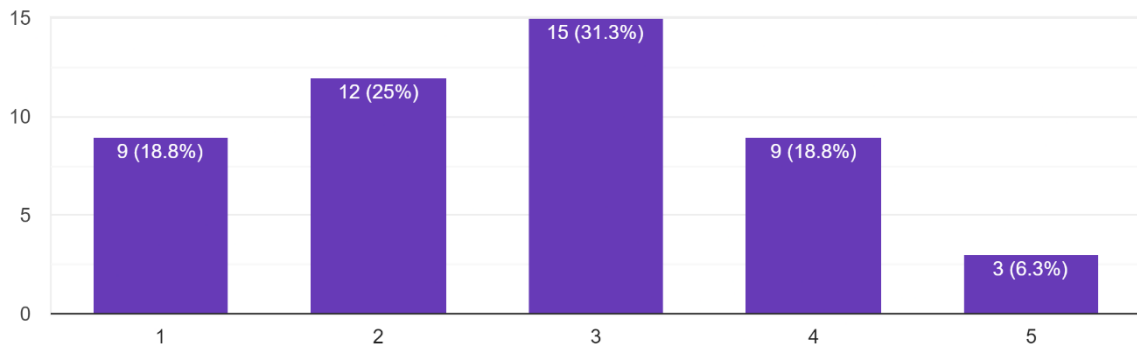


Graphic 11: goal setting

Regarding the degree that mental health issues have influenced the job/uni/school performance the answers were ambivalent. More than half responded that it doesn't influence their performance.

2.6) Δυσκολεύομαι με τις επιδόσεις μου στη δουλειά/στο πανεπιστήμιο/στο σχολείο λόγω της ψυχικής μου υγείας.

48 responses



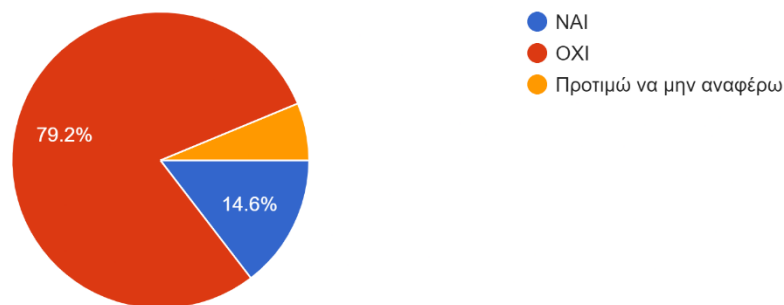
Grapheme 12: work/uni performance

In the open question “what worries you the most currently” the answers can be broken down into 4 categories: 1) finishing my studies, 2) financial difficulties, 3) state of the country and world/climate change/war and 4) finding employment

In grapheme 13, 80% of the respondents have been formally diagnosed, while those who have/ had, mostly suffer from anxiety and/or depression.

2.8) Έχετε διαγνωστεί με ψυχική διαταραχή/ασθένεια από επαγγελματία; (η απάντηση είναι προαιρετική)

48 responses

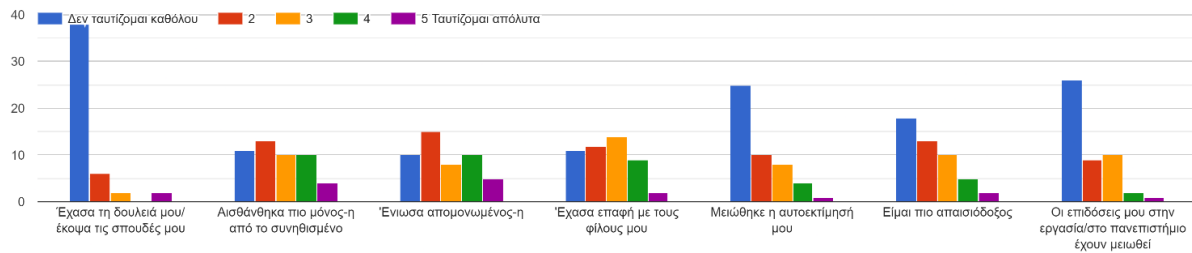


Grapheme 13: diagnosis

Covid

The next chapter of questions concerned the experience of the respondents of the pandemic and its influence on their life and well-being. It seems that hardly anyone lost their job or stopped their studies neither their performance dropped during the pandemic. Less than half people felt pessimistic while the majority of people lost contact with other people or felt secluded.

3.1) Εξαιτίας της πανδημίας

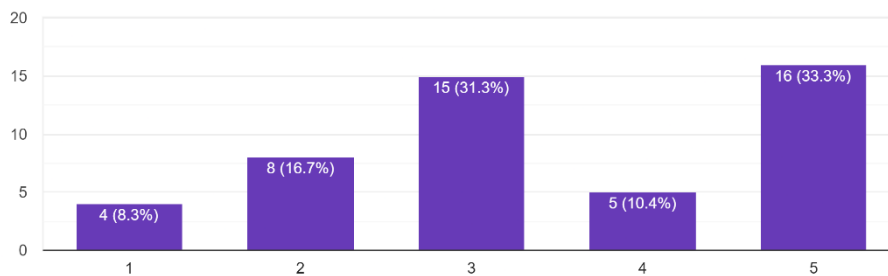


Grapheme 14: pandemic

As can be seen in grapheme 15, the answers to the question if online courses/meetings were a good alternative to meetings in real life were positive.

3.2) Οι διαδικτυακές πανεπιστημιακές/σχολικές/κοινωνικές συναντήσεις ήταν μια καλή εναλλακτική λύση.

48 responses



Grapheme 15: online meetings as alternative

The respondents were asked to name positive experiences connected to the pandemic. The majority of them responded “reconnection with family”, “retrospection” and “free time”. They seem that they used positively this free time to explore their creativity and new talents as well as to take up new hobbies. Only few of them mentioned that the pandemic had no positive impact.

In what ways has the pandemic affected you, the majority said that it had a negative effect (fear of getting infected, fear for their own or their relatives’ lives, become distant etc), 2 of them said that the pandemic had no impact whatsoever while the rest said that it had a rather positive impact (time for reflection, new hobbies, having rest, reconnection with family).

Professional help

In the following set of questions, the respondents were asked to answer questions concerning their experience and thoughts with and about mental health. As it seen from the graph, only 25% have done therapy while 42% have not, but they find it appealing. Only a 10.4% considers therapy a bad idea and they have never had or will try it.

4.1) Ψυχοθεραπεία/ Βοήθεια ειδικού ψυχικής υγείας

48 responses

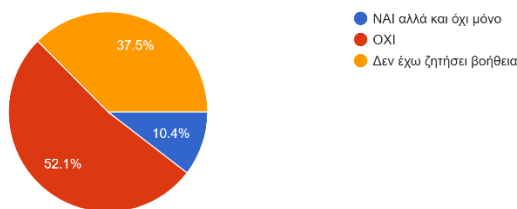


Grapheme 16: therapy

Grapheme 17 is about online therapy and whether it can be a good idea. 10.4% of people have experience with online therapy/coaching, 37.5% said that they have no experience while 52.1% consider online therapy a bad idea.

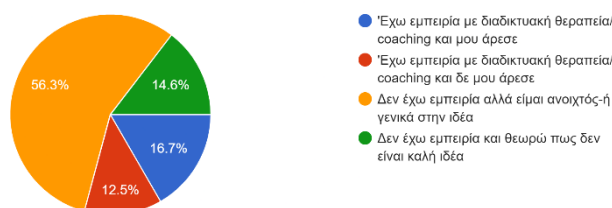
4.2) Εάν ζητήσατε τη βοήθεια ειδικού, ήταν εξαιτίας της πανδημίας;

48 responses



4.3) Διαδικτυακή ψυχοθεραπεία

48 responses

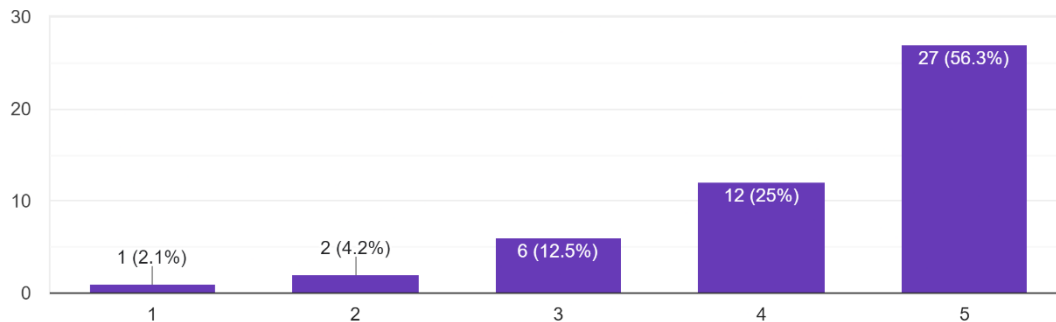


Grapheme 17: Online therapy

When asked if it is easy to get professional help at the place where they live, the majority of the respondents claimed it was. This makes sense since the majority of them live in a city.

4.4) Η λήψη βοήθειας ειδικού είναι εύκολη εκεί που ζω

48 responses

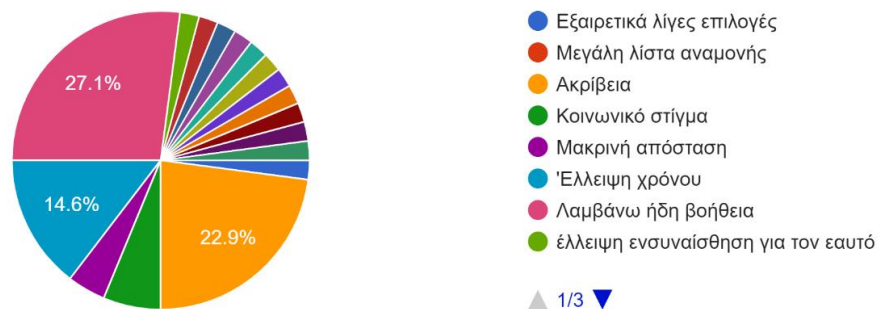


Grapheme 18: easy access to professional help

When asked what the reasons are to not seek professional help, 27.1% of the people say they already receive help. The top three reasons according to the respondents to not seek professional help is that they do not need it yet, it is too expensive, followed by not having enough time for it.

4.5) Τι σε εμποδίζει απο το να ζητήσεις βοήθεια ειδικού;

48 responses

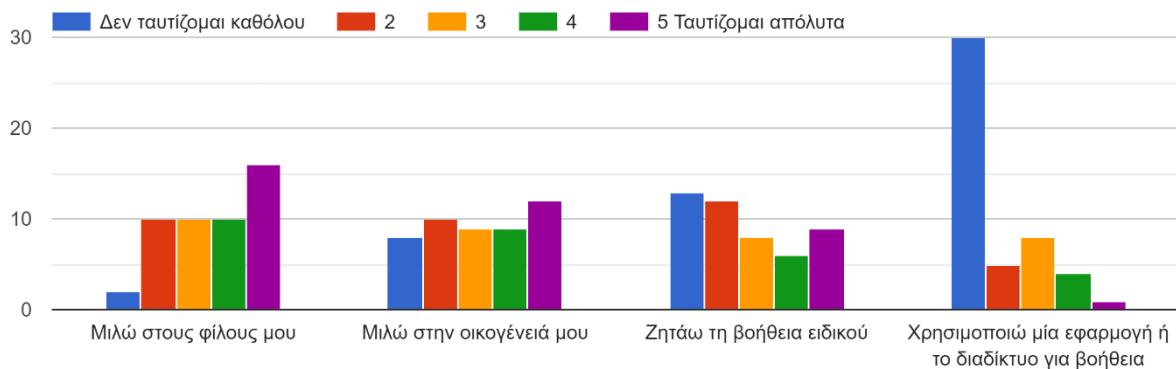


Grapheme 19: reasons not to seek help

Self-empowerment, stress relief, goal setting

The last subtopic concerns self-empowerment, stress relief and goal setting. The respondents were asked where they turn to when they have problems. They were supposed to choose on a Likert scale between 1 “that doesn’t describe me at all” and 5 “that totally describes me”. Mostly, the respondents confide in their friends or family when they have problems. Only a few use and application or the internet to receive help.

5.1) Όταν έχω δυσκολίες...



Grapheme 19: when you have problems...

Responses about strategies that they employ when in need are balanced and varied. 20.8% said that they have no strategy for self-help while the rest of the responses include: therapy, spending time with friends, hobbies, healthy diet, going to the gym, read books or watch films while less do breathing exercises.

5.2) Τι στρατηγικές χρησιμοποιείς για να μειώσεις το στρες;

48 responses



Grapheme 20: Strategies for mental well-being in daily routine

Then the respondents were asked if they use apps for certain strategies that help with their mental well-being or self-empowerment and 47.9% of them said that do not use apps for these purposes . The most common reason to use an app is for meditation (12.5%) and yoga (8.3%) followed by self-empowerment setting.

5.6) Χρησιμοποιώ εφαρμογές ή το διαδίκτυο για...

48 responses



Grapheme 21: app for self-empowerment, mental well-being

“How would you help a friend in need”. In this open question they responded unanimously. The most common response was “listening and simply being there”. Then they offer to help with analysing the problem or providing advice, referring him/her to a specialist or sympathise with them.

The next open question concerned the fields in which they would like to improve themselves. The most common answer was to work on their anxiety management, then their self-confidence. The second most common response was that of self-discipline concerning procrastination and sport or eating. Then, responses included: increase social capacity, adaptability to change and feeling less sad.

The question to follow was what they would expect from a self-empowerment/self-worth course. The majority of people responded “increase my confidence”, “mindfulness”, “stress management” and building self-resilience.

4.2.3. Discussion

Based on the data from the online survey on mental health, it can be observed that a significant proportion of respondents reported experiencing mental health issues. For instance, nearly half of the respondents reported feeling anxious or nervous frequently or all the time, while more than a quarter reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless frequently or all the time. This highlights the prevalence of mental health issues among the population and the need for greater awareness and support for those who are struggling with these issues.

It is also noteworthy that a substantial number of respondents reported not seeking help or treatment for their mental health issues. This could be attributed to several factors such as lack of awareness, stigma associated with mental health, or difficulty accessing mental health services. Therefore, it is important to increase awareness and reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues and improve access to mental health services in order to encourage more individuals to seek the help they need.

Moreover, the survey results also highlight the importance of identifying effective coping mechanisms for managing mental health issues. Respondents reported using various coping mechanisms such as exercise, talking to friends or family, and watching TV or movies. While these coping mechanisms may provide temporary relief, it is important to note that they may not always be effective in managing mental health issues. Therefore, seeking professional help may be necessary in some cases to manage mental health issues effectively.

All in all, the results of this survey on provide valuable insights into the prevalence and impact of mental health issues among the population. It underscores the importance of addressing mental health issues and improving access to mental health services to ensure that individuals receive the support and care they need to manage their mental health effectively. The You Heal project aims at addressing the gaps identified above and contribute effectively to the improvement of young people’s mental health and general well-being.

4.3. Romania

4.3.1. Introduction

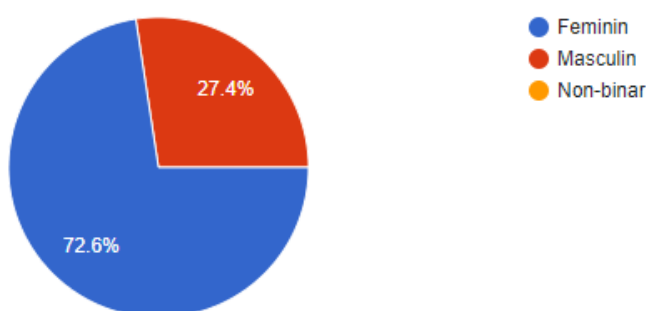
The YOUHEAL developed a questionnaire to identify real-world needs, gaps and opportunities among young people affected by the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. The questionnaire was then translated into Romanian language and put into Google Forms. Each partner had to reach at least 50 individuals so as to gather 250 responses in total. Romania managed to reach individuals. The target group for the questionnaire was young people aged 18 - 26.

This survey was promoted through FITT’s partner organizations and collaborations with the high school student council, also it was promoted at local and national levels through social media channels and national NGO partners we have collaborated in the past, with our efforts we reached a total of 62 reponses. To promote inclusiveness, at least 20% of the respondents had to be from disadvantaged groups, such as minorities, refugees, people who were struggling financially or socially, and people who lived in rural regions. Since the topic was sensitive, the questionnaire was anonymous.

4.3.2. Results

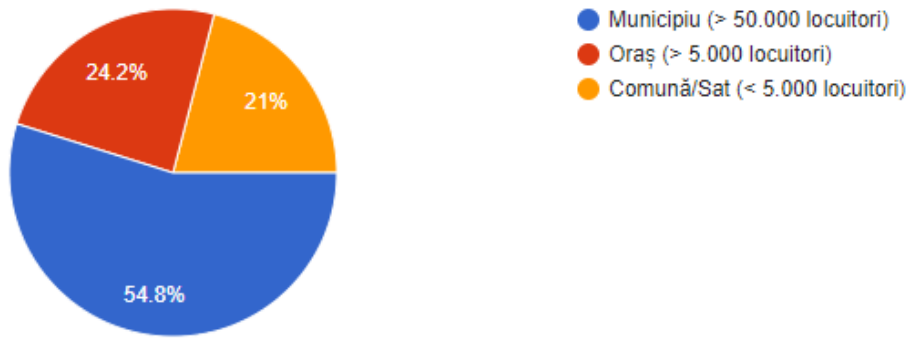
Socio-demographic data

71,2% of the respondents were female and 27.4% male, there were no respondents that identified as nonbinary.



Graphic 1: gender

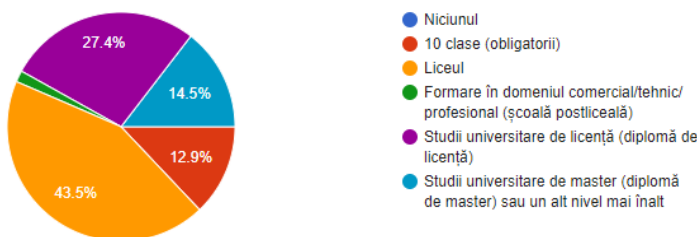
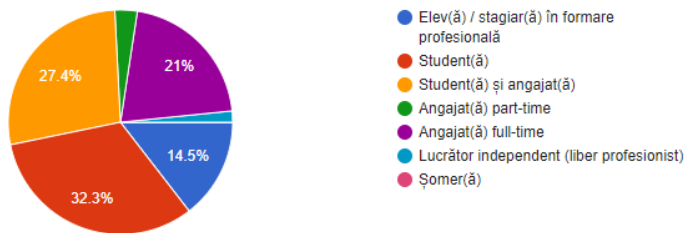
We were able to achieve balanced responses from urban and rural areas, around half the respondents live in larger cities 54.8% with 24.2% living in smaller towns and 21% in rural areas.



Graphic 2: place of living

A majority of 60% are students of which, 27% are university students that are working on the side. 21% work full time and 14.5% are with upper secondary education. The remaining 4.8% represent independent workers and part-time employees that are not in an educational circle.

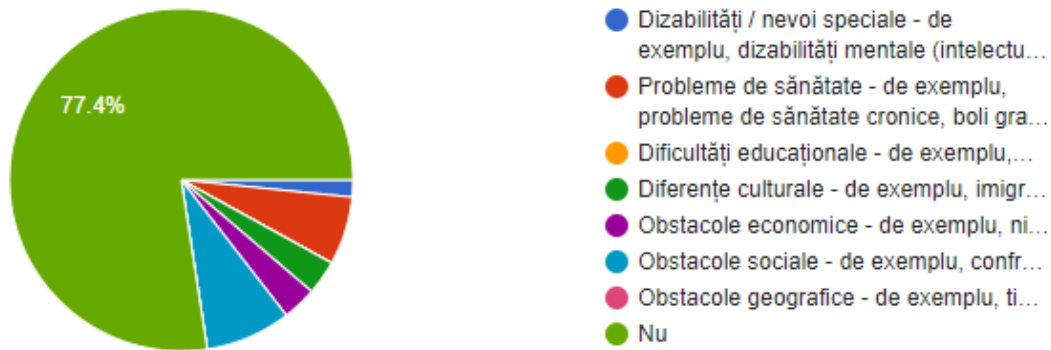
As for educational levels, 43.5% have high school studies and 27.4% are in higher education such as a bachelor's degree. 14.5% have a master's degree and 12.9% have lower secondary education which is considered compulsory education.



Graphic 4: Occupation

Graphic 5: Educational level

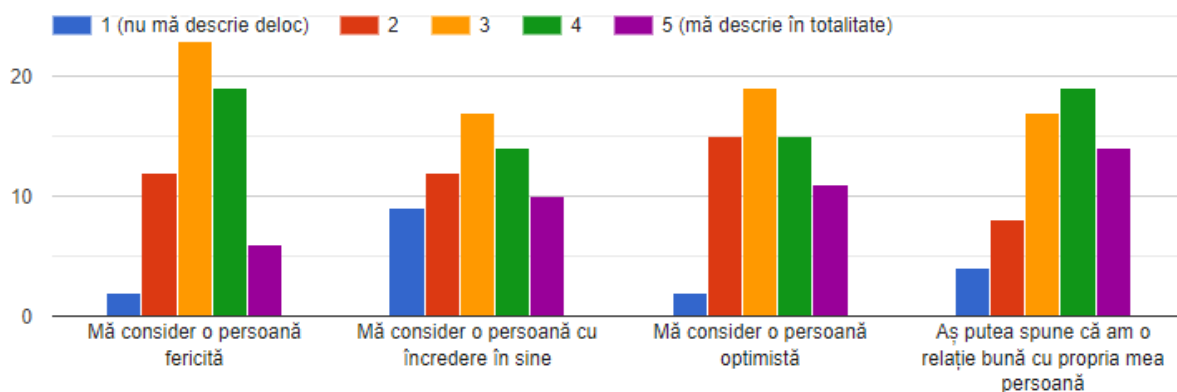
22.6% of the participants consider themselves to be part of some sort of minority group which means our goal of representation is fulfilled. We had participants in almost every group; however, the most common ones were social discrimination (8,1%) and health issues (6.5%). It is important to note that people could only choose one, so they had to choose the one they felt they belonged to the most.



Graphic 6: minority groups

Mental health

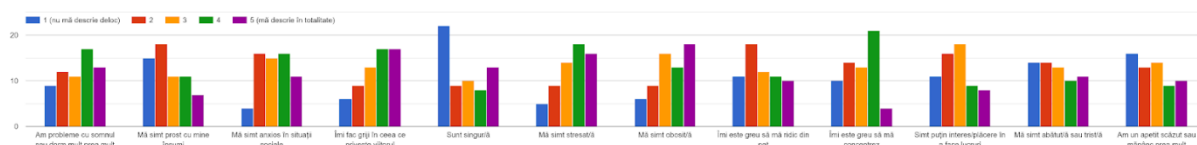
In this chapter, the questions targeted the topic of mental health. When assessing the mood or state of mental health of the respondents, the timeframe of the last 3 months was used. It was measured using a Likert scale going from 1 “it doesn’t describe me at all” to 5 “it totally describes me”. As it is seen below, when asked about their general happiness, self-esteem, optimism and relationship to themselves, the most common answer was the middle ground.



Graphic 7: self-assessment

Although they don’t constitute a diagnosis, the following points are suggestive of a mental health disorder. A majority of the respondents say that they have trouble sleeping, they worry about the future, feel stressed and tired, and have a hard time concentrating.

2.2) Cum vă descriu aceste afirmații atunci când vă gândiți la ultimele 3 luni?

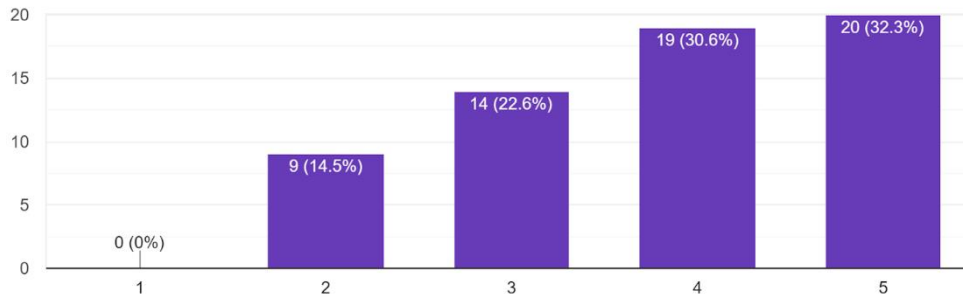


Graphic 8: symptoms of depression

The questions about self-empowerment (bar charts 9 and 10) were answered positively by the respondents (the scale was 1 totally disagree and 5 totally agree). 39 respondents feel like they can achieve change and 47 of them feel that they can change their own situation, therefore we can assume that if young people are offered the opportunity and tools to improve their mental health and skills, they will have an active interest in doing so.

2.3) Simt că pot obține o schimbare adevărată prin acțiunile mele.

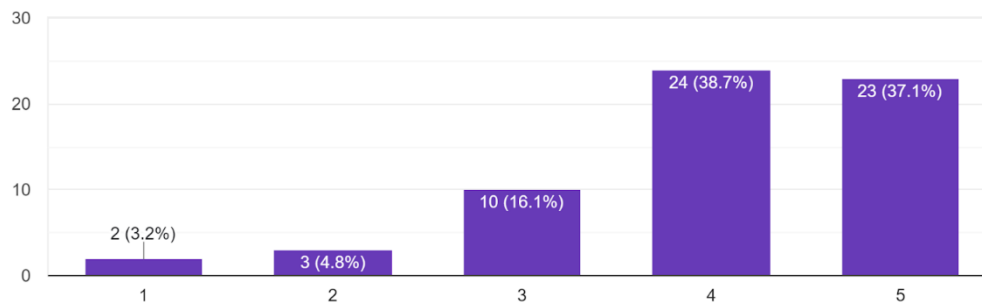
62 responses



Graphic 9: the power to achieve change

2.4) Simt că am puterea de a-mi schimba propria situație.

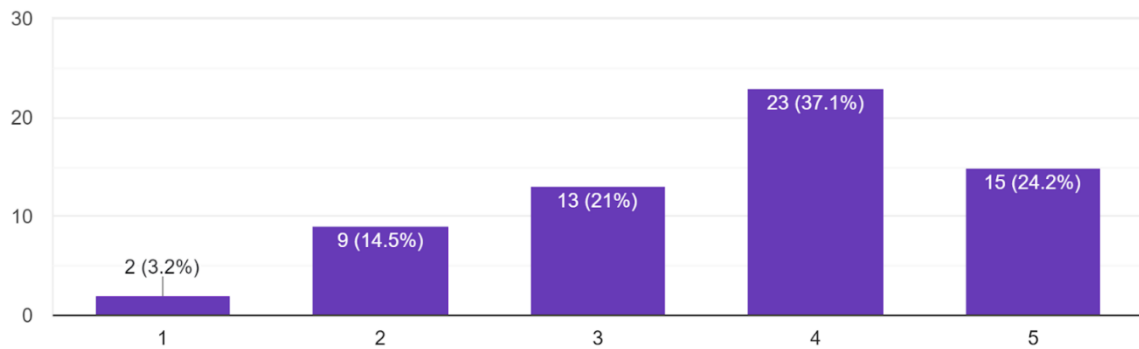
62 responses



Graphic 10: the power to change one's own situation

2.5) Îmi stabilesc obiective.

62 responses

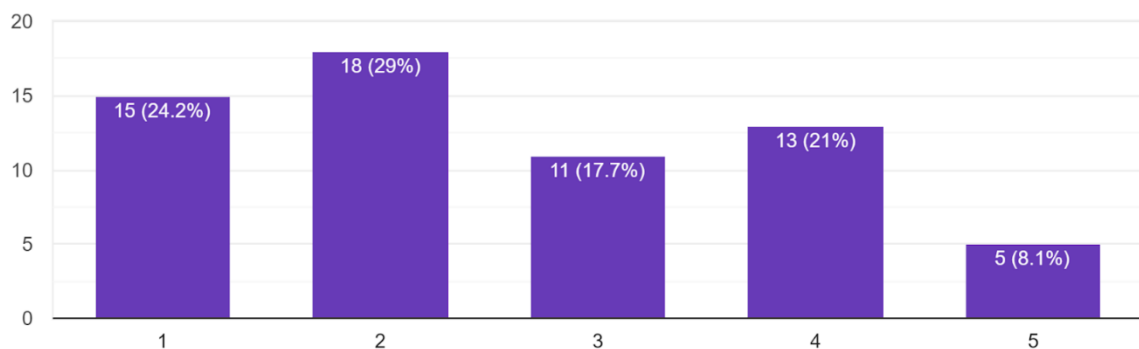


Graphic 11: goal setting

Regarding the degree that mental health issues have influenced their job/uni/school performance, the answers were ambivalent. More than half responded that it doesn't influence their performance.

2.6) Îmi este greu în ceea ce privește performanțele mele la locul de muncă/universitate/școală din cauza sănătății mele mintale.

62 responses



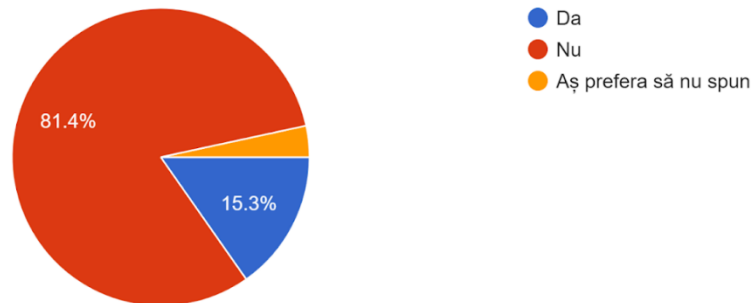
Graphic 12: work/uni performance

In the open question “What worries you the most currently” the answers can be broken down into 3 categories: 1) finishing my studies, 2) financial difficulties, 3) state of the country and world/climate change/war, most answers either relate to external factors like finances or war but there are also repeating issues as to not feeling good enough in their education, work, or personal life.

In graphic 13, 81.4% of the respondents have not been formally diagnosed, while those who have/had, chosen equally from each option, the result here might reflect respondents not understanding the question clearly.

2.8) Ați fost diagnosticat/ă cu o tulburare/boală psihică de către un profesionist? (răspunsul este opțional)

59 responses

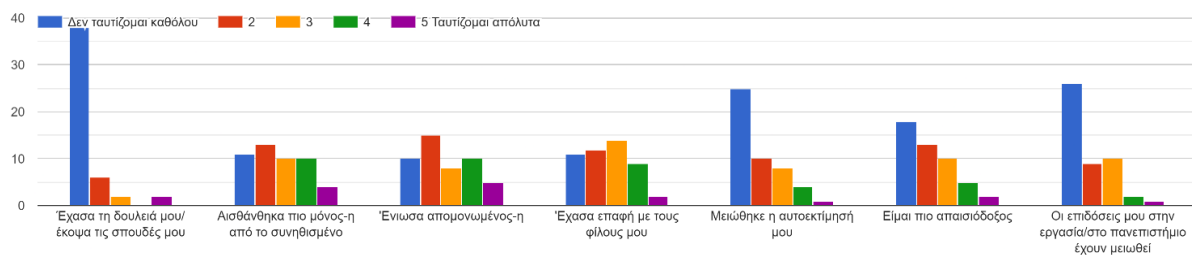


Graphic 13: diagnosis

Covid

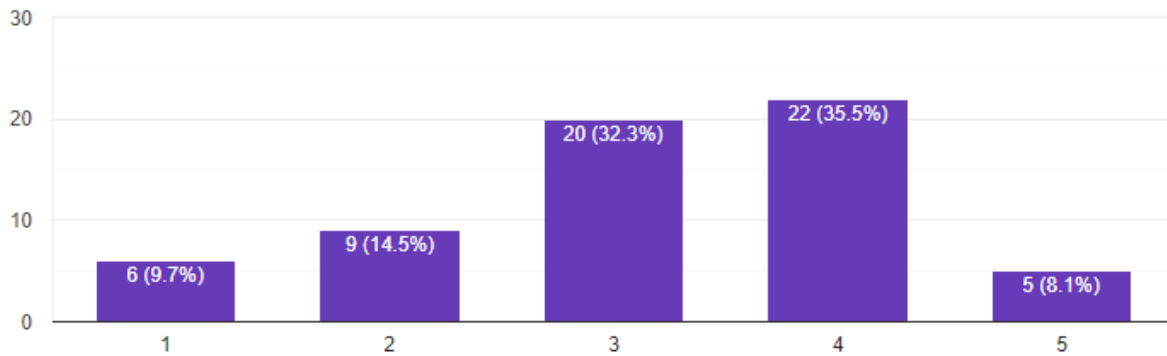
The next chapter of questions concerns the experience of the respondents through the pandemic and its influence on their life and well-being. It seems that hardly anyone lost his job or stopped his/her studies however more than half felt affected by loneliness and isolation.

3.1) Εξαιτίας της πανδημίας



Graphic 14: pandemic

As can be seen in graphic 15, the answers to the question “if online courses/meetings were a good alternative to meetings in real life” were mostly positive.



Graphic 15: online meetings as an alternative

The respondents were asked to name positive experiences connected to the pandemic. The majority of had similar answer on how they had the opportunity to start a healthier routine for them with exercise and food and exploring their mental health, but also improving their digital skills because of the need for “living” online. Only a few of them mentioned that the pandemic had no positive impact.

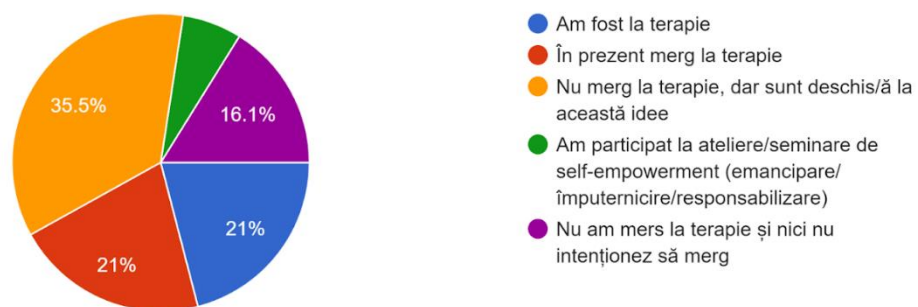
“In what ways has the pandemic affected you”, the answers were mixed, 14 people mentioned they had definitely negative experience, one person even mentioned they dropped out of school because they were not able to adapt to the change, on the other side 12 people mentioned that the pandemic offered more time to work on themselves and improve on their health. the rest of the respondents considered that the pandemic had both positive and negative effects, the most common negative answer was that they lost relationships with people and they developed anxiety because of how uncertain the situation was.

Professional help

When the respondents were asked about seeking professional help, going to therapy or generally working with a professional for their mental health, 35.5% mentioned that they don’t go to therapy but are open to it, while 21% of respondents says they are going and another 21% mentioned that they have been to therapy once or several times, lastly 6.5% of respondents have used workshops or seminars for self-empowerment and only 16.1% would not want to go to therapy.

4.1) Terapie/ajutor profesional.

62 responses

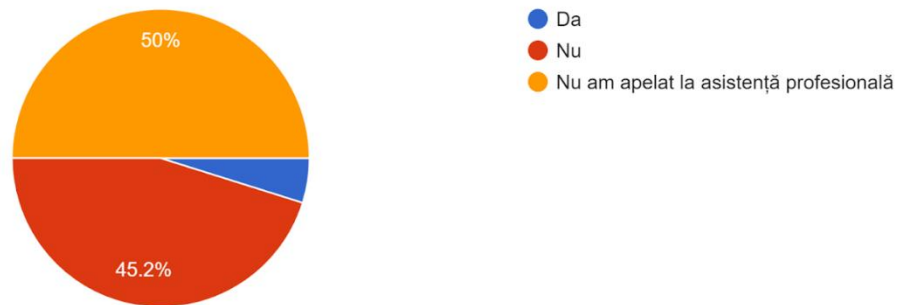


Graphic 16: Therapy

A surprising result, although most people mentioned in the previous questions that they would be open to therapy and working with professionals for their mental health, 50% chose to not seek professional assistance and 45.2% satiated that if they did seek professional help, it was not because of the pandemic, while only 4.8% have gotten professional help because of the pandemic.

4.2) Dacă ați apelat la asistență profesională - a fost/este din cauza pandemiei?

62 responses

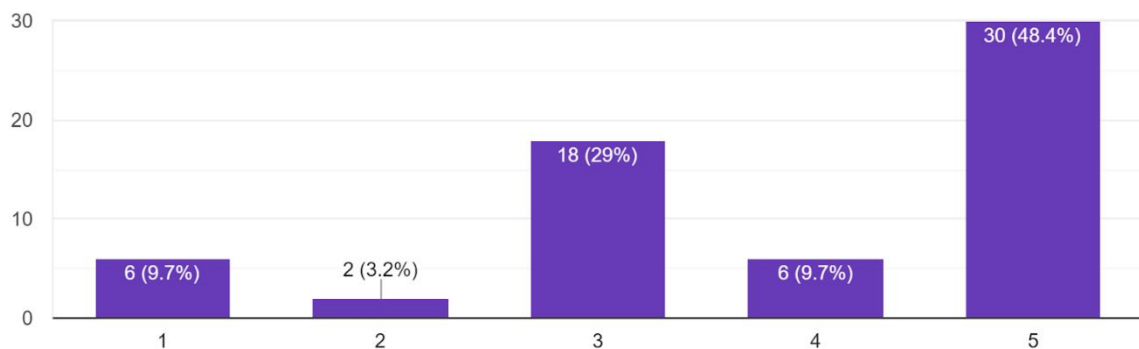


Graphic 16 & 17: professional help

When asked if it is easy to get professional help at the place where they live, half of the respondents claimed it was. Taking into consideration the previous answers and these results it's most probable that for people in rural areas its harder to get professional help.

4.4) Obținerea de ajutor (profesional) este accesibilă acolo unde locuiesc eu.

62 responses



Graphic 18: easy access to professional help

When asked what the reasons are for not seeking professional help, the top three reasons according to the respondents to not seek professional help are that it is too expensive, they don't have enough time and 11.3% are already receiving help.

4.5) Ce vă împiedică să obțineți ajutor/asistență profesional/ă?

62 responses

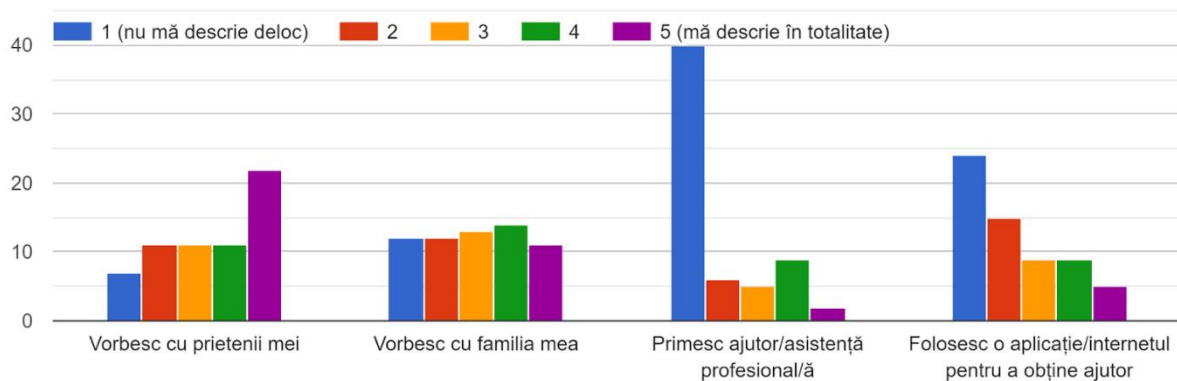


Graphic 19: reasons not to seek help

Self-empowerment, stress relief, goal setting

The last subtopic concerns self-empowerment, stress relief, and goal setting. The respondents were asked where they turn to when they have problems. They were supposed to choose on a Likert scale between 1 “that doesn’t describe me at all” and 5 “that totally describes me”. Mostly, the respondents confide in their friends or family when they have problems. A similar amount also uses an application or the internet to receive help.

5.1) Atunci când am probleme...

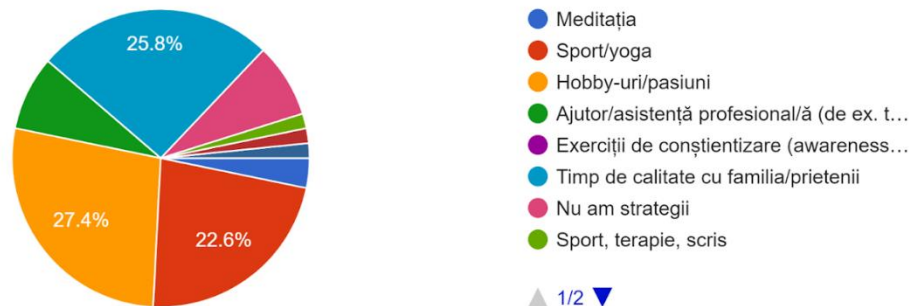


Graphic 19: when you have problems...

In responses about strategies that they employ for reducing stress the top 3 answers mentioned 27.4% hobbies and passions, 25.8% spending time with family and friends, and 22.6% do sports and yoga.

5.2) Ce fel de strategii folosiți pentru a reduce stresul? (Indicați-o pe cea mai folosită)

62 responses

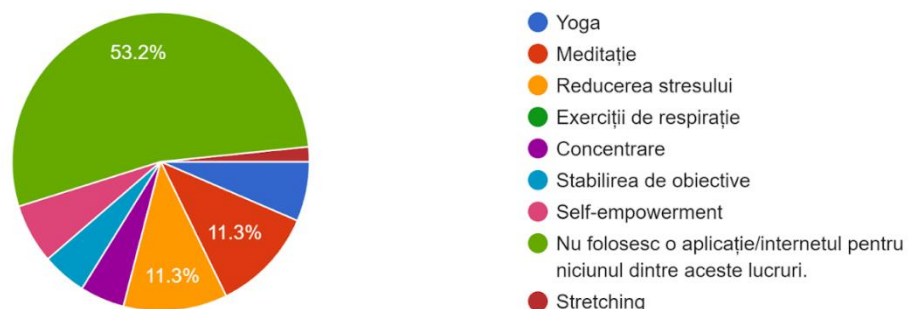


Graphic 20: Strategies for mental well-being in daily routine

Also, regarding strategies for improving self-esteem a big majority of respondents had similar answers regarding spending time on themselves relaxing, doing sports, or learning a new skill.

5.6) Folosesc o aplicație/internetul pentru... (Indicați-o pe cea mai folosită)

62 responses



Graphic 21: app for self-empowerment, mental well-being

When asked if they use an app or online service, half of the respondents mentioned they don't use apps for any of the options indicated in the form, and 22.6% say they use apps for meditation and self-improvement.

"How would you help a friend in need". In this open question they responded unanimously. The most common response was "listening and simply being there". Then they offer to help with analysing the problem or providing advice, referring him/her to a specialist or sympathising with them.

The next open question concerned the fields in which they would like to improve themselves. The answers were very diverse varying from arts, to studies to be better at their job to improve their self-esteem, there was no pattern or major similarity in their answers.

The question to follow was what they would expect from a self-empowerment/self-worth course. The majority of people responded "increase my confidence", "how to develop a good routine and "stress management".

4.3.3. Discussion

After analyzing the data from the survey the main takeaways are that people have been more aware of mental health problems and how much they are affected by them, the possibility of being affected by these issues also before the pandemic is high, just that before, there was no “culture” of mental health in Romania so people would not feel ok to talk about it and seek help, this could be a reason why when asked if they seek professional help, majority of correspondents are still reserved in doing so.

For now, the strongest support system respondents are using when confronting mental issues such as depression and fatigue, is relying on their family and friends and talking about their problems, however, based on the data collected people also require more support on specific issues, especially improving their self-esteem

4.4. Serbia

4.4.1. Introduction

For the national competencies report in Serbia, the YOUHEAL team wrote a questionnaire to identify real-world needs, gaps and opportunities. This questionnaire was then translated into the national languages of the partners. It was translated to Serbian, checked and then put in Google Forms. The online questionnaire aimed to reach 50 young individuals in Serbia, to reach 250 people altogether. The target group for the questionnaire was the same as for the project, namely young people between the ages of 18 and 26.

The target group was contacted through the social media of the Vojvodina Environmental Movement, shared with young people active in the organisation, and sent to youth organisations to disseminate it to their active young people.

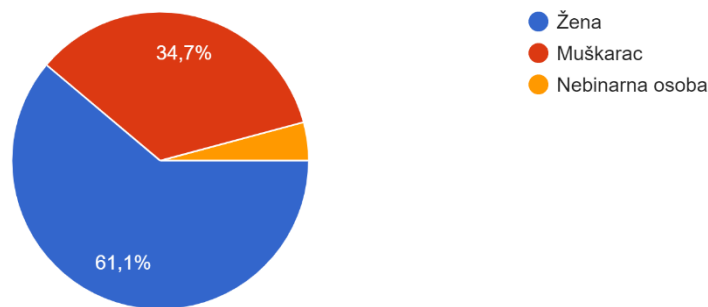
The questionnaire was sent out in January of 2023, and a second wave started in February to reach the agreed-upon number of 50 people. Eventually, 73 people were reached. However, one had to be excluded due to being too old to fall into the target group.

4.4.2. Results

Socio-demographic data

The first part of the online survey concerned the socio-demographic elements of the participants. 72 Serbians answered the survey, of whom 61,1% were female. Because mixed methods of contacting were used, such as the snowball method, we couldn't guarantee a gender balance. Three people identified as non-binary (4,2%).

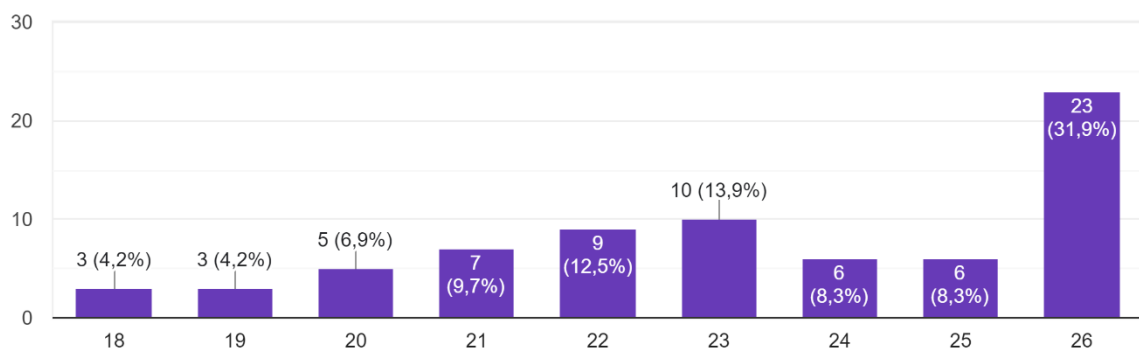
1.2) Rod
72 одговора



Graphic 1: gender

Since the target group are young people between 18 and 26, the participants also had to fall into that age group, and our sample included people from that age. One of the possible weaknesses is that the most considerable percentage of participants was 26 years old (31,9%).

1.3) Godine
72 одговора

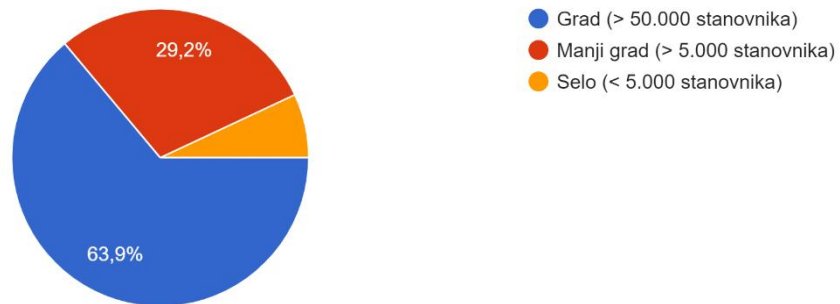


Graphic 2: age

Most survey respondents lived in a city (63,9%), 29,2% lived in a town, and 6,9% lived in the countryside.

1.4) Mesto stanovanja

72 одговора

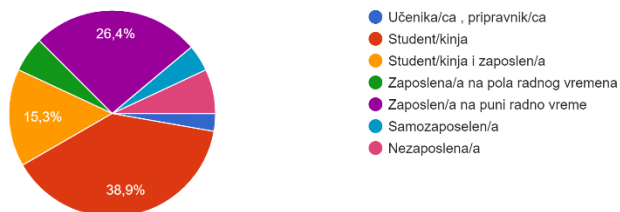


Graphic 3: the place of living

As can be seen in graphic 4, most of the participants are students (38,9%), 26,4% are full-time employed, and students and employed are 15,3%. Unemployed are 6,9%, part-time employed 5,6% and self-employed 4,2%.

1.5) (glavno) zanimanje

72 одговора

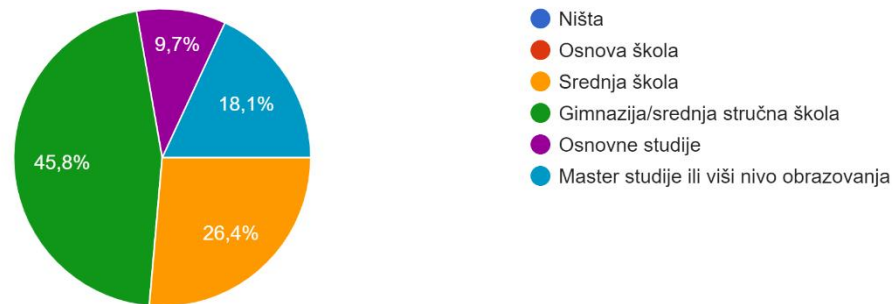


Graphic 4: occupation

Concerning educational level, most of the participants have high school finished (72,2%). Bachelor studies have finished 9,7% of participants, and Master studies 18,1%.

1.6) Koji je najviši nivo obrazovanja koji si završio/la?

72 одговора

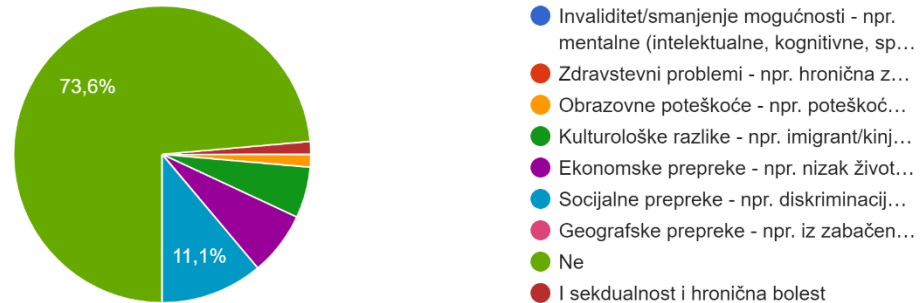


Graphic 5: Educational level

16,4% of the participants consider themselves part of a minority group. We had participants in almost every group; however, the most common were participants facing social discrimination (11,1%), economic issues (10,3%), cultural discrimination (5,6%), and educational issues (1,4%).

1.7) Da li pripadaš nekoj od sledećih grupa osoba sa smanjenim mogućnostima (označite ukoliko se odnosi na vas)?

72 одговора



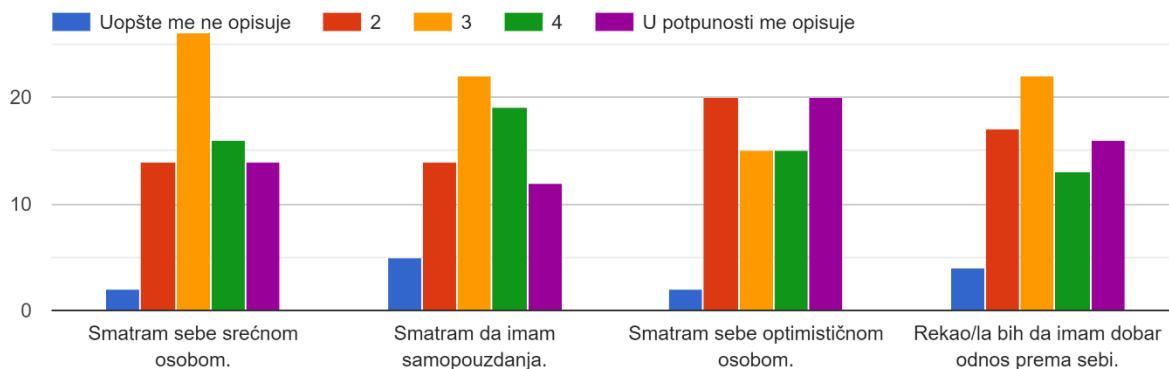
Graphic 6: minority groups

Mental health

In this chapter, the questions surrounded the topic of mental health. When assessing the mood or state of mental health of the respondents, the timeframe of the last three months was used. It was measured using a Likert scale from 1, "it doesn't describe me at all", to 5, "it totally describes me". The most common answer was the middle ground when asked about their general happiness, self-esteem, and relationship with themselves. The only question where more respondents chose the negative (22)

than the positive (20) was if they consider themselves optimistic.

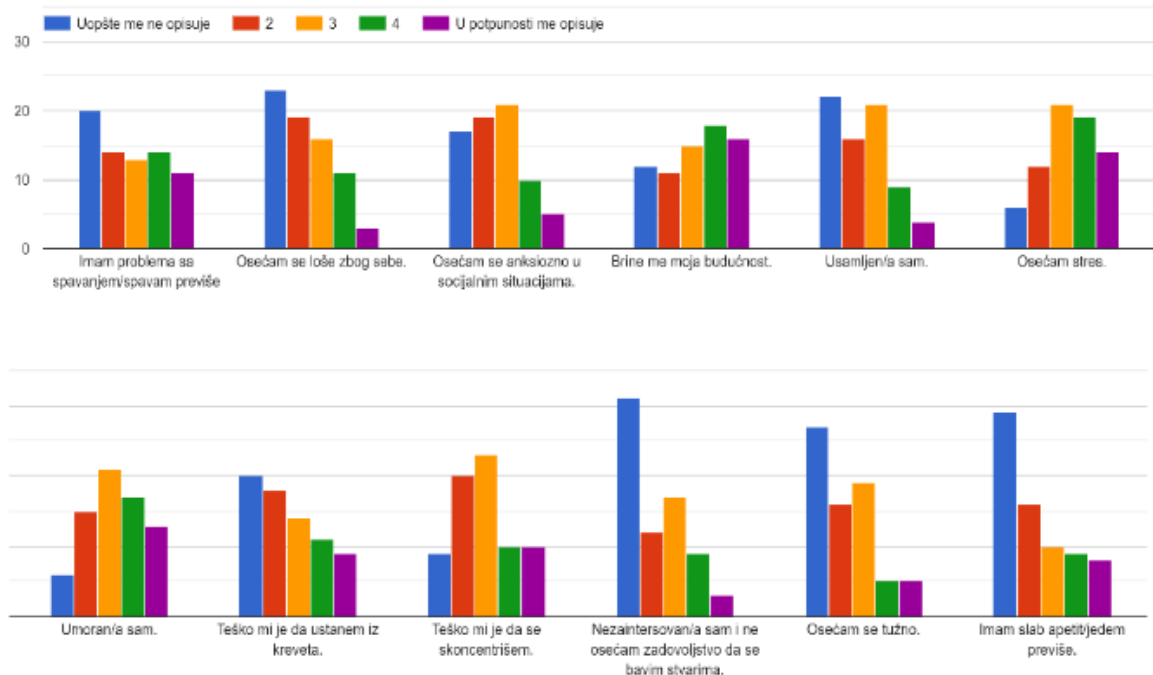
2.1) Koliko te ove tvrdnje opisuju ukoliko posmatraš poslednja tri meseca?



Graphic 7: self-assessment

The following questions are about symptoms of depression. Even though we cannot diagnose because we lack medical expertise, it is still relevant to see if our respondents show symptoms. Interestingly, the symptoms concerning feeling bad, depressed, lonely or not interested in the things they usually love doing show a clear tendency that most respondents do not experience these feelings. However, symptoms related to stress or worrying are entirely present. A majority of the respondents say that they feel stressed and tired and have a hard time concentrating. As concluded through other research activities, we can also see that young people worry about their future (34 out of 72 participants said that the statement “I’m worried about my future” describes them or describes them).

2.2) Koliko te ove tvrdnje opisuju ukoliko posmatraš poslednja tri meseca?

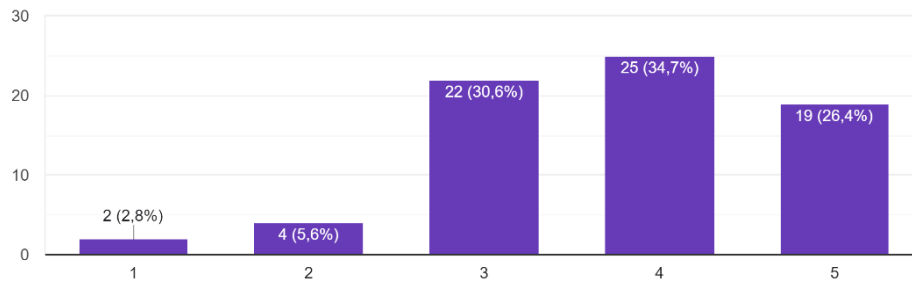


Graphic 8: symptoms of depression

The respondents positively answered the questions about self-empowerment (see graphics 9 and 10) (the scale was 1 disagree and 5 totally agree). 16,4% claimed the power to make meaningful changes, and 30,6% of people agreed that they have the power to change their situation. This result is understandable, considering that young people have a more internal locus of control, which means they believe more in a change they can make rather than relying on others to make a general change.

2.3) Osećam da mogu da postignem pravu promenu kroz svoje postupke.

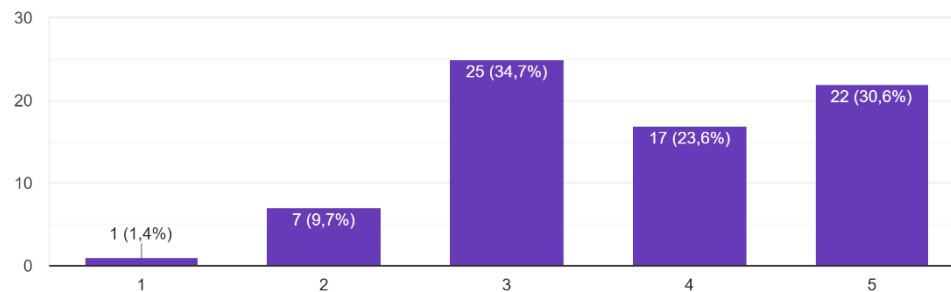
72 одговора



Graphic 9: the power to achieve change

2.4) Osećam da imam moć da promenim situaciju u kojoj se nalazim.

72 одговора

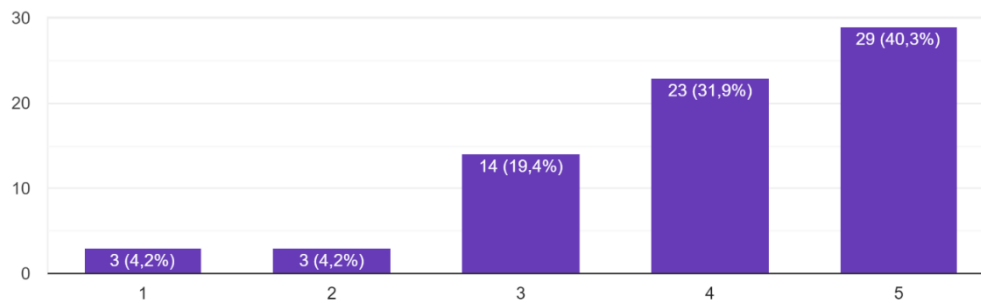


Graphic 10: the power to change one's situation

As seen in graphic 11, most (72,2%) respondents actively set goals for themselves.

2.5) Postavljam sebi ciljeve.

72 одговора

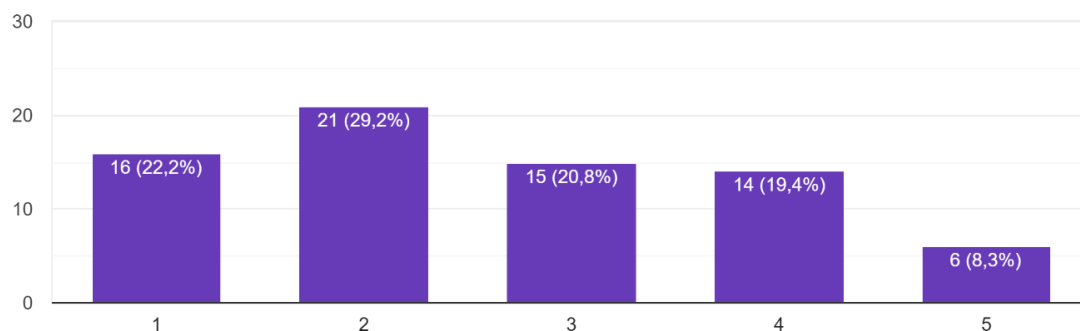


Graphic 11: goal setting

The answers were ambivalent regarding whether mental health issues have influenced job/uni/school performance. Still, almost half said it doesn't impact their performance.

2.6) Imam poteškoća na poslu/fakultetu/školi zbog svog mentalnog zdravlja.

72 одговора



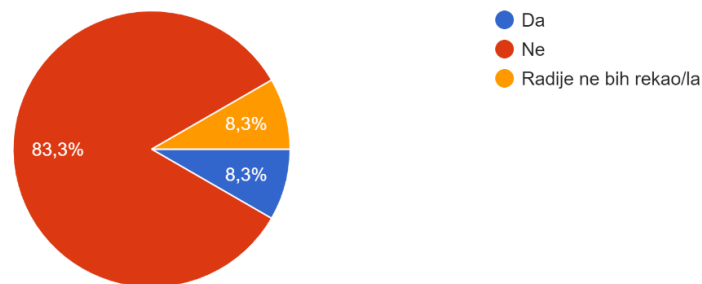
Graphic 12: work/uni/school performance

In the following question, the respondents were asked what makes them worry the most. It was an open question, so they could write whatever was on their mind. However, the answers can be broken down into categories by frequency: 1) anxiety about personal future (mental health, finding a job, financial issues, stability); 2) school and university (exams, studying, getting into desirable faculty); 3) state of the world/climate change/war and 4) personal and emotional relationships in the future (finding a partner, loneliness).

As seen in graphic 13, 6,3% (6) respondents have been diagnosed with a mental illness by a professional. However, one should be aware that it could be more because some people chose not to answer the question, and just because no one has diagnosed it doesn't mean they don't suffer from it (also 6,3% or 8 respondents). The respondents with a diagnosis were asked to elaborate on it, some of the respondents listed two diagnoses. The mental health issues that were mentioned: were anxiety (3), depression (2), bipolar disorder (1), and adjustment disorder (1).

2.8) Da li ti je dijagnostikovao mentalni poremećaj/poteškoća od strane stručnog lica? (nije obavezan odgovor)

72 одговора

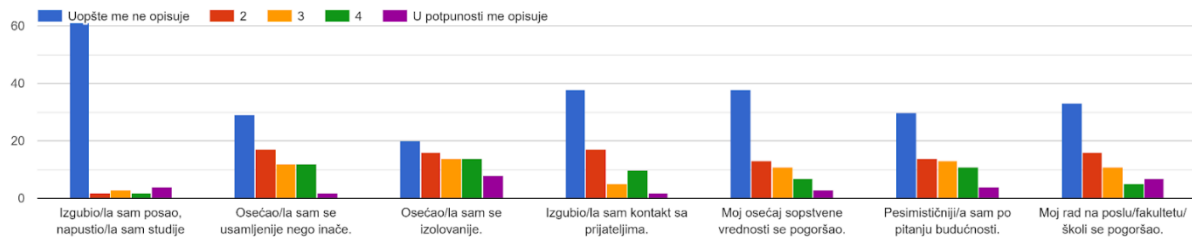


Graphic 13: Diagnosis

Covid

The next chapter of questions concerns the respondents' experience of the pandemic and its influence on their life and well-being. It is interesting to see that the pandemic did not have such a negative impact on the respondents as one might have thought. A majority cannot relate to the negative influences, such as feeling lonelier or more isolated than usual, losing friends or a job through the pandemic, worsening self-esteem, university or job performance or becoming more pessimistic about the future. It is also interesting to note that while most people chose the middle ground option prior, it differs in this question set. For the questions if one felt lonelier and if one felt more isolated during the pandemic, the two most chosen options were both extremes ("that does not describe me at all" and "that describes me"). It seems that either the pandemic greatly impacted one's life or not at all.

3.1) Zbog pandemije



3.1) Zbog pandemije

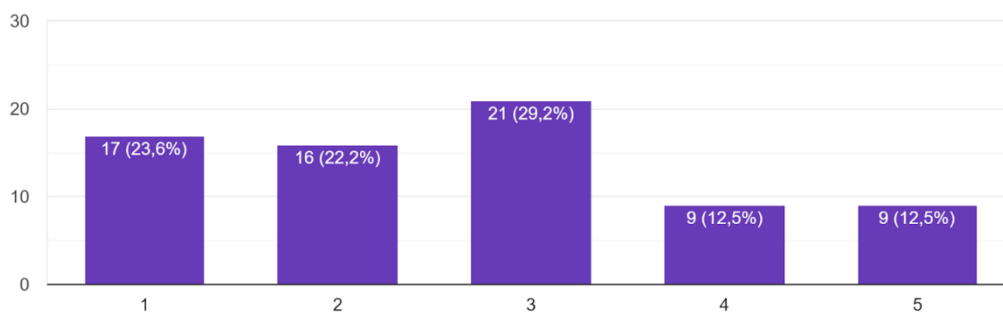


Graphic 14: pandemic

In graphic 15, we can see the answers regarding online gatherings at university/school/work. Most respondents position themselves in the middle. Still, it is also noticeable that 55,9% (33) of respondents graded online gatherings as an alternative on the negative side of the scale (18 or 25% were on the positive side).

3.2) Online fakultetska/školska/društvena okupljanja su bila odgovarajuća alternativa

72 одговора



Graphic 15: online meetings as an alternative

The respondents were asked to name positive experiences connected to the pandemic. This open-type question gave answers which differed a lot. The answers can be summarised into the following categories: time to work on themselves (physical health highlighted), spending time with families and pets, time for hobbies (reading, gardening, learning languages, sports...), slower everyday living (fewer expectations and pressure), the opportunity to volunteer and be helpful in the community. The follow-

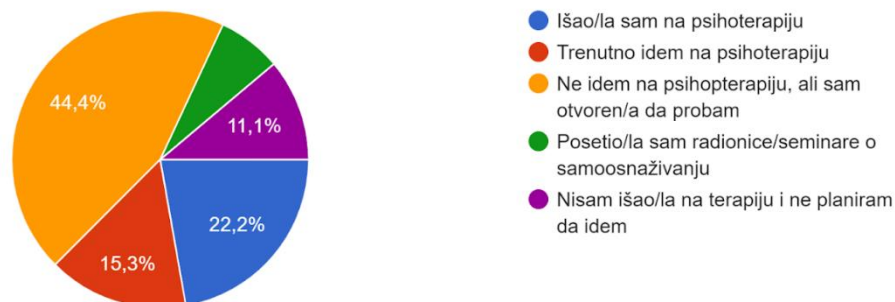
up question was if there were any negative or positive impacts on the respondents' lives. Answers that can summarise answers to this question are: "It took a toll on my mental health in terms of isolation, but it made me focus on myself and work on my emotions and needs, so I'd say it was both bad and good.", "Both. Negative in the sense that socialising has become much more limited, and we have all somehow become more ready to cancel socialising and stay at home alone. Positive because now we pay more attention to important things and friends".

Professional help

In the following questions, the respondents were asked to answer questions concerning their experience and thoughts with and about mental health. The first question (graphic 16) was about therapy. 44,4% are not in therapy but are generally open to the idea, 22% went to therapy, and 15,3% of respondents are currently in therapy. Regarding self-empowerment workshops and seminars, 6,9% have participated. Interestingly, 11,1% of respondents said they never went to therapy and are not planning to. During the pandemic, 9,7% of respondents have sought professional help.

4.1) Psihoterapija/stručna/profesionalna pomoć

72 одговора

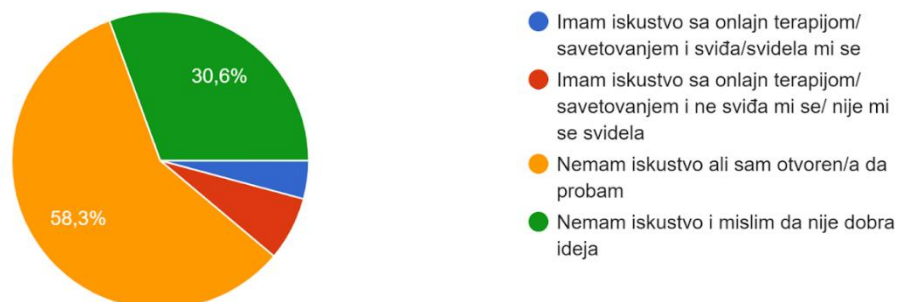


Graphic 16: Therapy

Graphic 17 concerns whether the respondents have experience with online therapy and if they think it can be a good idea. 3 people say they liked it, and 5 of them say they didn't. 58,3% didn't have experience with it but are generally open to the idea, while 30,6% don't think it is a good idea.

4.3) Onlajn terapija

72 одговора

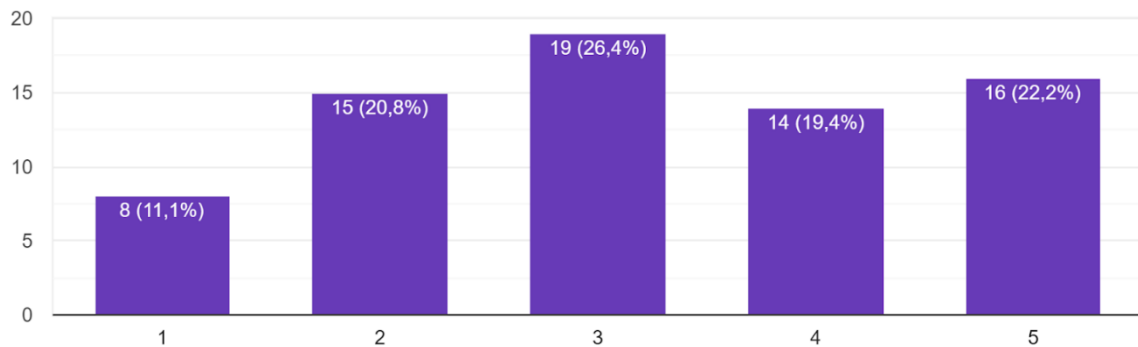


Graphic 17: Online therapy

When asked if it is easy to get professional help at the place where they live, 30 respondents (31,6%) think it is accessible, and 23 (31,9%) are on the opposing end of the scale. In the middle are the unsure participants (26,4%).

4.4) Korišćenje usluga stručnjaka/profesionalaca je lako dostupno u mestu u kom živim

72 одговора

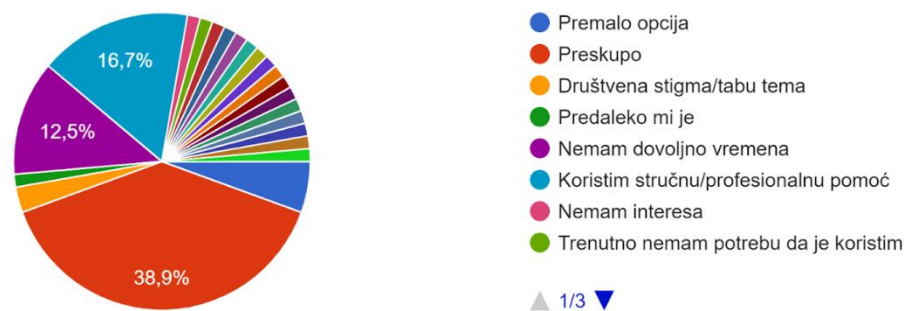


Graphic 18: Easy access to professional help

When asked what the reasons are for not seeking professional help, most people said that it's too expensive (38,9%), they don't have enough time (12,5%), too few options (5,6%), social stigma and taboo (2,8%). Other reasons are: it's too far, they don't need it, out of their comfort zone etc.

4.5) Šta te sprečava da dobiješ stručnu/profesionalnu pomoć?

72 одговора



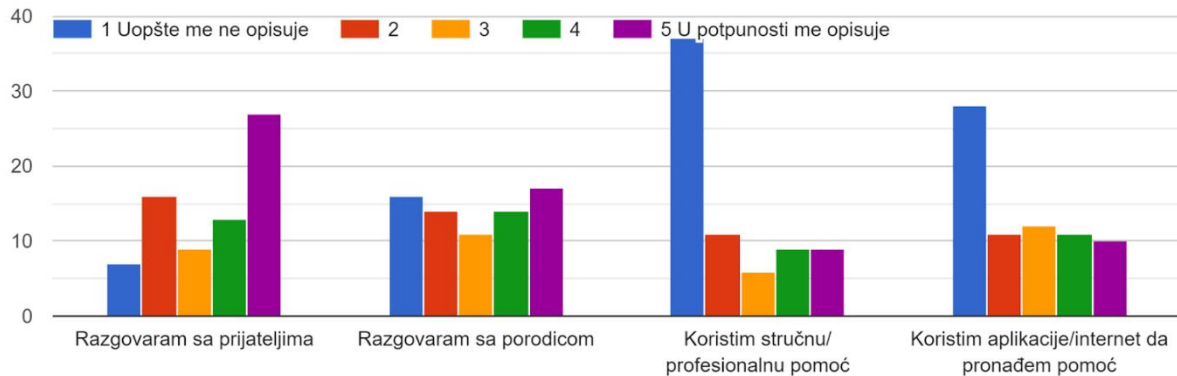
Graphic 19: reasons for not seeking help

Self-empowerment, stress relief, goal setting

The last subtopic concerns self-empowerment, stress relief and goal setting. The respondents were asked where they turn to when they have problems. They were supposed to choose on a Likert scale from 1, "that doesn't describe me at all", to 5, "that totally describes me". Mostly, the respondents confide in their friends when they have problems. The responses to confiding in their family are ambivalent, and no majority can be made out. The respondents mainly do not seek professional help for their problems, a little more considerable percentage use the internet or apps (as seen in graphic

19). Then the respondents were asked to share their strategies for stress relief. The most common strategies are spending time with their friends and family, then on their hobbies and then sports.

5.1) Kada se susretnem sa problemima...

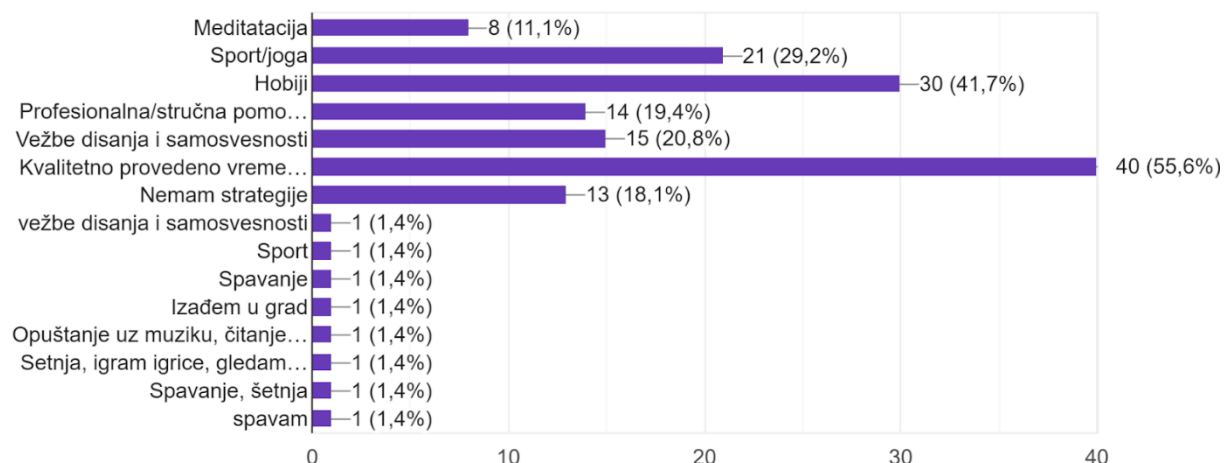


Graphic 20: when you have problems...

The respondents were asked to share their strategies to deal with stress (Graphic 21), and the question was multiple-choice. Most answers (55,6%) were about spending quality time with their friends/families. After that, the most common strategy was hobbies (41,7%), sport/yoga (29,2%), breathing and mindfulness exercises (20,8%), professional help (19,4%), and 18,1% of answers were about not having strategies for dealing with stress.

5.2) Koje strategije za smanjenje stresa koristiš?

72 одговора

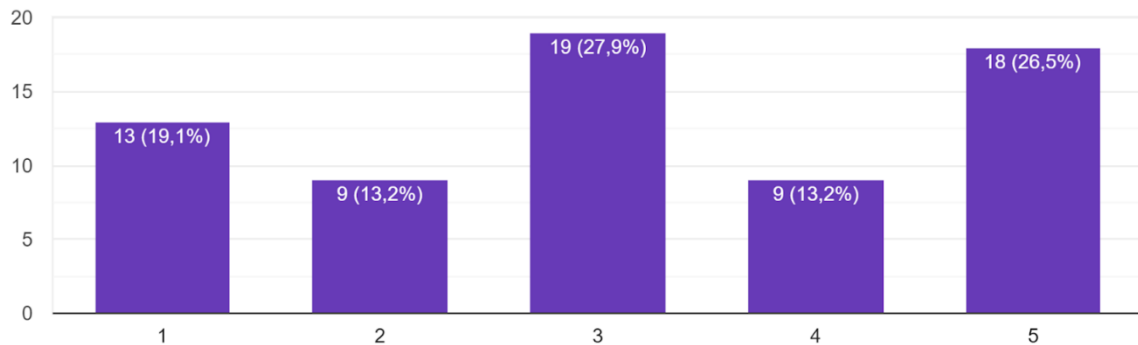


Graphic 21: Strategies for dealing with stress

Considering the use of strategies for mental health, well-being, and self-empowerment (Graphic 22), respondents responded either on the high end of the scale or in the middle. Most respondents positioned themselves in the middle.

5.5) Uključujem strategije mentalnog blagostanja/samoosnaživanja u svoj svakodnevni život (npr. sport, vežbe samosvesti)

68 одговора

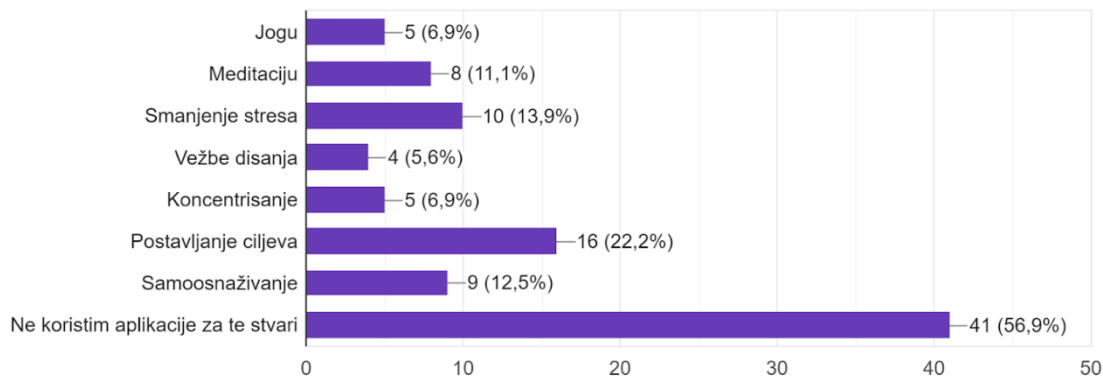


Graphic 22: Strategies for mental well-being in daily routine

Then the respondents were asked if they use apps for specific strategies to help their mental well-being or self-empowerment. 56,9% of people said they do not use apps for those things. The most common reason to use an app is goal setting (22,2%), followed by stress relief (13,9%), self-empowerment (12,5), and meditation (11,1%).

5.6) Koristim aplikacije/internet za:

72 одговора



Graphic 23: app for self-empowerment, mental well-being

The last three questions in the survey were open-type questions. The first one was how they would help their best friend with problems. Most of the answers were the same, most of the respondents said that they would have an open-minded conversation with friends, try to understand and be in which they would like to better themselves, the answers included: self-confidence, communication/active listening, stress relief, anxiety, organisation/motivation/self-discipline, mental health, decision-making, personal and partner relationships. The last question was what the respondents wished for in a self-empowerment/self-worth course. Most respondents answered this question by looking through the lens of availability - they said they need more options and especially

more accessible options. Other respondents said they need good course leaders, good examples, strategies and tips on how to use everything they learned in real-life situations, conversations with professionals...

4.4.3. Discussion

As the results show, our respondents are mildly aware of mental health issues and mental health in general. The need for this topic among our respondents was considered obvious, and the existing gaps in available mental health services are vast. You HEAL project can have an important impact in filling these gaps and providing the space for mental health to be seen and talked about.

As other research activities on this project show, young people from Serbia that took part in this research did not show highly present depression, but anxiety and stress were considerably present. The stress and anxiety about the future are highly present and are mainly related to financial issues, the labour market, “adult life”, and personal and intimate relationships. Related to worrying about the future, when asked about their power to make a change in general, young people agree less with that statement than with one related to making a change in their situation. These statements show that surveyed young people have more internal locus control and feel responsible for their situation, which can motivate them to take action. The critical result of this research is about the things young people worry about the most. Serbia’s youth from this survey expressed that they worry about the future and stability the most, which can be helpful input for the You HEAL project to provide materials for young people in this area. These materials can be tools for planning, visualising (for example, vision boards), routines, and managing stress when dealing with uncertainty.

The next segment of the survey dealt with Covid time. Most participants have chosen a “positive” assessment of the statements. The only statement that participants agreed more was concerning covid effect on school/work performance. This result indicates that young people had challenges adapting to a new uncertain situation and continuing their professional life. This result can be connected with the previous one regarding what young people worry about the most. You HEAL can be a space to recognise these highlighted results of research activities and once again find materials and recourses to provide young people with a sense of security and stability in possible uncertainty in the future.

Concerning attitudes about professional help, more than 70% of young people who participated in this survey have tried therapy, are currently in therapy and haven’t tried but are open to the idea. These results show that respondents know the importance of professional mental health support. On the other hand, 11,1% of respondents said that they have never been to therapy and are not open to it. Not attending therapy is due to lack of money, not being accessible, social stigmatisation and taboo. These results indicate that You HEAL project can fill in these gaps and offer young people the option to care for their mental health in a way that is suited to their needs and possibilities. Since the You HEAL platform will be free of charge and online, it offers young people to work on their mental health without adding more stress, anxiety and pressure. The You Heal platform can also be helpful for respondents who said that they have never been to therapy and are not open to it. For this group of respondents, the platform can offer a space that is a comfort zone for possible foreseen challenges and maybe make them more open to seeking professional help if they ever need it. Additionally, 58,3% of respondents didn’t have experience with it but are generally open to the idea, while 30,6% don’t think it is a good idea. This result is in line with other projects’ research activities where young people said that online therapy is good but not a long-term solution and can be a critical urgent response to some issues. Still, it should be followed by face-to-face therapy.

Concerning stress relief and self-empowerment, on a multiple-choice question, young people responded with spending quality time with their friends/families, hobbies, sport/yoga, breathing and mindfulness exercises, professional help, and 18,1% of answers were about not having strategies for

dealing with stress. Most of these strategies can be incorporated into You HEAL platform, which can offer young people the opportunity to have more strategies to try in one place. Strategies regarding stress, anxiety, and uncertainty of the future are fundamental since most research activities showed that those are the issues most young people face in the post-covid era.

To conclude, young people from Serbia that participated in this survey are mainly open to taking more care of their mental health but feel that obstacles can sometimes be too big (financial, accessibility, time, stigmatisation). As mentioned above, the You Heal platform should help young people care for themselves without these obstacles or at least make them less of a challenge. You HEAL platform should focus on strategies to deal with mental health issues and provide a sense of security and stability in possible foreseen challenges and uncertainties in the future.

4.5. Slovenia

4.5.1. Introduction

The YOUHEAL project addresses digital transformation through development of digital readiness, resilience and capacity. It also promotes active citizenship, young people's sense of initiative and youth entrepreneurship including social entrepreneurship. Project targets those priorities holistically by promoting young people's mental health and consequentially their sense of initiative by strengthening their soft skills.

In addition to these priorities, YOUHEAL also directly addresses EU Youth Goals, particularly MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING, which aims to achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people. With adequate support and timely intervention, young people experiencing mental distress due to the Covid crisis may be able to bounce back as we recover from Covid. This will require a scaling up of existing mental health support, offering interesting, easy access and open-source content with the goal of improving young people's psychological resilience and the use of outdoor socializing activities.

The YOUHEAL project created a questionnaire to identify the needs, gaps, and opportunities among young people impacted by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was translated into Slovenian and put into Google Forms.

The questionnaire was distributed through social media, e-mails, and through acquaintances with the hope of achieving a snowball effect.

Slovenia gathered 89 individual responses, because the questionnaire targeted young people aged 18-26, 12 of the responses were not analysed, from the respondents that were older than 26.

4.5.2. Results

Socio-demographic data

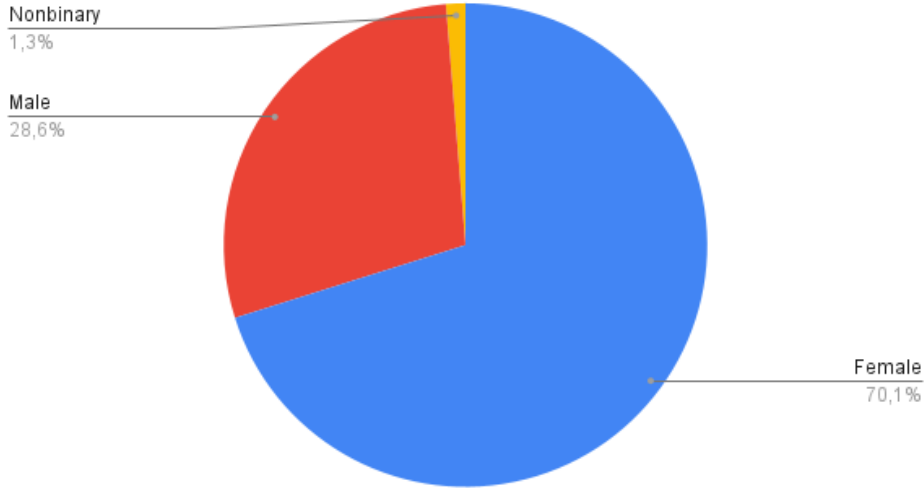
The survey was distributed to Slovenians, although there were options to select the country of Austria, Greece, Romania and Serbia, if the survey would potentially find its way to a foreigner from a partner organization country.

89 people fully answered the survey, all of them had selected the country of Slovenia.

Gender options, that were presented, are male, female, nonbinary, and other. Out of 77 people that fit in our target group, 22 of them were male, which represent 28,6%, 54 of them were female which represents 70,1%, and lastly, 1 respondent identified as nonbinary, which represents 1,3%.

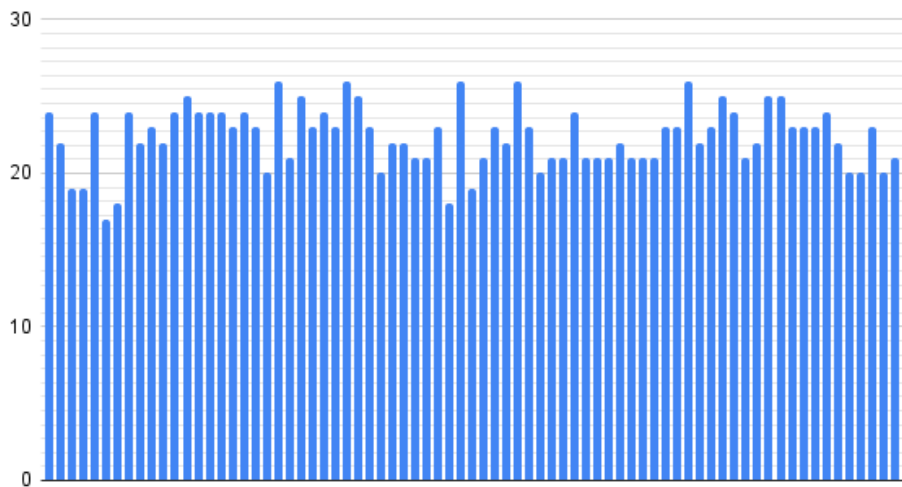
Because mixed methods of contacting were used, we couldn't guarantee a gender balance.

Gender



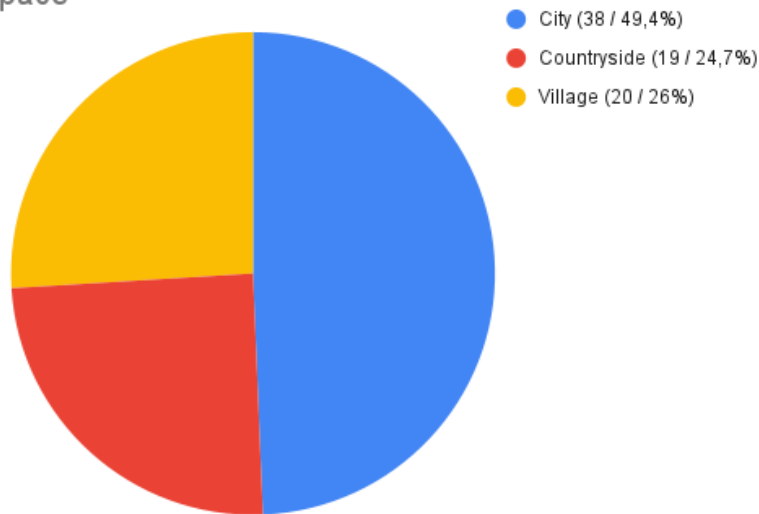
:

Respodnent Age



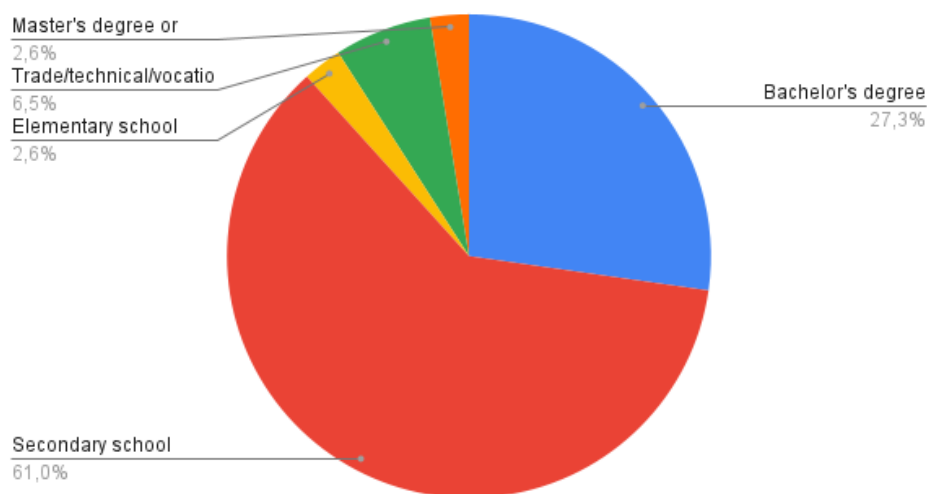
The survey (as the project) targeted young people up to 26 years old. 12 respondents weren't in the age group of under 26, accordingly, the recorded data of respondents aged more than 26 was exempted. We are left with 77 respondents. The average age of the respondents is 22,4.

Living space



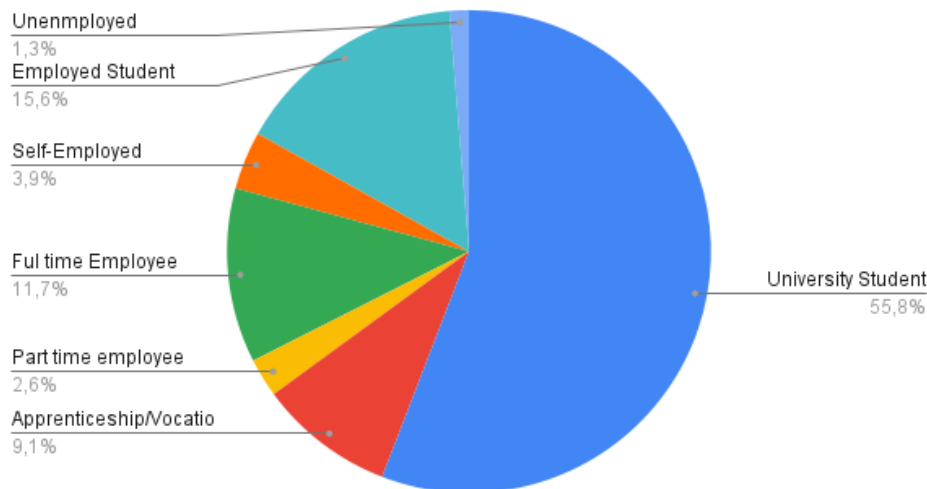
Respondents were able to define their living environment as village (> 5.000), countryside (<5.000), and city (>50.000). 20 (26%) are living in a village, 19 (24,7%) in the countryside, 38 (49,4%) in a city.

Level of Education



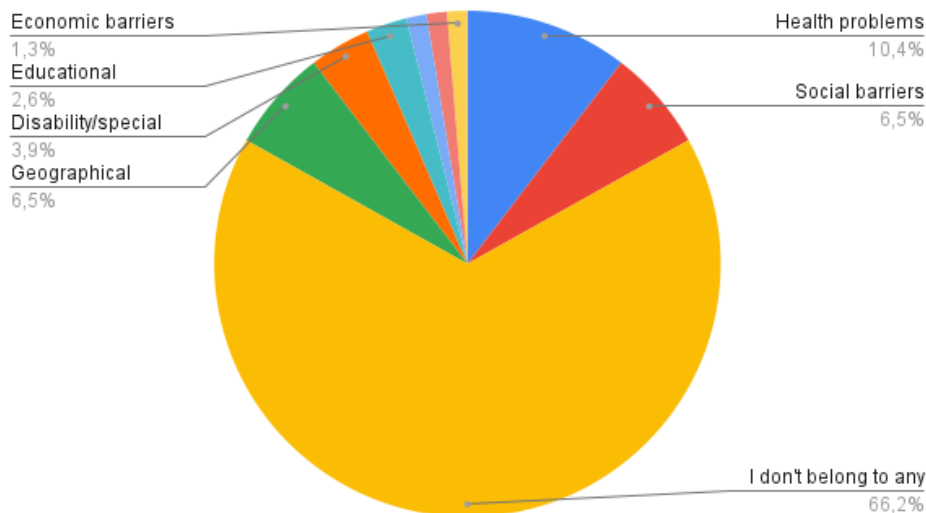
Most respondents (61 %, n=47) reached secondary level of education. Considering the targeted age group, most of the respondents are still students. 2,6% finished elementary school, 6,5 % finished vocational education, 27,3 % have a bachelor's degree and 2,6% have a master's degree.

Employment



55,8% of the respondents are in University, 15,6% are an employed student, 11,7% are a full time employee.

In this section, the respondents were lastly asked if they consider themselves to be a part of the following groups of people with fewer opportunities.



The responses were following:

- I don't belong to any of the groups with fewer opportunities – 51 (66,2%)
- Health problems - e.g. chronic health problems, serious illnesses or psychiatric conditions – 8 (10,4%)
- Social barriers - e.g. facing discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation – 5 (6,5%)

- Geographical barriers - e.g. you are from remote or rural areas, you live on small islands or in peripheral regions, you are from urban problem areas, you are from underserved areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) – 5 (6,5%)
- Disability/special needs - e.g. mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities 3 (3,9%)
- Educational problems - e.g. learning difficulties, early school leaving, poor school performance – 2 (2,6%)
- Economic barriers - e.g. low standard of living, low income, involvement in the social security system, long-term unemployment or poverty, debt or financial difficulties 1 (1,3%)
- Cultural differences - e.g. immigrants, refugees or with a family background of immigrants or refugees belonging to a national or ethnic minority 1 (1,3%)
- Foreign student 1 (1,3%)

33,8% of the respondents consider themselves to be a part of a minority group, that has been made an available option. The largest part (10,4%) are facing health problems, 6,5% are limited by social barriers and 6,5% by geographical barriers.

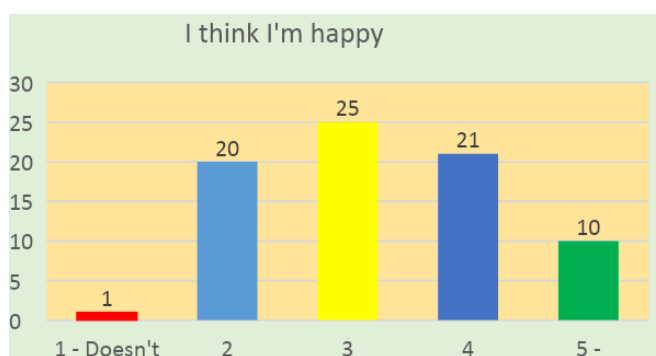
Mental health

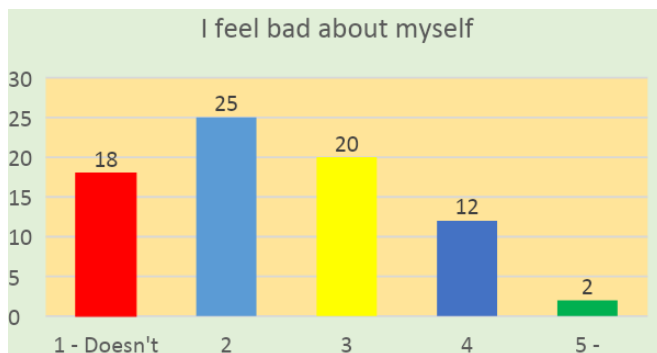
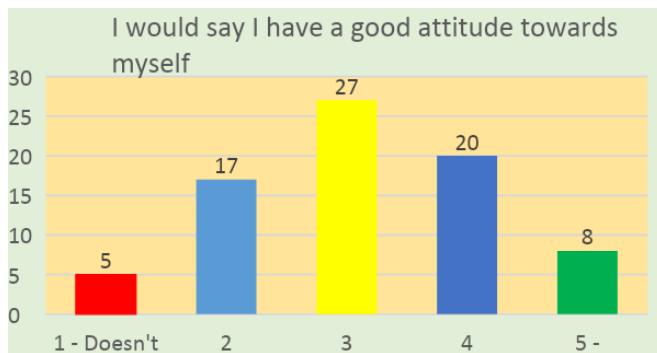
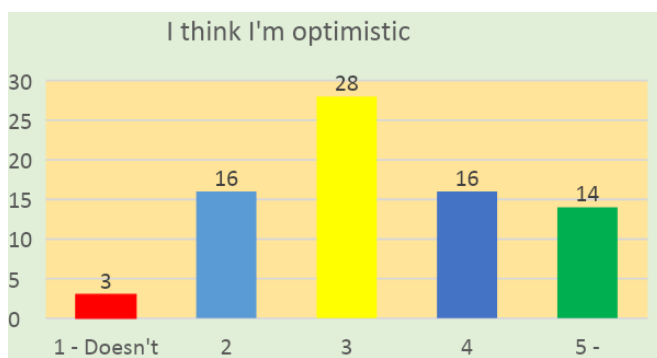
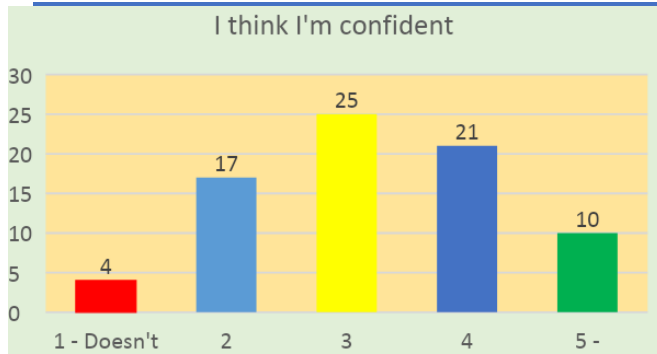
The participants were firstly asked a series of questions, which they needed to grade (from 1 to 5) how they were feeling, what described them in the last 3 months.

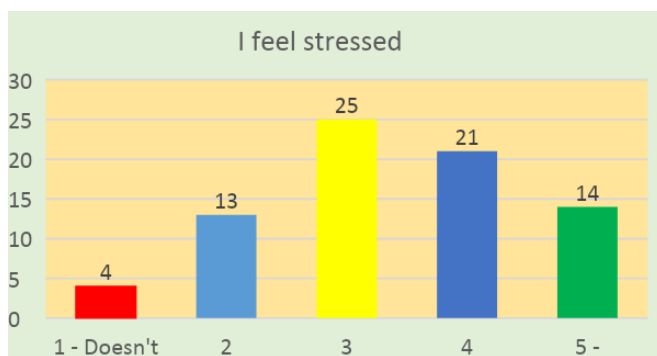
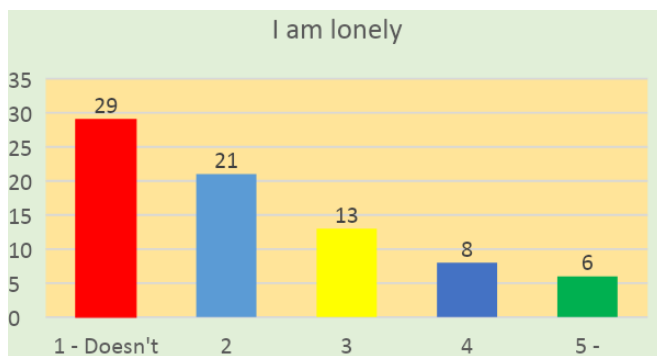
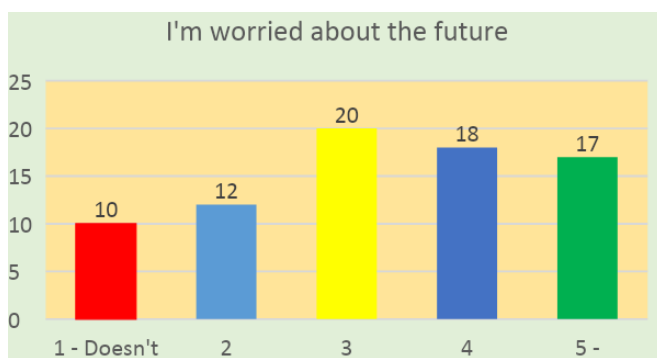
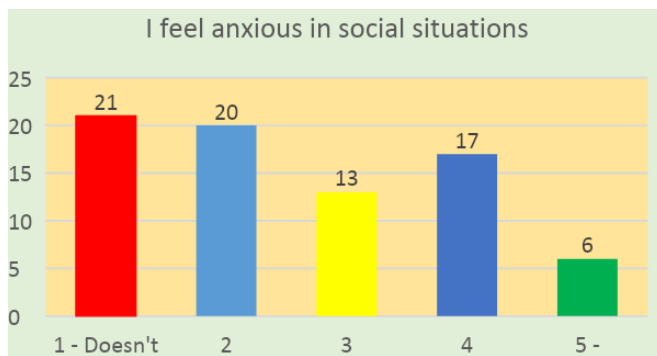
The survey used a Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates that the statement does not describe the respondent at all, while 5 indicates that it fully describes them. The survey covered areas such as general happiness, self-esteem, optimism, and the respondents' relationship with themselves. The most frequently selected response for each of these areas was the middle option on the Likert scale.

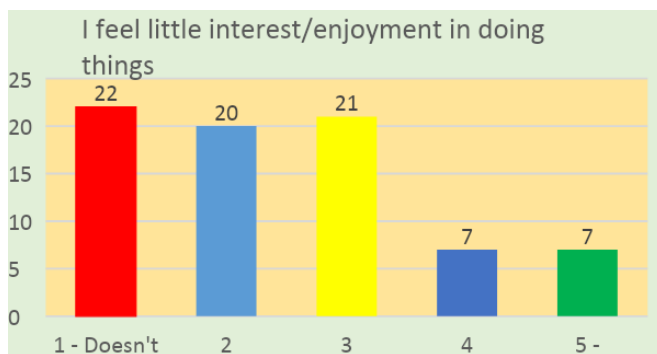
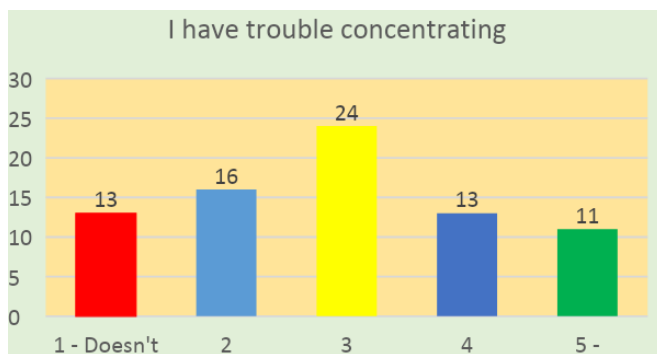
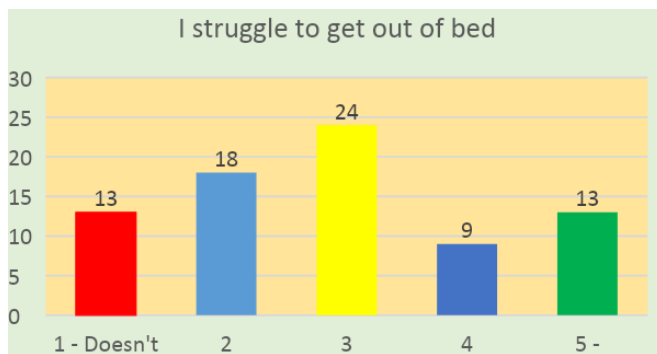
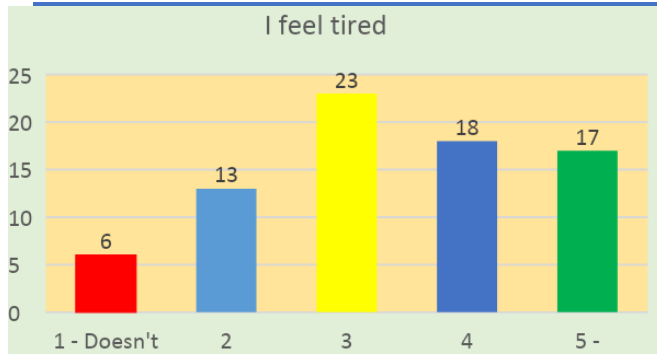
The question with different variations was:

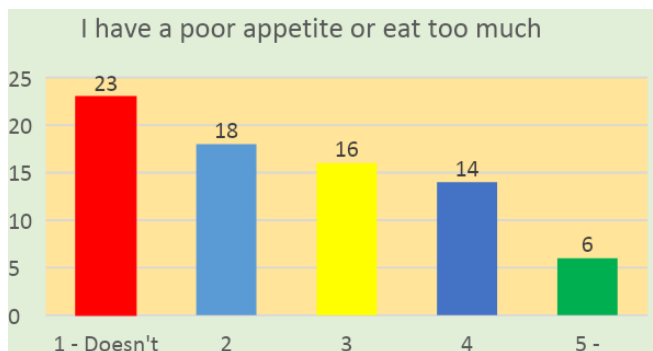
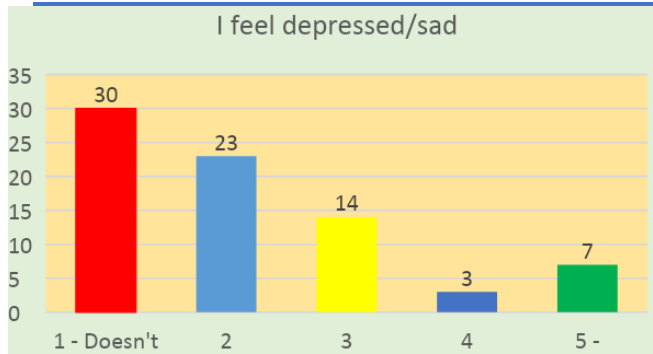
“How do these statements describe you when you think about the last 3 months?”



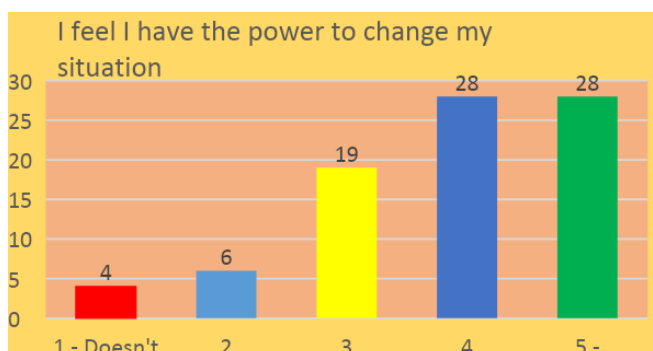
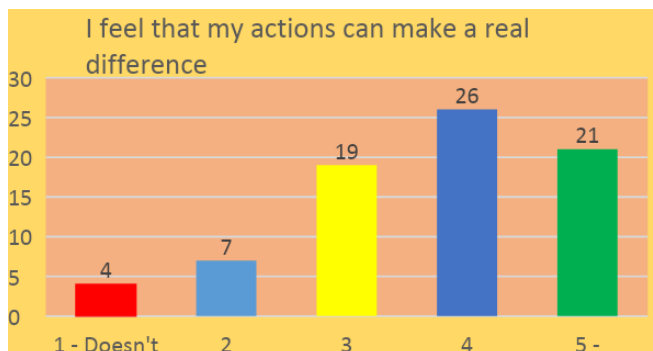


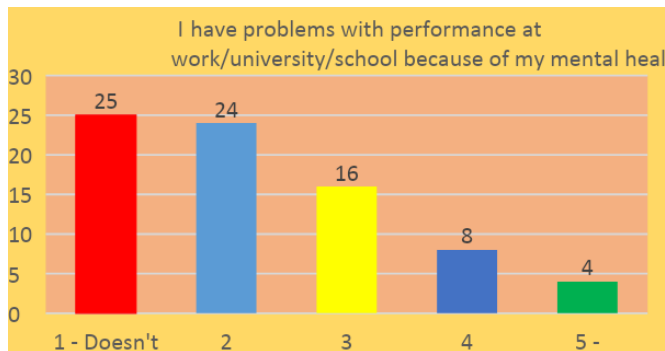






Next, a few questions about self-empowerment followed. Based on the responses from the questionnaire about self-empowerment, the majority of the respondents answered positively. This suggests that many respondents feel that they have the ability to take control of their lives and make choices that lead to personal growth and fulfillment.





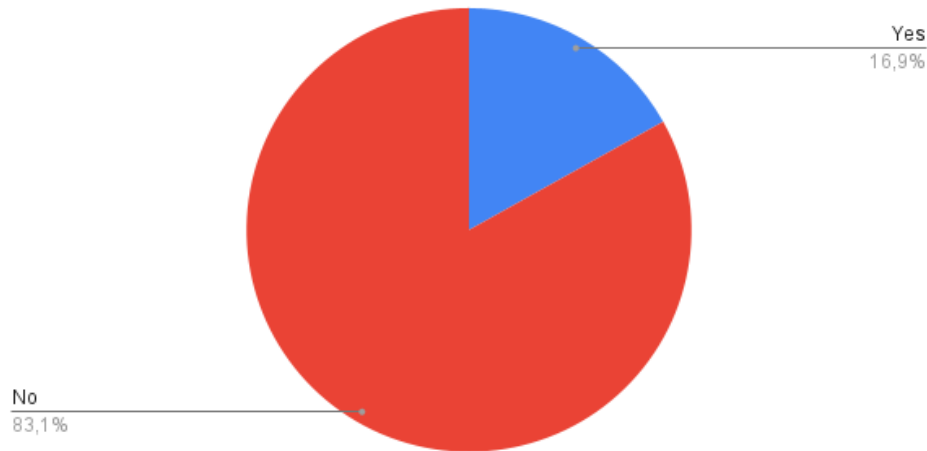
2.7) Participants were also asked an open question “What is your biggest concern at the moment?”.

The respondents were mostly concerned with their school and work performance. Some responses were also concerning the financial problems and financial safety. Some young people also expressed that they are worried about the right career choice and about future. Some concerns that repeated in many answers are also regarding relationships (with a partner, with friends or with family), looks, climate change, lack of motivation, war, health problems, economic situation (capitalism, profit seeking among politicians), inflation.

Some other concerns are also: concerns about getting a driving license, A.I, unhealthy food that is being sold to us, pessimism in society, future of young people in general, self-worth, migrations, coordinating having a family with education.

2.8) When participants were asked if they were diagnosed by a professional, 13 (16,9%) answered with yes and 64 (83,1%) with no.

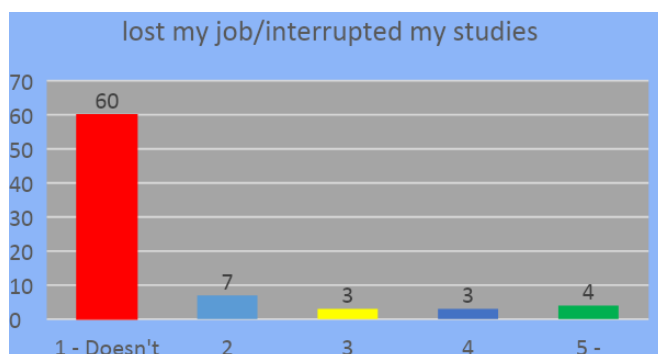
Have you been diagnosed with a mental disorder/illness by a professional?

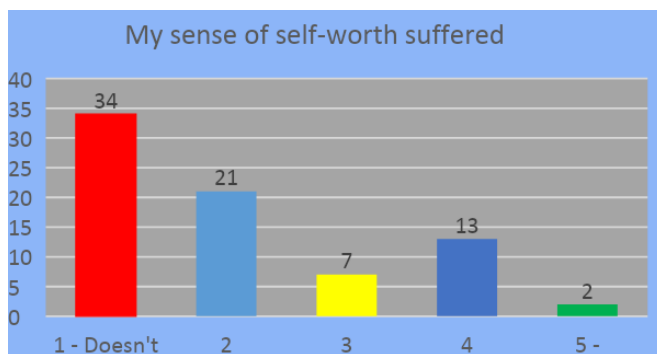
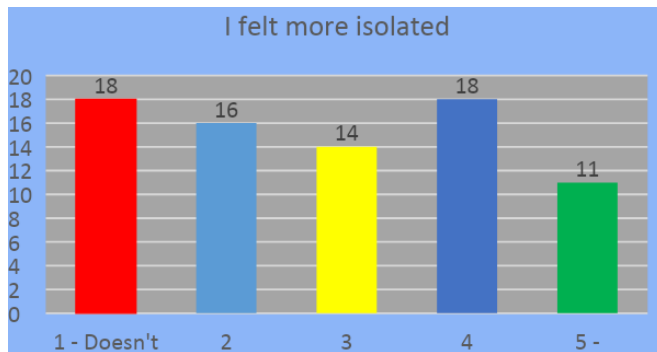
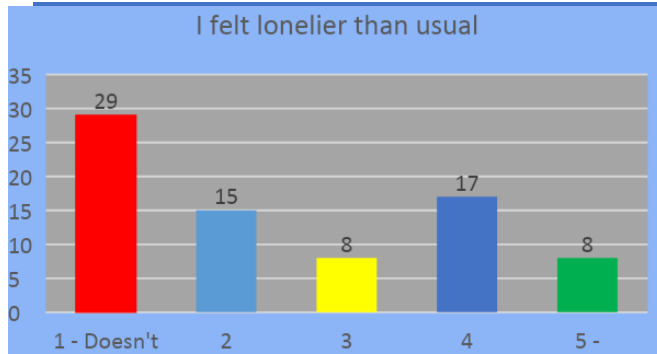


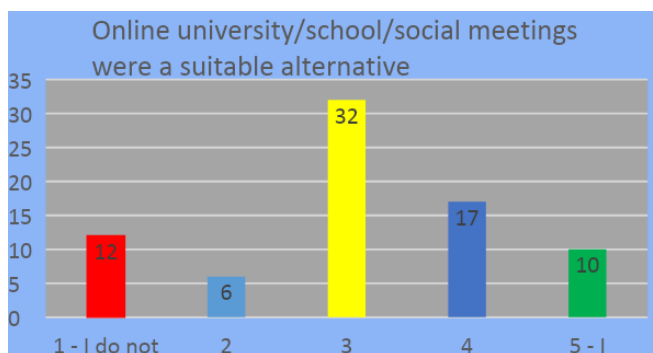
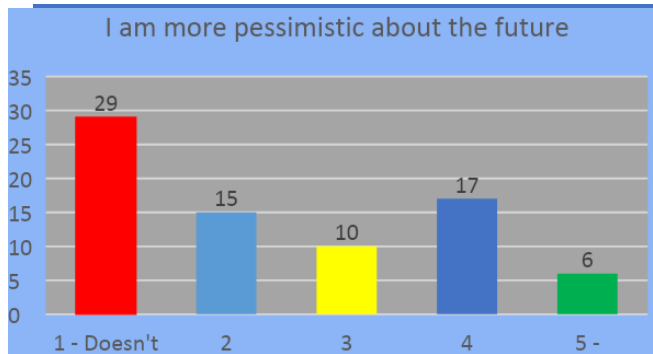
10 of the respondents answered the optional follow up question “if yes, which one?”: General anxiety, anxiety disorder (2), depression PTSD, anxiety and depression, episodic depression, mixed anxiety and depressive disorder (2), anxiety and functional depression, ADHD and panic attacks.

Covid

In the next chapter participants were asked, about the effects of covid epidemic on their lives. The majority of respondents did not report negative effects such as feeling more isolated or lonely, losing their job or friends, or experiencing a decline in self-esteem, university or job performance, or becoming more pessimistic about the future. However, 9 % of participants felt like their lost their job/interrupted their studies because of covid-19, 32,5 % of participants felt lonelier than usual because of covid-19, 37,7 % of participants felt more isolated during the covid-19 pandemic, 19,5 % of participants felt like they've lost contact with their friends because of pandemic and 19,4 % of participants felt like their sense of self-worth has suffered because of pandemic. Additionally, almost a third of participants felt more pessimistic about their future because of pandemic. However, more than a third of participants (35 %) felt like online university school/social meetings were a suitable alternative.







The respondents were then asked to describe positive experiences related to the pandemic in the form of an open question.

Although 23 of the respondents did not answer, when asked about their experiences, many of them mentioned reconnecting with family, reflecting on their lives, having more free time, getting more exercise and even enjoying distance and online education. A respondent even mentioned he found a new group of friends. Young people also answered that they've learned new things and gained new competencies, also about self-growth, because they didn't need to travel to school, they've also saved some money, some young people liked that society was more peaceful (less traffic,...), some also said that they had more time for housework, and self-care practices. Only a few of respondents answered inclusively negatively, in fact only 4 of the respondents.

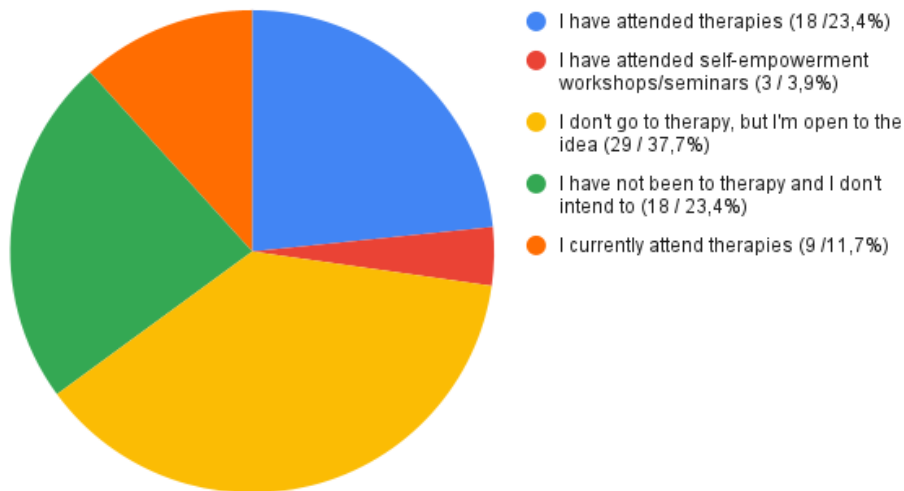
For the next open question “Has the pandemic changed you in a negative or positive way?” the answers were quite divided. About half answered with negative effects and half with positive effects.

On the negative side respondents mentioned they got less productive, lost trust in strangers and trust in the government, their anxiety levels got higher and had more troubles integrating into society after the pandemic ended, one respondent expressed the hardships they went through after losing a family member to covid. On the positive side, respondents experienced higher productivity, they connected more to their family and partners, they started appreciating daily life more, to one respondent it represented a chance to a new beginning. However, on the negative side – some participants picked up unhealthy habits – such as less exercise and turning to alcohol.

Professional help

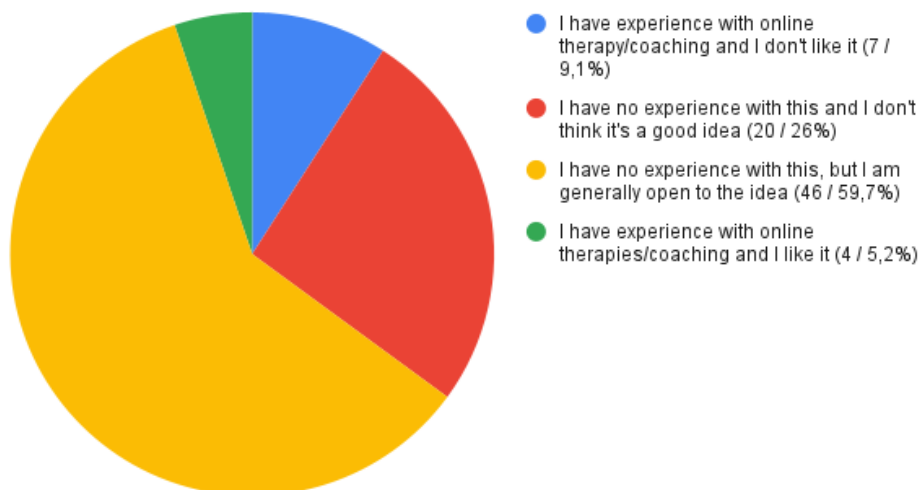
The subsequent set of questions focused on the respondents' experiences and perceptions regarding mental health. These questions were designed to obtain information about their personal experiences with mental health and their attitudes towards seeking help for mental health concerns.

Therapies/professional help



Most (29) of the respondents did not yet attend therapy but are generally open to the idea of it. 18 of respondents have attended therapy and 18 do not intend to. A small portion of them did attend therapy at the time of the questionnaire and others attended alternative professional help.

Online therapies



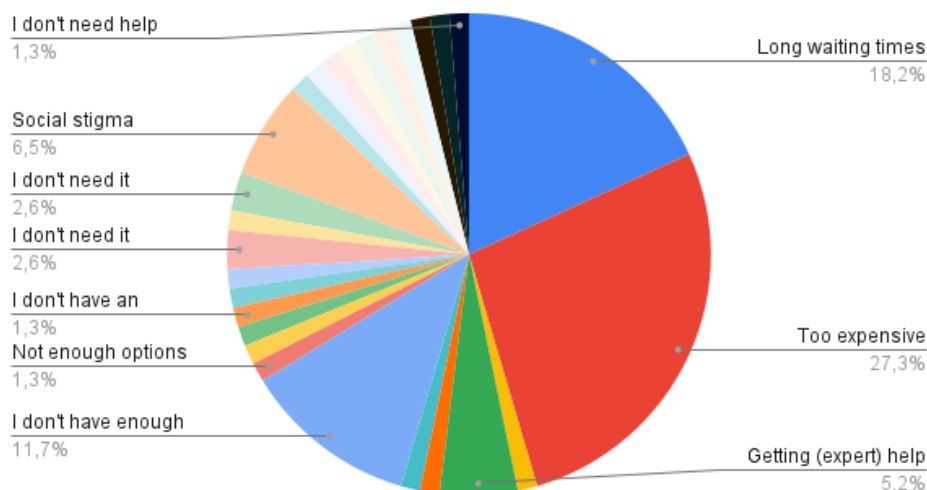
Similar to the previous results, a big portion (60 %) of the respondents had no previous experience with online therapy but are open to it. However, 26 % of participants don't have the experience with online therapy but they don't think that it's a good idea. Only a small portion of respondents did have experience with online therapies and only 4 of them liked it.



When asked if it is easy to get professional help at the place where they live most of the respondents remained neutral – probably because they don't have experience with searching professional help. However, 40 % of respondents said that it's not easy to get professional help where they live while only 21 % of respondents said that it is easy to get (professional) help where they live.

Perhaps this relates to the fact that half of the respondents live either in the countryside or in a village.

What prevents you from getting (professional) help?

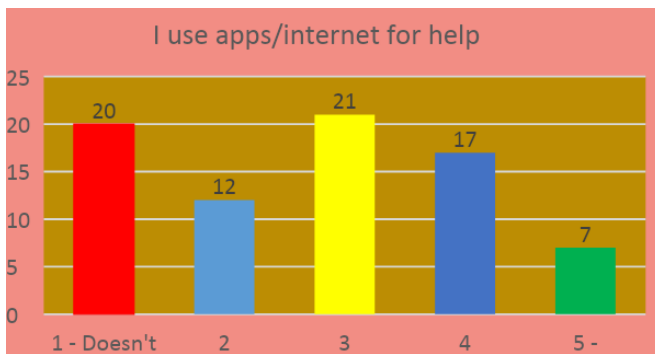
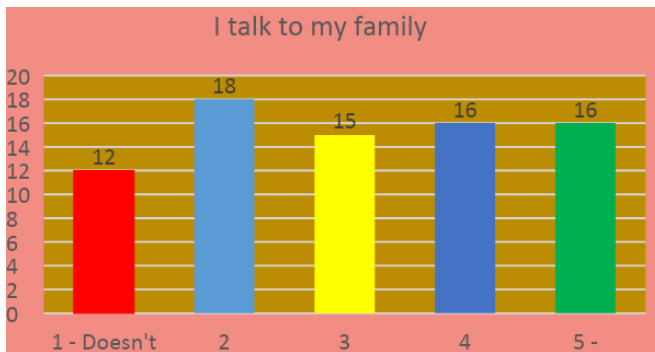
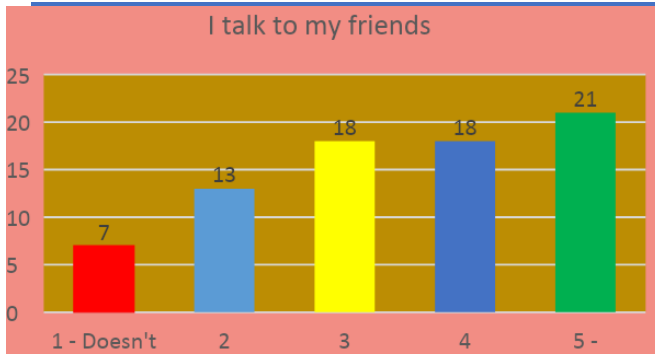


5,2% of the respondents are already getting professional help, others did not. The most popular reason why respondents didn't get professional help was in their opinion the fact that it is too expensive (27,3%). The second most answered reason was long waiting times (18,2%) and the third was I don't have enough time (11,7%). A few also did not want to visit a therapist because they believe it's clouded in social stigma (6,5%).

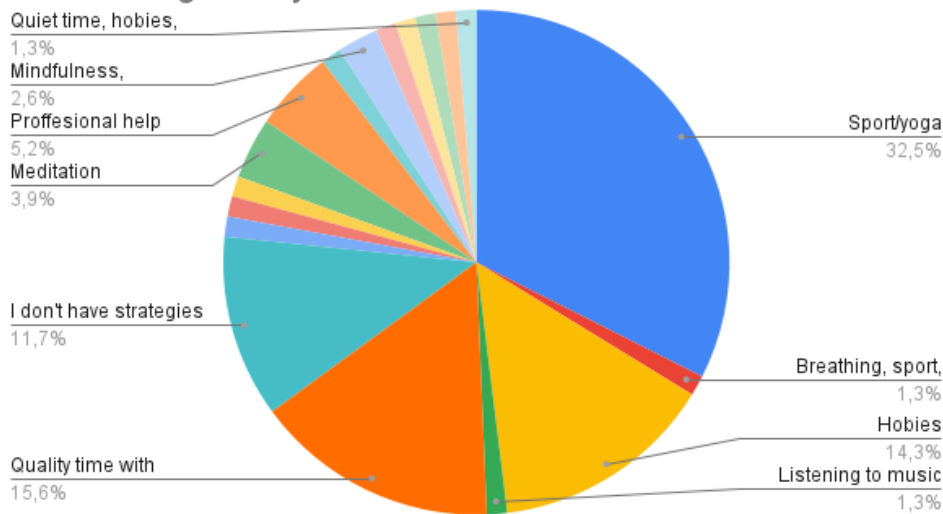
A small portion of them have already received therapy, others had various reasons why they won't seek it out, the main reason being the opinion that they don't need it.

Self-empowerment, stress relief, goal setting

The final topic focused on self-empowerment, stress relief, and goal setting. Respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale where they typically turn to when faced with problems, ranging from " doesn't describe me at all" to "describes me perfectly".



What strategies do you use to reduce stress?

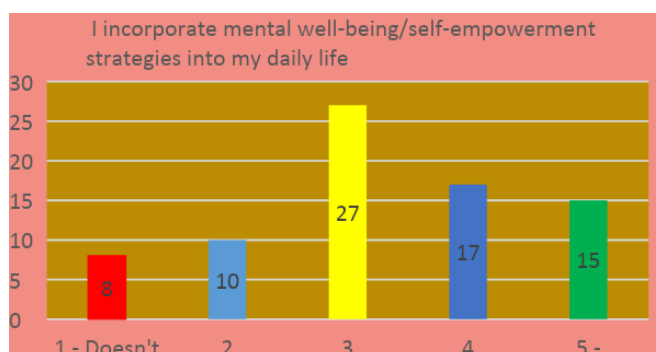


When asked what strategies do you use to reduce stress, the most popular answer was sport/yoga (32,5 %), second most answered was quality time with family/friends (15,6 %), and the third was hobbies (14,3 %). A good portion of respondents do not have strategies to reduce stress (11,7 %). Some of them also prefer meditation, alone time and professional help.

For the open-ended question “Do you have any strategies to improve your self-esteem/feeling of self-worth?” respondents answers had a common theme, most answered that they use journaling, positive affirmation, sports, hobbies and socializing. Some of them also prefer listening to music, talking with friends and getting enough sleep.

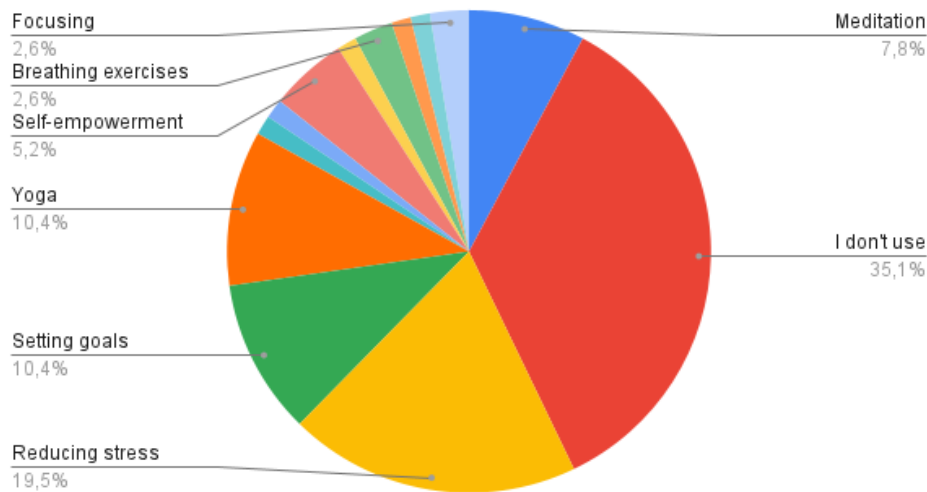
Another open question was asked “What strategies do you use when you want to improve your mood?”. The answers were almost identical as for the previous question, with slight variations – more free time activities (watching movies, listening to music, sport) were included and less techniques.

In summary, the most common strategies are spending time with their friends and family, spending time on their hobbies and taking care of their health i.e. sports and yoga.



Similar to the results of the first set of questions, the respondents seem to be highly aware of the ways of self-empowerment and try to incorporate them into their daily lives, which contributes to their mental well-being.

I use applications/internet for...



As shown here, given these certain possible choices, most of the respondents – 15 of them use apps and internet for reducing stress, followed by yoga (8) and setting goals (8), and meditation (6). Although 35% (27) of the respondents do not use apps for any of these things.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about how they would assist their best friend with problems, and their answers were very similar. There was a common answer (with slight variations) from all the respondents - All would help their friends by talking, actively listening and giving them friendly advice. Listening and being present were identified as the most important aspects of providing support. Many respondents also expressed a willingness to help their friend analyze their situation and offer advice.

The respondents were then asked in which areas would they like to improve. Confidence was the most popular answer, education/work improvement was also mention often, others would like to improve their mindfulness, inner peace and motivation, ability to cope with stress, learn techniques for wellbeing, relaxation, how to get rid of imposter syndrome, how to become the best version of themselves, how to get motivation, how to be less addicted from mobile phone, how to learn to be happy, advices.

Lastly, the respondents were asked “What you would like from a self-empowerment course?” The answers corresponded with the previous question; most would like to improve their confidence and self-worth, their motivation, some would like to reduce stress. It’s also interesting to note that a small portion of the respondents weren’t sure what exactly they wanted from such a course.

4.5.3. Conclusion

The covid-19 pandemic has affected young people in Slovenia – some showed high resilience towards negative effects of the pandemic and lockdowns, however – some young people struggled with pandemic. Common theme is that they became more pessimistic, they are often worried about the future and their levels of loneliness and feelings of isolation increased during the pandemic. Some young people also struggled with university or lost jobs because of pandemic. To those there's a place for YOUHEAL project, which can offer them learning courses and mental health techniques which can help them get back on their feet. So far, young people in Slovenia don't often use applications for mental health help, but since they feel that professional help is often inaccessible and are generally open to the idea of using applications to improve their mental health, there's a place for YOUHEAL

project in Slovenia. However, it's important to notice that young people in Slovenia are reluctant to seek professional help when they have problem.

4.6. Conclusion

In general, it can be stated that the youth who participated in this survey show a heightened awareness towards matters related to mental health. The YOUHEAL initiative operates in a field where there is a significant demand and interest. The results of the online mental health survey reveal that a notable percentage of respondents reported having experienced mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress and feelings of depression. This emphasizes the prevalence of such issues among the population and underlines the necessity for increased awareness and support for those dealing with mental health challenges. The importance of this topic was evident to the respondents, and there are significant gaps in available mental health services due to financial constraints, lack of accessibility, time limitations, and social stigmatization. The You HEAL project has the potential to make a significant impact in addressing these gaps and creating an environment where mental health can be acknowledged and openly discussed.

The majority of respondents in the survey do not report symptoms of depression such as feeling bad, lonely, or losing interest in activities they usually enjoy. However, many of them do report experiencing stress and worry. While some respondents have received a professional diagnosis, they may be receiving adequate treatment. The most common symptoms reported are feeling stressed, fatigued, and having difficulty concentrating. Additionally, many respondents express concerns about the future, particularly related to financial issues, the labor market, personal and intimate relationships, and the challenges of "adult life". So, the sources of their mental health issues do not seem to be internal but rather through external influences. Stress from work or university, concern about the state of the world, and personal circumstances were the most frequently cited sources of burden. Therefore, the YOUHEAL program should focus on stress relief exercises and provide young people with planning tools, visual aids like vision boards, routines, and strategies for coping with uncertainty.

It is interesting to see that while some participants did not experience negative impacts from the pandemic, others struggled with to adapt to a new uncertain situation and continuing their professional life. While it is encouraging to see that some young people have shown high resilience towards the negative effects of the pandemic and lockdowns, it is also important to recognize that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of many young people. In the open questions, it was noted that some young people struggled with pre-existing mental health problems that were worsened by the pandemic. The YOUHEAL project aims to support young people by providing them with learning courses and mental health techniques that can help them cope with the challenges they face. This type of support can be especially important for those who are struggling with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and pessimism about the future, as the pandemic has led to increased levels of these feelings for many.

The survey aimed to understand the needs and situations of young people and to learn from them. The strategies that young people use to relieve stress and boost self-worth/self-confidence are similar, such as talking to friends or family, engaging in sports or hobbies, self-reflection, and listening to music. However, most participants do not use apps or the internet for these purposes. Some of the participants do have experiences with stress relief exercises such as yoga, meditation, journaling and so on and for those activities, they do use apps. The YOUHEAL platform can still be helpful by offering a place for self-reflection and acting as an "open ear" through a daily check-in system. The survey also highlights the importance of identifying effective coping mechanisms for managing mental health issues. While exercise, talking to friends or family, and watching TV or movies may provide temporary relief, seeking professional help may be necessary in some cases. However, the lack of access, social stigmatization, and taboos around mental health prevent many young people from attending therapy.

The YOUHEAL project can fill in these gaps by offering a free and online platform that can be used without adding more stress, anxiety, and pressure. The platform can also be helpful for respondents who have never been to therapy and are not open to it. Moreover, incorporating more stress relief strategies and tools to build a good relationship with oneself into the YOUHEAL platform can provide a comprehensive and helpful resource for young people.

The youth seems to be more open to therapy, but few have experience with self-empowerment workshops or online therapy. Many also reported not seeking help for their mental health issues, which could be due to factors such as lack of awareness, stigma, or difficulty accessing services. It's crucial to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and improve access to mental health services to encourage more individuals to seek help. The YOUHEAL platform is addressing some of these barriers by offering free support that can be accessed online. This approach can help break down barriers related to time and stigma, making it more convenient and accessible for young people to seek help. However, it's important to note that online resources may not be enough for everyone, and some individuals may need more intensive support.

In conclusion, the survey showed that mental health issues are prevalent among young people, and there is a need for increased awareness and support for mental health. The YOUHEAL initiative can make a significant impact in addressing the gaps in available mental health services and providing free and accessible support for young people. The platform can offer stress relief exercises, planning tools, visual aids, and coping strategies for managing uncertainty, and its online accessibility can help break down barriers related to time and stigma. However, it's important to note that online resources may not be enough for everyone, and some individuals may need more intensive support.

5 Focus Group reports

In each of the partner countries, several focus group meetings were held with young people between the ages of 18 and 26 to deepen our understanding of their thoughts and needs concerning mental health. Based on their input, the learning materials can be written to cater their needs.

5.1. Austria

5.1.1. Introduction

The first focus group meetings in Austria took place on the 20th and the 28th of February 2023. A doodle was sent out to the interested Austrians beforehand. The interested answered a call-out on the private Instagram account of the author. The meetings were held over the video chat platform Zoom and lasted for an hour, also due to the group size. Because of spontaneous cancellations, the group sizes were a little smaller than expected. However, the group sizes also had its perks since everybody involved made a statement to each question, so we got to hear everyone's opinions. The groups were quite homogenous because they mostly consisted of people in their mid-twenties with most of them having experience with studying at university (either still ongoing or finished). The genders were quite balanced out with slightly more females to join.

After introducing the participants to each other and presenting the project shortly, the discussion started. Most of the participants already had an idea of the content of the project since they participated in the online survey.

5.1.2. Discussion

What are the biggest struggles that young people have to face in the post-Covid era?

The participants think that the biggest problems are that young people experience crisis after crisis and the public/politicians cannot catch up. After the health crisis, there came war and the economic crisis and the ongoing climate crisis and for that, the politicians do not do enough and there is not enough professional help. All of that leads to worrying about the future. Another point that was spoken upon is lives changed during the pandemic and that was never processed. That is why there is still a level of “overload”. It was also said that while society tried to return from “zero to hundred”, some of the feelings of isolation and loneliness never went away. It was also said that the problems and struggles that were already there were worsened through the pandemic and people are now living with the consequences. Another struggle that was worsened through the pandemic according to the participants was the youths relationship to their phones and social media. Since it was their only way of having social contacts for a while, it became a compulsion for some and their attention span has worsened. Through the pandemic, many young people have the feeling of having lost their youth since they weren't able to see their friends, party or travel. Another big point that was named is the frustration about the climate crisis. The young people have the feeling that important time was lost during the pandemic to fight the climate crisis and that not enough is happening now. The social division that happened during the pandemic because of the vaccination debate is still here today, but now happening concerning the climate crisis and the protests against it.

Do you have experience with self-empowerment/stress relief exercises? What do you do when you're stressed out or feeling down?

The answers by the participants to this question were quite similar to the ones given in the survey. The most common stress relief exercises are doing sport or going for a walk. The participants also talked about apps they have used for yoga and meditation. One girl also uses an app with breathing exercises that help her falling asleep. There are also apps to self-reflect in use. The participants were unanimous in their opinion that there are very good apps on the market. However, the participants were also quite open to therapy, with most of them seeing at least a psychiatrist. That is why they also said that taking your meds is also a good strategy.

Which offers concerning self-empowerment/stress relief etc. do you know? Are they easily accessible?

The respondents were in agreement that there is a weird situation concerning self-empowerment/stress relief offers in Austria. On the one hand do they believe that there are a lot of offers, on the other hand are they sometimes not easily visible. The respondents believe that there are more offers than ever but question their usefulness. The situation of offers in Austria was described as “quantity over quality”. There is a lot of information and that clouds the correctness of this information. Such offers are also all-over social media and it seems hard to distinguish between good, professional help and less serious tips. The respondents claimed that it is kind of a “trend”. Having said all that, they think that professional help is often “too far away from the people”, be it because of the price or too long waiting time. However, it was also said that there are quite a few good apps to help, especially with stress relief.

Can online courses on mindfulness/mental health/stress substitute face-to-face meetings?

The participants were once again unanimous that online courses on these topics can be an addition but never a substitute to face to face meetings, especially if there are more serious problems. They said that it depends on the sources of the problems. If one has stress because of work, online courses on stress relief can be a good substitute for example but if the stress is coming from a more complicated source, like for example broken relationships, then it is not a good substitute. It was said that online courses should only be a substitute when the alternative is not working on one's problems

at all. The respondents said it is a good “first step” to get into the topic but online courses on these topics have their limitations. However, they said that online courses make a good addition to face-to-face meetings.

What does an online platform for self-empowerment need? What kind of content would you wish for?

One concrete tool that was wished for was a mood tracker where people can put in how they feel. This however needs to be easily understandable and best guided through questions to answer. This is also important to understand one’s own triggers when it comes to stress or depressive moods. It is also important to the participants that the platform recognized that people are different and can have different needs or different ways for, for example, stress to show itself. There should not be one solution for everything but the content should be individualizable. This can be done through lists of symptoms or even self-analysis.

Also, it was wished for “behind the scenes” information, as the users can then understand their problems and the solutions better. The YouTube channel “In a nutshell” was named as an example as how to explain mental health issues. The platform should include scientific explanations to self-empowerment or stress and so on. Individuals can understand their problems better if they understand what stress is. Very important to the respondents is that the platform is very honest about its own limitations. It shouldn’t claim to be the solution to everything and maybe list professional help offers. Another important point that was named is that the platform should remind its users to “check in” or to do awareness exercises or meditation.

5.2. Greece

5.2.1. Introduction

In order to identify missing competencies for coping with anxiety, stress, uncertainty etc., to map existing expertise on self-growth methods, and to validate digitalisation support, Innovation Hive conducted 3 focus groups: one hybrid and two online.

The first focus group took place in Innovation Hive’s headquarters on 27th of January and it consisted of 7 participants in total aged 18-26. Five of them participated in person and two of them were online. The second one took place online on the 8th of February (5 participants) and the third on 20th of February (8 participants). At the beginning of the session, the participants were given a description about the project and its aims. All groups started the session by writing on a post it note/ virtual wall a word that describes the way they felt during the pandemic, as an ice-breaker. All participated equally and were eager to contribute to the discussion with their personal views. The participants were found through youth organisations (SMouTH), psychotherapy centers, the Panhellenic Organisation of Psychologists and colleges.

5.2.2. Discussion

What are the biggest struggles that young people have to face in the post-Covid era?

Agoraphobia: participants mentioned that are afraid to be in crowded places or travel

Employment: Working conditions have varied considerably since the health crisis, which concerns participants particularly in the field of education where tele-education conditions can easily be imposed (such as closing schools during bad weather conditions).

Anxiety/ Panic attacks: many young people shut themselves off, their anxiety increased and they got used to a different rhythm and a different daily routine.

Isolation: All the contacts and communications were made either via mobile or computer and this impacted behaviour.

Health care anxiety: "In case of hospitalisation would I be able to get the best possible care, Is Greece's health care system efficient enough?"

Online gaming addiction

Procrastination. 8 participants mentioned procrastination as one of their biggest challenge.

Loss of energy and motivation to do things

Difficulty in adapting to the new "normality". Half of he participants mentioned that they found it difficult to adapt to it, after the pandemic.

Do you have experience with self-empowerment/stress relief exercises? What do you do when you're stressed out or feeling down?

Breathing exercises: 7 participants mentioned this technique when experiencing a panic attack or general anxiety.

Hobbies/ Seeing friends: Most of the participants choose to do a hobby that will socialise them.

Setting boundaries: 1 participant mentioned this technique in order to have plenty of time to do things that I love, instead of doing other things.

Youtube videos with meditation and Yoga.

Getting organised: 2 participants this as method to tackle anxiety

Talking to friends/ family. Participants mentioned that it is also quite helpful at that moment to talk to someone close to you, either a friend or a family member. They will listen to you, they will listen to your concerns, which are causing the stress and this sadness and will certainly advise you appropriately and suggest solutions themselves.

Healthy Eating

Which offers concerning self-empowerment/stress relief etc. do you know? Are they easily accessible?

-There are not many opportunities. But also the existence of the few opportunities is not promoted enough. Seeking help from an expert is not a top priority for young people when they need support.

-Young people also having access to the world of information (internet), looking for techniques for self-improvement, stress reduction and other such things, will certainly find relevant information/articles by scientists that help them

Can online courses on mindfulness/mental health/stress substitute face-to-face meetings?

All participants agreed that face to face meeting cannot be substituted by online courses but the kater could be as an additional help.

What does an online platform for self-empowerment need? What kind of content would you wish for?

The participants mentioned:

- Live chat with a specialist
- Informative or Meditation Podcasts
- Articles
- Proposals for activities that could promote mental health throughout Greece
- Categorisation of mental health issues in order to find easily what they look for
- Music: lots of concentration/ motivation music.
- Concentration games (link the dots, drawing etc) to serve as distraction.
- A list with the names of mental health specialists that exist in the area of close proximity that they can come in touch with.

▪ 5.2.3. Conclusion

The groups took around 1 hour to run. The majority of the participants experienced anxiety and OCD behaviours, followed by panic attacks. Almost all agree that an online supplement to therapy would include music, mediation and yoga podcasts and breathing exercises. Running the focus groups session with a deeply informative and evolving experience for me. The discussions ran smoothly, everyone participated lively and I was pleased to see how many people can relate with each other. It was a positive overall for all parties involved.

5.3. Romania

5.3.1. Introduction

In order to create a safe space for young people to be able to communicate freely about their mental health and how they use different resources for self-improvement all the focus groups were conducted by youth workers in our organisation, FITT conducted 3 focus groups: all 3 of them physically.

The first focus group took place at the Youth House, the headquarters of the Timis County Youth Foundation on 03rd of February and it consisted of 14 participants in total aged 16-22. All of them participated in person. The second one took place in the youth center in Lugoj town, also a center managed by FITT in a different town, on the 10th of February with 5 participants, ages between 16 and 27, and the third on the 24th of February with 6 participants ages between 22 and 26. At the beginning of the sessions, the participants were given a description of the project and its aims. All groups started the session by discussing where would they choose to go in vacation if they had all the money in the world, as an ice-breaker. All participated equally and the discussion created a friendly atmosphere for them. The participants were found through groups of young volunteers, beneficiaries of activities done in youth centers and high schools.

5.3.2. Discussion

What are the biggest struggles that young people have to face in the post-Covid era?

Unable to socialize: participants mentioned that it is difficult to get used to the change from home isolation to face-to-face activities like schools, university, and work, on participant in a group mentioned that they feel like they are not prepared for real-life since all his university experience was basically online and he just “woke up one day” in the last year of university.

Complacent: Young people feel a lot more drained emotionally after the pandemic and are more comfortable with staying inside even if maybe they would like to go out more, it takes less effort to stay inside and prefer to rest to the point of overeating, especially because of the other external factors like the war in Ukraine and the wildfires in Australia and so on.

Unable to focus: Before participants felt that it was a lot easier to sit on a chair at school or at university and pay attention for 6 hours a day, but now the youth have difficulties learning because they have gotten used for staying in front of a monitor and doing other things while not paying attention to online class, and that transferred to face to face meetings after the pandemic, most participants agreed that this applies also with other social activities not just learning.

Selectivity in what is involved: "We probably realized that years of our lives are going by and we should focus on things that we like."

"And some stuff that really helps us because the years in life go by and never come back."

Do you have experience with self-empowerment/stress relief exercises? What do you do when you're stressed out or feeling down?

- Creating a dynamic schedule that breaks you out of your routine.
- Diversifying activities to get out of the every day through volunteering.
- Making the people around you happy through small deeds.
- HOBBIES.
- Listening to psychological videos.
- Listen to motivational videos.
- Following social media feed regarding positive messages and interesting short educational videos.
- Focusing on instant gratification, “when I get stressed, I finish the task and I'm fine”.
- I do things that charge my batteries. I sleep, I rest, I read, I draw.
- I like to spend time on TikTok or Instagram reels.
- I cry, and when I manage to manifest myself through my tears it makes me feel better afterward.
- When I feel stressed, I feel like I get stuck, I sit and stare at the walls.
- I am going out with friends.

- Meditation - breathing.

*Participants also started to discuss how crying is seen by adults or older people as a weak behavior, and friends or other young people they know are closing their emotions inside and then manifesting themselves, the conclusion that most participants agreed on is that generally being vulnerable, and crying should be more promoted positively in order to not develop blockages for frustration and sadness in the mind.

Which offers concerning self-empowerment/stress relief etc. do you know? Are they easily accessible?

- Social media channels, especially those created or that involve professionals on the field of self-care, mental health, sport, and healthy food are a great source of information, most participants across groups stated that they would rather select their information from a social media channel such as Instagram profile than having to go on a website.

- Participants stated that it is difficult to also find the right person or service to help them with their self-empowerment and mental health because there are many people that don't actually have experience in the field or are just doing it to gain money and power at the expense of not actually helping people.

- Besides social media, there were also a few mentions of self-empowerment and meditation techniques that can be easily done like keeping a journal, practicing gratitude, having a walk in a park or any green space.

Can online courses on mindfulness/mental health/stress substitute face-to-face meetings?

The main results were pro:

- They are more accessible,
- It's more of a safe space,
- Just one click away
- You can practice anywhere
- You can go through the content at your own pace and rewind parts you want to rewatch.
- A platform can give you more diversity in content than just one person

Con:

- It feels less personal and it just doesn't feel as good as a face-to-face meeting.
- Some participants mentioned that they would like to start doing things that don't involve a monitor after so many years of being more dependent on computers and devices.
- Online could also become like a "have to do mindset" than a physical meeting that you "would like to do"

What does an online platform for self-empowerment need? What kind of content would you wish for?

The participants mentioned:

-Great visuals including images, but also video

-Easy to understand the content and simple to put in practice for you to implement.

-Some exercises or materials that a group of people can do by themselves to inspire a group activity or to inspire meeting new people.

-
- More details about who are the people that work on this to build trust.
 - No more general content, it would be nice to also have some specific content about why stress can appear in certain conditions, on specific days, or from specific topics.
 - The content should be also accessible on social media.

5.3.3. Conclusion

The groups took around 1 hour (+-10 min) to run, the groups felt they were in a safe space and the facilitators of the discussions were able to moderate space for each person to make their voice heard.

The majority of the young people were “sick and tired of online or being at home” and were more open-minded to content that also encourages socializing and group activities.

5.4. Serbia

5.4.1. Introduction

Environmental Movement of Vojvodina organised two focus groups. The first focus group was organised in Sremski Karlovci in Ecological Centre Radulovački on the 14th of January. The participants were young people aged 18 to 26 who were specifically chosen for this activity on a project. The second focus group took place in Novi Sad in the space of the youth organisation BalkanIDEA Novi Sad on the 6th of February. Both focus groups lasted around 1.5 to 2hrs. Before starting each focus group, the YouHEAL project was presented, and the purpose of its activities was explained, including focus groups. After introducing the participants to each other, the discussion started. After participating in the online survey, most participants already knew the project's content. At the beginning of each focus group, participants agreed on the rules of working together to make sure a safe place for sharing is created. Before starting the discussion, participants were asked to introduce themselves, including their favourite hobbies and activities they enjoy.

The first focus group lasted longer because more participants were compared to the second one, and everybody wanted to share their opinion on each question. The sample included 11 young people who identified as women and 10 young people who identified as men. 13 participants came from areas >50.000 inhabitants, and eight came from smaller areas (>5.000 inhabitants). Concerning the activity, six young people were students, two students who work, full-time employed 7, part-time employed 2, self-employed 2, unemployed 2. Regarding belonging to marginalised groups, not all participants were ready to share that info in a google form shared at the beginning of the focus groups. Later on, some of the participants shared their experiences and identified themselves as part of these groups: health issues, cultural issues, economic issues, and social issues. During focus groups, some individuals pointed out that they face intersectional issues caused by belonging to more than one marginalised group.

5.4.2. Discussion

What are the biggest struggles that young people have to face in the post-Covid era?

Most young people emphasised that the biggest problem they face after corona is uncertainty, financial instability, inability to compete in a labour market, self-isolation, "weakened" social skills and oppressive leadership in their country. Even though young people from Serbia who participated in focus groups pointed out that they are “used to socio-economic issues in their countries”, they also mentioned increased anxiety related to their families' financial situation and their future. The young

people reported that while attending online classes, a lot was lost concerning their academic and practical skills. They feel that they didn't have equal opportunities (compared to generations pre-covid, and not all of them had equal learning environments at home) to learn and practice knowledge and skills necessary in their field of study. Regarding this, young people are worried that they will not be able to compete in the post-covid labour market, considering that they didn't have the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in their field fully. Young people are also worried that they somehow "weakened" their social skills and that now, in the post-covid era, they have trouble making personal and professional connections. They mentioned that they feel self-isolated and can't make connections in the offline world, which is why they feel more comfortable in online spaces. Young people have expressed concern regarding, as they described, oppressive leadership in Serbia. In this area in the post-covid era, they are increasingly worried about rapidly decreasing freedoms and not having a choice or any influence in politics. Some participants mentioned the concern about the war spreading worldwide and making the future even more irreparable. Young people also pointed out that they still might not be aware of all the challenges and difficulties they will face in the post-covid era.

Do you think that there are enough offers concerning self-empowerment/stress relief etc.?

The participants agreed that mental health, self-empowerment/stress relief etc., are still stigmatised in Serbia. They believe there are not enough offers concerning these topics, and even when they exist, they are not accessible to everyone. Young people believe there is no concern from the government about the mental health of its citizens and that the focus is put on more "important" questions. Concerning the accessibility of a few mental health and well-being offers, they are usually too expensive or not located in smaller towns. Participants also mentioned that the offers that could be useful for them are usually provided for free by non-governmental organisations in the bigger cities and require more time and effort.

Do you have experience with self-empowerment/stress relief exercises? What do you do when you're stressed out or feeling down?

Most of the participants mentioned hobbies as a way of dealing with stress-related situations. Many have reported sports, yoga, meditation, and going in nature as a strategy they use to deal with challenging and overwhelming situations. Young people also mentioned that reading, writing, watching TV shows and movies, and listening to music help them relax. Participants emphasised of having an understanding and caring friend to talk to as one of the most important strategies for coping. Some young people mentioned that they like participating in activities where they feel valuable and useful in their communities (volunteering and activism). Some of the participants shared that they have experience with psychotherapists, and the majority of them would like to try therapy if they had the opportunity.

Do you think that online courses on mindfulness/mental health/stress relief can be a good addition/substitute to face to face meetings? Why (not)?

Most participants agreed that online courses on these topics could be an addition but never a substitute for face-to-face meetings. They think online mindfulness/mental health/stress relief courses can be necessary when the situation is urgent; people require immediate support, and for people who can't attend face-to-face meetings (e.g. anxiety, phobias, disability, inaccessibility, a distance of the location...). But even in that situations, appropriate face-to-face meetings and more continuous must follow. Young people think online courses can be a good addition and make them more aware of the importance of caring for their mental health and well-being.

What does an online platform for self-empowerment need? What kind of content would you wish for?

Young people had concrete suggestions about what kind of content an online platform for self-empowerment should have. They agreed that it needs to have an informational aspect. For example, some of the participants said that young people usually misdiagnose themselves with depression because that is now considered to be "a trend for gen Z". Considering this, the platform should have

some of the standardised tests for initial screening of potentially existing mental health issues followed by suggestions of next steps (visiting a therapist, exercises etc.). The informational aspect of the platform should also contain tips about certain lifestyles that can help to improve well-being – for example, daily routines, exercising, sleep etc. Here young people emphasised the importance of having a database of organisations offering free psychological support, their contacts, and locations (especially for smaller towns). The need for the option to “save” or “archive” some information to a profile was considered essential. Another important aspect mentioned in focus groups was the motivational aspect which could include quotes, short videos, visualisation, making vision boards etc. The skills and techniques aspect –offering solutions for challenges and issues (but considering that each individual is different and the exact solutions might not work for everyone), breathing techniques, meditation, relaxing music, mindfulness etc. The social aspect was mentioned as an important one. It should include personal stories and experiences, the possibility to add people and interact with each other, posting your “mood of the day status”, and supporting each other. The platform should also ensure its users understand that they can use it as an addition to their mental health care and encourage them to seek professional help if they need it.

5.5. Slovenia

5.5.1. Introduction

We’ve conducted 3 focused groups.

Focused group took place on 1st February 2023 in an online format, organized by PFCI, moderated by Tanja Bogataj. There were 10 registrations, but only 3 participants within 18-20 years old attained the discussion. Participants shared information about the event among their friends and classmates who express the interest about the topic, but were reserved to attend and actively participate at this kind of event. Participants were open to share and exchange their experiences during and post Covid-19 era, and offered many interesting suggestions to make the platform attractive to use, and to address relevant needs of youth in this age range. They’ve expressed the interest to be further informed about the outcome of the project.

Focus group took place on 2nd February 2023 in a hybrid form in MIITR's offices (Gregorčičeva ulica 21b, 2000 Maribor) and online on Jitsi meet. 9 people excluding moderator (Ana Ulbin) were present in person and 11 people were present online. The group was mixed and consisted of people we know and have participated in our events in the past and also young people that have heard about the event from their friends or social media and cooperated with us for the first time. The group was very pleasant and young people cooperated with us nicely so we gathered a lot of interesting information.

Focused group took place on 16th February 2023 in an online format, organized by PFCI, moderated by Tanja Bogataj. There were 15 registrations for the event, but only 4 participants within 21-26 years old attended the discussion. One participant shared she has invited to the event several friends and co-students, but many couldn’t attend, either due to overlap with other obligations or because of already having too many activities during the week. Group was open to share and exchange their experiences during and post Covid-19 era, shared very valuable views and suggestions on the topic. They’ve expressed the interest to be further informed about the outcome of the project.

▪ 5.5.2. Discussion

What are the biggest struggles that young people have to face in the post-Covid era?

- **Missing live socialization** – Participant has pointed out that she missed the most that she couldn't see the people she loved (family members, grandmother, grandfather (scared that she'd bring virus to them), close friends...)

- Participant who is a foreigner in Slovenia (student from another country) pointed out that the COVID-19 outbreak happened the first year he was in Slovenia, so he didn't have many friends and was alone in a house so it was really hard to deal with the **loneliness**. It also felt **confusing** at the beginning, hard to understand what was going on. He enjoyed when students could go back to faculty, meeting faces-to-faces with peers.
- Another participant said that he got used to the situation by work through it. Methods he used were movement, sport.
- Some participants replied to that, that for them it was harder to exercise during the pandemic and that they **exercised less** - some moved less, the routine was interrupted by Covid, especially for sports such as soccer where there is contact. Also, some sport groups that were disbanded during COVID-19 never meet again in the same composition as before covid-19. Nevertheless, some new groups have formed. The participant says that she does less sports and is less fit than she was before covid. The participant says, on the contrary, that his friends were more involved in sports during Covid. For example he also started running and is now fitter.
- For some it was **easier to exercise** during covid-19 pandemic, because they had **more time** and they exercised with the help of YouTube videos. The plus for them was also that they didn't have to drive anywhere to get the exercise.
- Young adults that live on the countryside said they struggled less during covid-19 because they could always go into the nature. However, for those that live in the city this was difficult.
- Some participants emphasized that it was difficult for them when they went back to college because they spoiled (got lazy) themselves at home. However, going back to school was better than staying in one room all day and looking at computer all day. They were mostly all happy that they could have gone back.
- Some participants expressed the **need to relearning social skills and having communication challenges** - Participant shared she likes live contact with people. She said she had to relearn social skills (how to control body language, how to be present with others). The other participant said she had problems with coming to college and meeting new people after covid, which she had no problems with before the epidemic. She had to relearn how to communicate. They were confused when meeting people. They didn't know if they should shake hands when they saw each other or what was appropriate, after seeing each other for a year or more over the zoom, but never in person. Participants expressed the need of young people to have the opportunity and access to learn and practice needed social skills and help themselves when challenged with anxiety.
- **Some participants expressed some struggle with social interaction, communication, and discomfort if exposed to too many external stimuli** - Participant expressed that she noticed she has hard time with too many stimuli from the environment (example meet up with friend at McDonalds restaurant, many sounds, beeps, people, they needed to leave due to her anxiety and discomfort), which was never the case before covid-19. Participants shared that young people feel now safer at home and do not socialize with each other as much as before Covid-19. They got used to talking more on the phone and less in person. Partners and friends are also sought by phone. They also note that there is an emerging addiction to characters on social networks, and not in their environment.
- **Hobbies and extracurricular activities** - Participant says that because of covid she stopped going to some of the activities that she used to attend, but it was positive that she saw her family more. Participant shared that some groups expired, and never got back, some are only now forming again. That affected their interaction with others/friends and which activities they are (not) attending.

- **Increased stress at school** - Participants expressed they feel that teachers put pressure on students as if they are to blame for this backlog that has occurred in education because of covid circumstances, or as if they are taking out their frustrations on them. They felt being accused by teachers that they are cheating because of the online classes and exams. They notice that the relationship between teachers and students has deteriorated. They expressed that young people also feel distressed because they feel that the standard and the requirements changed, but the school system has not. It was also pointed out that many people lost their motivation, will or that they got lazy.

- **Increased stress thinking about the future, too many choices, and hard time taking decisions**
- Participants shared that young people are under a lot of stress because they are at a turning point in their lives when they have to decide what they will do in the future. They are very stressed because they don't know what to decide. They look at their parents who work really hard all the time and they don't want same for themselves, they want to do something that makes them happy, where they can be creative and express themselves. The challenge is that there are too many choices, it's hard to decide.

- **Feeling tired, stressed, not having enough time** - Participants expressed they don't have time for themselves, just to be; they study, work, and have many other obligations. It's a fast pace, all day, every day many obligations. There are many quick money options online, so the stress of choosing what to do is even greater. There are many possibilities. Young people are sought after - the problem is also the rapidly changing environment - economy, technology.

Do you have experience with self-empowerment/stress relief exercises? What do you do when you're stressed out or feeling down?

- **How do you understand self-empowerment?**

"To strengthen your well-being, positive self-image, you help yourself".

"Ways to support yourself, to strengthen your sense of self-confidence"

- One participants **meditate** every day for 10/15 min, now 2x a week. It's a guided meditation with the help of YouTube videos.

- Some participants practice **yoga, deep breathing** helps them a lot to feel better (make them feel calm, relaxed). They practice it preventively (when they are not stress) but some of them also acutely when they are stressed. Especially breathing techniques are useful when the stress levels are high. They learn yoga and deep breathing through YouTube videos, at home.

- **Breathing, Breathing awareness, Breathing exercises** - One participant accidentally found out how important breathing is when you're under stress, lately she's been practicing breathing awareness when she's under stress and it helps her to feel better. One participant uses **breathing exercise in the 4/4 square** (4 seconds inhale, 4 seconds hold, 4 seconds exhale), she emphasizes the importance of breathing when you are stressed, angry - you need to change it to deep, slower breathing. Two participants practice **breathing and The Win-Hof method** - they take a shower every morning with ice water, helps them a lot with stress relief. This practice helps them focus and have more mental clarity and strength in other life situations. It very accessible on Youtube, and easy to follow the guidance and practice.

- One participant practices **becoming aware of where they feel certain emotions** - in certain parts of the body you feel certain emotions more than elsewhere, then you should focus there to relax.

- One participant goes to the **gym** when under stress, helps him to forget problems, and to feel better, more relaxed.

- One participant helps herself with **music and dance, cleaning, screaming into pillow** – which she described as "**more aggressive relaxation**", she can't get into yoga or meditation. She doesn't like the idea of it.

- Participants emphasised that it is also necessary **to withdraw from all electronic devices**. Participant says that her phone and computer cause her stress. To relax, she needs to put technology aside and do something simple, such as washing dishes, and talking to her family about random topics.

- **Struggle with managing stress** - One participant says that repeated events such as exams cause her stress, and she doesn't know how to deal with this stress so that it won't be there anymore.

- Some participants share that for young people is best to deal with stress through **physical exercise**. It is necessary to get out of the position you are in and go out and move. Other participant shared he uses **movement, meditation, music** to release stress. Prefers running outdoors, listening to music.

- **Driving** is also therapeutic. It also helps to **talk to people**, also **silence**, so that you have time to be alone with yourself. Also, **music and creation. Dance.**

- **Hugging** also helps, if not with person, then at least with a big plushie or pillow - before covid, there **were more hugs between friends**, and this haven't come back after the epidemics. Young people are not that close anymore or they are worried that they if they give each other hands/hugs, they will spread the covid virus.

- One participant expressed about **self-empowerment** that our **mindset** affects how we feel. We young people far too much on the future instead of focusing on the present. If you have the right thoughts, then everything else is ok. **It also helps if you simply do the things you want to do and don't procrastinate on them.** Try to **look at the situation as objectively as possible - keep a distance.**

Which offers concerning self-empowerment/stress relief etc. do you know? Are they easily accessible?

- One participant went to psychotherapy, but it was difficult to access **financially** (50 euros/hour or more). She also pointed out that psychotherapies and other offers are **not promoted enough**. Seeking help is a taboo topic and should be talked about more. Also, younger generation should be educated more about depression (it isn't just occasional sadness but changes in the brain). They should also talk about mental health more to promote in.

- Obstacles to accessing help are also **long waiting lines**. Sometimes you also don't get an appointment because you're **too busy. Too little** offers.

- One participant says that learning relaxation and other similar mindfulness techniques is not affordable - €100 per hour of learning relaxation techniques is too much if you need 10 of them. Psychotherapies are also too expensive.

- Help should be more accessible, mental health is taboo, it is not promoted, it is not talked about. **Conversations about mental health should be more common**. It should be an accessible option for someone to show you how to reduce stress. As part of a college elective, they were taught hypnosis, and was very interesting and helpful for stress relief. This would be great if accessible for youth.

- Accessible offers of self-help are **TV, books and YouTube videos**, there are also some offers that are **discounted for students**, in some student dorms there are some **free 1 to 1 offers of psychotherapy**. **Gong** meditations are sometimes organized for free and are very relaxing. Sometimes free **workshops of self-empowerment** are organized (MKC Maribor). Simply writing down your problems also helps and its accessible. Especially **guided writing** - if the questions are asked correctly, you start to think

properly, it helps you, but it is difficult to just think and solve the problem yourself, if you are guided, it is easier, it helps.

- MKC Maribor also has such events

- **Music, podcasts, sports are available**, and everyone can find something for themselves. **Breathing exercises is available**, also guided practice is available, on participant also learned it on seminars at college. Everyone has a **shower and cold water** for practicing the Wimhof method - it's easily accessible. Information is also available on YouTube.

- **Yoga classes** are not free, but in principle they are accessible, at least for some. Sometimes the **problem is lack of time** – even for conversations about mental health.

- One participant **misses innovative techniques and empowerment programs**, something that has not been the same for 15 years, and that it doesn't take whole day or too many hours/day.

- There is a whole **set of techniques for dealing with stress**, but **there is no education on this topic in school**. Just what they learn about stress in psychology classes. The current offer at the school is very modest, as if it is not important enough to agree on these topics..

- The problem of accessibility is also the **lack of time to search for content**.

- Some participants shared that they also use the **website Quora to help with stress** - if you have a question, you can look and see that someone before you had the same question, and it calms you down.

How can online courses on mindfulness/mental health/stress relief help as an addition/substitute for face-to-face meetings?

- Live yoga is better (you're less likely to injure yourself and do exercises correctly). However, online yoga also helps, it's better than nothing. Other participant disagrees and says that online yoga is better because you can do it anytime you want and you don't waste time driving to it and money for hours, also it's less stressful because you don't HAVE to go to yoga if you don't feel like doing it. Also, one participant **likes doing yoga alone, because this is her alone time when she can truly relax**. For those with **social anxiety it's better helping sessions such as yoga are online**.

- Live contact IS important, but online sessions are a good substitute. It depends on a person.

- One participant said that "online is better because you choose it yourself, it is **more flexible**, it suits me better, it's my time for myself, I don't want to share this time with others, it is better in terms of time compared to all the other obligations I have."

- One participant said that if I they don't have a **fixed time** to go somewhere, they're not motivated to go.

- One participant said that for live workshops, they won't go by themselves, but if there is an event, for example once a month to meet, they would certainly be happy to go.

- One participant said that they prefer sessions in real life with people, alone at home it's hard to motivate themselves, they said that when they were doing meditation alone it was hard for them to get into it, however when they were with people it was easier to go with the flow. Participant also said that those kinds of apps we are planning to do are good alternative, and supports this kind of apps.

- For some people apps are better, but for some people meetings in real life are better.

- Participants emphasised time - not more than an hour, maybe sometimes better if it would be even shorter sessions. One participant said "I don't have time for sports, practicing exercises, if it's time consuming (1 hour or more, maybe driving), I won't do it, but **if it's 15 minutes, I'm more likely to do it, this is the advantage of apps, so that you can do shorter exercises, so that you can schedule yourself.**"

- If you are driving, in the train, for example, you can open the app, listen to videos and do exercises. **15 minutes sessions are perfect.**

- The participant says that she **feels better online** because it is more comfortable for her. Live, she feels like everyone is watching her, even though they aren't. For mental health exercises I would feel better online. For socializing live is better and also for some group exercises it is better to be live. For individual exercises, it is better to be away from home.

- The participant says that **1-on-1 live lectures are better for her, but if there are more people than 1-on-1, online is better**, because otherwise she wouldn't have the courage to do it live, she feels that these are intimate things. The participant says that they had group workshops on communication, everyone was laughing, and in the end they didn't achieve the goal of the workshop because they were distracting each other. If they are in a live group, too many young people are concerned with how it looks that they are there and what others think, instead of focusing on what is the point of the workshop.

- The participant also thinks that 1-on-1 is better live. In larger groups they are ashamed, and it might be also problem, because some don't understand it, don't like it, maybe even reject it, and sometimes make fun of those who do enjoy or want to do the exercise, in meditation/hypnosis maybe become emotional. Some think it's harder to ruin a session with laughter and giggles remotely than online. They feel best live where no one knows them. They feel they can be who and as they are. They feel good also with people who they trust and who support each other.

- Some participants think **teenagers are more open, braver and dare to say more online than in person**. They feel braver to say things online than in person (in person you don't have time to think - you have to answer right away).

- Some people think that **the best combination**, online and live meetings - one cannot go without the other. But they are partial substitutes for each other. Many young people find it easier to find time for online meetings than for live meetings. Many times young people can't take that extra step to meet in person.

What does an online platform for self-empowerment need? What kind of content would you wish for?

- **Schedule of live events on topics of mental health and self-empowerment** (not just from MIITR, but all other events too) list of live events, all in one place on the platform.

-10-15 min sessions.

- short **video contributions**, also **links to other good content that already exist.**

- **Text and videos.**

- Overview of yoga video content,

- Questions that lead you to ask yourself questions, to research. **Quizzes** about mental health – so you can find out if you have anxiety. Also written **lessons about different mental health illnesses** so you

can recognize them in yourself and others. Lectures about **better understanding your own feelings (and how to act on them)**.

- **Reading recommendation, exercises**

- **Tips on how to be productive and 1 every day challenge** in a way that platform would encourage you to do things for example – draw something, go outside, take a photograph of a tree. It would be good if you could share that on the platform and all others could see it (a way of knowing that you are not alone).

- **Reward system** – after completing a session you get a star or something like that.

- It would be good if **platform connected young people and experts**.

- **Something** that is a **part of every day, that it becomes a routine**. Something that takes half an hour a day and you are with yourself then. That you have some room and time for **self-analysis**, and that you are **somehow guided every day to do it, and how you do it**. The content should be such that you disconnect from outside world and distractions for some time, that your identity is not important, that you get help, that you can be just you, just be.

- **Variety of offers**: for example **meditation, hypnosis, 15-minute conversation with someone. Tips to help you sleep**. So everyone can find something for themselves because we are different and might need different things, also at different days/periods/facing different challenges etc. you need different things and adjusted help.

- **Categories for different topics of conversation and then I could find people to talk to about those topics**. There should be more categories. For example one category might be **stress** - to realize that it's ok to feel stressed. Another category could be **relaxation methods/techniques**.

- In order for young people to use this application, the content **should spread through social networks**. Information about the application should be **shared among young people**. If something is known among young people - more of them use it.

- It is also necessary to **involve as many people as possible in the creation of the application**, because they prefer to use some part of what they are.

- As many **young people as possible should recommend this to as many young people as possible**.

- The platform should **not be too traditional. The topics must be ones that are not talked about much in schools. That taboo topics are included**. There should be information on these taboo topics on the platform.

- It would be nice if **coaches had personal profiles on applications that young people could write questions to** - in the form of a **chat room or forum**. Young people want a **personal approach**.

5.5.3. Conclusion

Focus groups were well executed. Participants felt good and the discussion was lively. The length of 2 online focus groups was 1 h. Official part of the hybrid focus group lasted 1,5 h, but also after the focus group a lot of participants stayed for discussion about some other issues that there are facing (not necessarily related to covid-19). With 3 participants who were willing to participate we also shot a short video for a YouTube.

The most important observations of the focus groups are that young people experienced loneliness and lack of social interaction during pandemics, that some of them exercised less or stopped with some extracurricular activities. Covid-19 was a confusing time for young people. Some however, had more time and exercised more, or learned something new, started new practice. Young people are aware and practice some of techniques for self-empowerment. They practice yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, sport, listening to music, dancing, screaming, hugging, emotion awareness techniques, Wim Hof method. Some of them have learned some of these techniques also at school/seminars. Obstacles that young people face when accessing help are financial, linked to long waiting lines, or being too expensive because it takes 10 or more sessions to be successful. They also see the obstacle that mental health issues and conversations are being a taboo topic. However, some offers are accessible, those offers are available on TV, books, YouTube, psychotherapy discounts for students, some free psychotherapy sessions for students, workshops,...Also most basic approaches and methods, like breathing, outdoors activities, talking with others, cleaning, cooking, creating, learning and practicing through YouTube and other free and open sources are free, and accessible.

They emphasised that it's important that they have day-to-day support, somethings that become their routine, and that they are guided through how to work with themselves on day-to-day basis. Taking into an account time constraints, and many other obligations that they already have. For mindfulness courses live contact is important, but online sessions are a good substitute. It depends on a person. The plus of online sessions is that they are more flexible (you don't have to do them on fixed time), take less time at a time.

Young people emphasised that platform for self-empowerment needs Schedule of live events on topics of mental health and self-empowerment, -10-15 min long lectures (on emotions, mental health issues), quizzes, reading recommendations, exercise recommendations, tips on how to be productive, reward system and the platform should connect young people with experts. They've emphasised that there needs to be a variety of categories, different content and innovative techniques that are easily applicable, interesting, and everyone can find for themselves what they need in different situations or for their needs/wya of learning. They'd appreciate having the opportunity to get more information about topics that are not taught in school, or they don't know much about it, some are also taboo.

They've emphasised personal approach. That they can feel safe, and meet others with similar challenges, and can support each other. They also desire to have the opportunity to communicate with other peers, or have the access to coaches, experts, trainers and such in the form of open forums or chats, and 1-on-1 sessions.

5.6. Commonalities and differences

One big take away from the focus groups in all countries is mental health is an important topic for young people and they think the accessibility to professional help should be better.

In all four of the partner countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has left its traces among young people. Most notably, the return to the "new normality" is hard for most of the young people. Some sort of social anxiety, feelings of isolation and loneliness stayed and they feel the return to normality is very stressful. Social situations are being experienced as more stressful and some people have a harder time connecting with people in real life. Additionally, having lots of other crisis like war and climate change leads to additional anxiety. Being chronically online during the pandemic has left many young people with concentration issues as well. One distinction was that while in most of the countries the problems seemed quite global, in Serbia, the young people are really worried about the situation in their country.

When it comes to strategies to fight stress or feeling down, the young people all have different approaches. Most like to do something that gives them pleasure or even gratification, like their hobbies, be it sport, music or creative activities. Some of the participants already have experience with yoga, meditation and breathing exercises – often supported via the internet, like apps or YouTube videos. Participants also found that letting their emotions go, like screaming into a pillow or crying gives them relief. They are also in touch with their own mind. For some it helps to create a positive mindset, doing tasks they can manage to become a positive feeling through it or just trying to focus/calm down.

Young people in the partner countries all agreed that professional help like psychotherapy is often not easily accessible, mainly because of the high costs, but long waiting times are also an issue. While in a country like Greece for example, the young people thought that there are not a lot of offers, the contrary was the case in Austria. There the young people thought there are too many offers and it is hard to keep an overview. Social media channels that focus on self-empowerment and mental health were praised on the one side because it speaks to young people but criticized on the other hand because it is often hard to tell if the help is professional help or if somebody just wants to earn money.

Among the countries, the participants agreed that online courses/meetings are a good addition to face-to-face meetings but not a substitution. However, online meetings can be a good tool to overcome obstacles. People might be more likely to participate in an online course than a face-to-face meeting because of social anxiety. Also, people are more independent and it is easier time-wise.

When asked what young people want from an online platform regarding mental health, one commonality was that they want the learning materials to be presented in a multi-media kind of way. They want short videos, podcasts and self-tests. Another point that is important to young people around Europe is that the content is used regularly. They want reminders, patches, daily check-ins and so on. Another point that was important for the young people is the professional help side. A live-chat with experts was wished for as well as a list of contacts with professional help in each of the countries. They want to be informed about the scientific background of stress or mental illnesses as well as an opportunity to interact with each other.

This state of the art report on the needs and situation of young people as well the research on existing competencies and educational offers will be used as a base to build the YOUHEAL platform that shall cater the needs of the young people in Europe, as well as filling some of the gaps that exist when it comes to help concerning mental health and well-being.