

# Keep Dreaming

Transnational Research Study  
on the relationship between

## Mental Health and

## \* Youth Participation



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# INTRODUCTION



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## Project description

The **Keep Dreaming** project (2022-3-ES02-KA210-YOU-000096531) aims to enhance young people's involvement in social participation and community volunteering by supporting their mental health. This project will focus on all stages of youth engagement and how to turn an anxious and stressful experience into a healthier and more effective one. Improving young people's mental health can have a direct impact on their active citizenship.

By providing ways to have healthier engagement, young people will be able to get more involved in their local communities, start taking action at different levels from towns, larger cities or even at the national or global levels.

## Partner organisations



Keep Dreaming project's coordinator, **Fundación Plan B Educación Social** is a Spanish non-profit private foundation from Salamanca, Spain. Their mission is to create social change to improve the lives of children and youth by giving them a chance for personal, social and educational growth. Their expertise involves designing innovative projects that are implemented on the national and international levels that benefit a wide range of target groups that include children and youth, as well as adults and the elderly. On the international level, the foundation has carved a position as a reliable coordinator and partner in many projects within Erasmus+ (in KA1, KA2 and KA3) as well as within the European Solidarity Corps and CERV programmes. All of these actions are linked to what they think is the major good: developing the local community through their socio-educational interventions with youth in Europe and beyond.



**Idee in Movimento**

**Idee In Movimento** is an extremely active cultural association based in Giardini Naxos, Italy. They are engaged in various fields: a) Environmental Protection, green economy & sustainability, b) Inclusion & Mental Health, c) Sport & Social Inclusion, d) Youth empowerment & entrepreneurship, and e) Cultural & Volunteering activities. Their experience has allowed them to acquire the know-how for the development of activities in the field of Erasmus+ programme projects, giving them the opportunity to participate in and develop more than 20 projects in the last 2 years, both KA1 and KA2.



Established in 2006, **Volunteers Centre Skopje** has implemented nearly 100 projects under the "YiA" and "Erasmus+" programmes, as well as initiatives funded by local, national, and international donors. Focused on connecting, engaging, and empowering young people through volunteering, VCS promotes European values and offers diverse opportunities for youth participation. VCS is

involved in Macedonian policy development, contributing to the “law of volunteerism” and “law on youth participation and youth policies.” Their active participation extends to monitoring national youth policies, while they actively engage in public discussions on youth empowerment and engagement.



**InterMediaKT**, based in Patras, Greece, has been active since 2012 in education, training and innovation at the European level. Through technological tools and the exchange of best practices, they work to achieve their main goal of knowledge transfer. They combine non-formal education and technology for empowerment of vulnerable groups. Their work has three main pillars: the development of digital tools, supporting social entrepreneurship and innovation, and enhancing 21st century skills (soft skills and employability competences). So far, their organisation has participated more than 50 times in local and transnational projects, along with many more volunteer activities. They have served more than 27,000 direct beneficiaries and their work has been awarded on the national and European levels.

## Relevance

The importance of this research is to learn **how mental health can play a role in young people’s social participation and improve the quality of their community actions**. The COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent quarantines, caused an increase in mental health disorders all over the globe, especially in Europe. In the project partners’ organisations, they have witnessed firsthand how this has had a significant effect on today’s youth and their civic engagement.

The project partners believe that active participation gives young people the power and motivation to acquire life skills, improve their personal development, cultivate an understanding of human rights and equality, and foster a strong active citizenship.

However, for young people to engage effectively, it is essential to consider mental health awareness. The benefits of such awareness have been well-documented, and this study will specifically explore its impact on enhancing youth participation.

The following analysis considers the national contexts of the four partner countries-Italy, North Macedonia, Greece and Spain-regarding youth participation and how their mental health influences the quality of their actions and work.

The study strives to promote mental health care access for youth and youth workers, and cooperate between partner countries to find possible common solutions to providing youth with healthy ways to develop their participatory citizenship.

## Methodology

In order to better understand the current situation regarding youth participation in each country involved in the project, the partners decided to carry out both primary and secondary research, employing desk research, online questionnaires and focus groups.

For the desk research, each organisation had to provide a short contextualisation of young people's mental health and the current state of youth participation in their country.

Questionnaires were prepared with a mixture of 15-20 multiple choice and open-ended questions. The **questionnaire for young people** focused on youth participation, well-being (physical and psychological), youth self-esteem, their trusted network, and resilience.

The **questionnaire for youth workers** analysed how young people participate, their involvement, the effects of their participation on their mental health, the current mental and physical health status of youth workers and the people they work with, their physical and psychological well-being, their involvement in the well-being of the youth they work with, as well as resources or activities aimed at improving youth's mental health. For both questionnaires, the target was 25 answers each: 25 youth and 25 youth workers per organisation. The questionnaire templates, in English, can be found in the [annexes](#) to the study.

The last part of the research was the **focus group**. An interview template was prepared with 7 questions that all partner organisations translated and used with their focus group participants. The questions were aimed at collecting data on young people's active participation, improving and encouraging their participation, and examining how it affects their mental health and self-esteem, and whether it has helped them. The target number of participants in the focus group interviews were at least 5 young people per organisation. The focus group script, in English, can be found in the annexes to the study.

Findings from the questionnaires and focus groups were analysed and each organisation wrote a summary and drew conclusions. In the following section, research results are presented by country.

# NATIONAL RESEARCH



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## ITALY:

### National context

#### Introduction

The mental health of young people in Italy is a growing concern. According to a systematic review by Mazzotti et al. (2017), the prevalence of psychological conditions in adolescence in Italy is higher than the global and European average, with 16.6% of boys and girls between 10 and 19 years old suffering from mental health issues. This is likely due to a number of factors, including the economic recession, the refugee crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Nocentini et al., 2021).

#### The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of young people in Italy. A study by Nocentini et al. (2021) found that the prevalence of anxiety and depression among young people in Italy increased by 25% during the pandemic. The study also found that young people who were already experiencing mental health problems were more likely to have their symptoms worsen during the pandemic.

The pandemic has also had a negative impact on youth participation in Italy. Many youth-led organisations were forced to close during the pandemic, and young people were less able to participate in civic activities. This has led to feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement among young people (Donati et al., 2022).

#### Ways to improve mental health and youth participation

However, based on studies conducted by experts, there are a number of ways to improve the mental health and youth participation situation in Italy. These include:

- Increasing access to mental health services for young people (Mazzotti et al., 2015, 2018).
- Raising awareness of mental health issues among young people and their families.
- Supporting youth participation in decision-making processes (Donati et al., 2022).
- Investing in programmes that promote positive youth development.
- Addressing the root causes of mental health problems, such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

Nevertheless it is important to mention that these solutions are of hard realisation, mainly because, for example, there is a lack of resources for youth participation (Donati et al., 2022;



Mazzotti et al., 2022). There is a clear lack of funding for youth-led initiatives and for training and support for young people who want to participate in decision-making processes.

Moreover, there is an insufficiency of a legal framework for youth participation (Donati et al., 2022; Perrotta et al., 2021). There is no national law that guarantees the right of young people to participate in decision-making processes. This makes it difficult for young people to have a say in issues that affect them.

### The role of social media

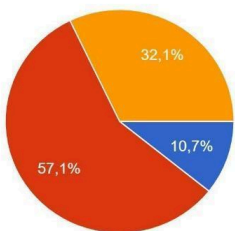
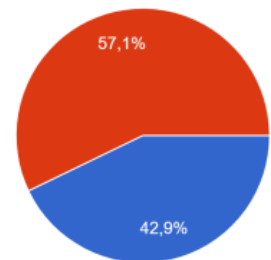
Social media can also play a role in improving the mental health of young people. Studies have shown that social media can be used to connect with other young people, share experiences, and find support (Mazzotti et al., 2018). However, social media can also be a source of stress and anxiety, especially for young people who are already struggling with mental health problems.

It is important for young people to use social media in a healthy way. They should be aware of the risks of social media, such as cyberbullying and unrealistic expectations, and they should take steps to protect their mental health.

## Questionnaire for youth

### Profile of participants

The age of participants ranged from 15 to 30 years, with the majority between **25 and 29 years (42.9%)**. These are therefore mainly young adults. This could influence responses; issues such as self-esteem and social participation may present differently in different age groups.



The majority of participants are **women (57.1%)**. This female prevalence could have an impact on some outcomes, for example on the propensity to seek help for mental health problems, which tends to be higher in women.<sup>1</sup>

### Well-being

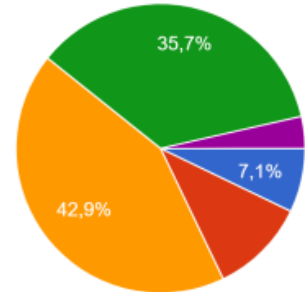
When asked about their well-being, **57.1%** describe their well-being as **good**. However, **42.8%** describe it as **fair or excellent**. There is therefore room to improve the perceived well-being of many young people. This data has particular relevance because it contrasts with

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epicentro.iss.it/materno/8marzomentale>

the reality that is often told by mass media, which mainly indicates that young people nowadays do not feel confident in themselves.

### Participation

The majority participate **occasionally (42.9%)** or **rarely (35.7%)** in decision-making processes that concern young people. This limited involvement may be due to lack of interest, lack of opportunity or confidence in being able to make an impact. This data partially reflects the Italian environment, particularly considering that a growing number of young people leave the country every year looking for better opportunities abroad.<sup>2</sup>



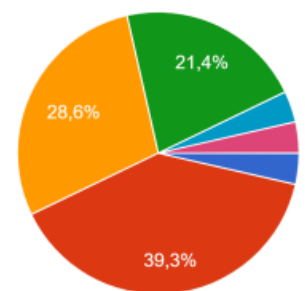
The main reasons for participation are the **desire for change (60.7%)** and **personal experience (42.9%)**. Feeling good about yourself carries less weight. Young people therefore seem to be driven above all by social and altruistic motivations.

The most widespread activities are **volunteering (35.7%)**, **online participation (39.3%)** and **artistic/cultural initiatives (39.3%)**. There is therefore a good commitment, albeit often in individual and remote ways.

### Well-being and leisure time

Free time is mainly dedicated to **socialising (42.9%)**, **watching films/TV (60.7%)** and **reading (46.4%)**. There is therefore interest in recreational and cultural activities. Sport and volunteering obtain lower percentages. This is interesting to underline, especially in consideration that youth in Italy are considered one of the most obese in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

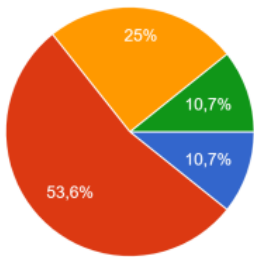
Indeed, despite only **39.3%** of the interviewees declaring that they practise sports during their free time in the previous question, for the question “How often do you do physical activities?” the majority answered “**many times per week (42.9%)**”, partially overturning the data collected in the previous question and indicating an important role played by physical activity in the lives of the young people interviewed.



<sup>2</sup><https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2022/11/rapporto-migrantes-+87-dei-giovani-italiani-emigrano-mattarella-spresso-non-fanno-ritorno-5e5d187c-0f2b-4a66-8ff8-33b4eaf1f222.html>

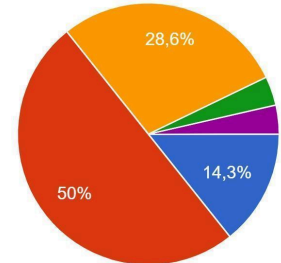
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coldiretti.it/salute-e-sicurezza- alimentare/salute-bambini-italiani-i-piu-grassi-obesi-4-su-10>

## Self-esteem and confidence

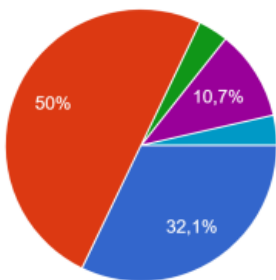


Self-esteem is considered **good** by the majority (**53.6%**), while **25%** consider it **fair** and **21%** **not good/excellent**. There is therefore room for improvement in this respect since this is a factor that greatly influences mental health.

Despite a significant 21% of interviewees answering the previous question that their self-esteem is not so good, **50% feel quite confident** expressing opinions in groups. **28.6%** are neutral, while a minority feel unsafe. Assertiveness is something many young people need to work on.



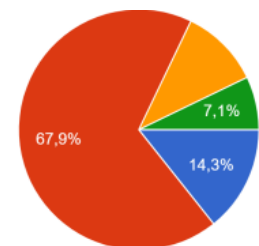
For personal problems, **50% confide in close friends** and **32.1% in family**. This data confirms the propensity of Italians to keep everything in the family. “Familism” is, indeed, particularly important in Italy.<sup>4</sup> Only **10.7%** turn to **mental health professionals**, while a few prefer not to share at all. There is therefore some openness to the idea of seeking help from mental health professionals, but still some stigma or hesitation to reach out to them and a preference to consult friends and family. This can also be explained by the widespread fear of looking for the help of professionals. The majority of Italians, indeed, think that it is not useful to go to a psychologist, and many people think that those who ask for professional help are simply crazy.<sup>5</sup>



Supportive relationships are **very (35.7%)** or **somewhat (32.1%)** important for the majority of young people. This confirms the key role of social ties for well-being.

## Resilience and mental health

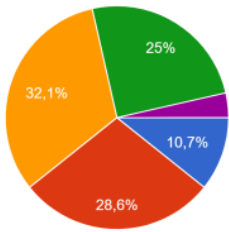
When faced with difficulties, **67.9%** believe they are likely to recover and continue to participate. This resilience is a positive factor for youth involvement and shows that they may not be quick to give up on something.



To manage stress, a positive and **proactive attitude prevails (46.4%)**. However, **17.9%** tend to **isolate and get angry**. Different coping styles therefore emerge among the participants.

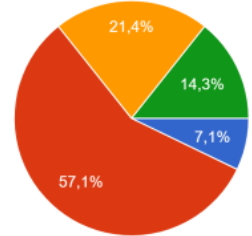
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.linkiesta.it/2017/10/litalia-e-una-repubblica-fondata-sul-tengo-famiglia-e-noi-paghiamo/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.centrointerapia.it/perche-ci-si-vergogna-di-andare-dallo-psicologo/#:~:text=La%20maggior%20parte%20delle%20persone,ritiene%20inutile%20andare%20dallo%20psicologo.>

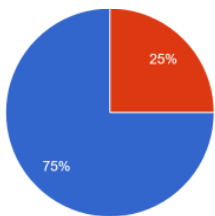


As for mental health support, **32.1% sometimes** seek help for mental health problems and **28.6% often** do so. But **25% rarely do it**, while a few never do it. There is therefore a good propensity to be supported, but there is still room for improvement.

Regarding the effect of mental health on consistent participation, **57.1% only sometimes** give up activities due to mental health problems. But **21.4% do it rarely** and **7.1% often**. The impact on participation therefore seems manageable overall.



When they are mentally well, everyone agrees that their participation increases. This bond is therefore recognized and confirmed by all.



Youngsters interviewed agree when asked if they think that a better mental health awareness can have a positive impact in active participation in society. We can see that everybody agreed, with **75% completely agreeing** and **25% simply agreeing**.

### Suggestions for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and active youth participation

Space on the questionnaire was left to the interviewees to give some suggestions on how to create an environment that can encourage both mental health and active participation of young people. Here are some of their tips:

- *Be more vocal about mental well-being, stress and anxiety management. It is not talked about enough.*
- *Talk about it more and clear this taboo, raise awareness among young people right away, make them understand that it is a real problem.*
- *Talk about it more, especially with younger people.*
- *The creation of cultural events and activities to do together.*
- *Normalise, at a corporate level especially in small towns, the figure of mental health professionals.*
- *Building community and engaging through recreational and cultural activities.*
- *Implement lots of tasks because there aren't many.*

- *I think it's important to make adults understand that it's important to talk about mental health with us young people.*
- *Talk more about these topics at school.*

## Focus group with youth

Idee in Movimento conducted a focus group interview with 5 youth, ages 19-25, on October 20, 2023 in Merano Italy. Questions were asked to a group of young people to explore their experiences of active participation, the factors that influence it and its impact on well-being.

### Main results

Participants are active in different fields: artistic, environmental, musical and recreational. The perceived level of active participation varies, with some considering themselves very involved and others feeling they are only passively participating.

To improve the involvement of young people, according to the participants, safe and free spaces are needed where events and activities can be proposed in line with the needs and interests of the new generations. For example, it is suggested to focus on co-working, sustainability, and cooperative activities.

Schools and educational institutions should also do their part, promoting more extra-curricular activities for students and dedicating more resources in terms of space, time and involvement of teachers. A more active role for teachers in extracurricular initiatives is hoped for, not necessarily with educational purposes but also with recreational and socialisation purposes.

Regarding the role of youth organisations and non-formal education, it is necessary to listen to young people more, asking them directly what they need and how they wish to express themselves and feel valued. Also in this case, the request is for more space, time and resources dedicated to extra-curricular activities tailored to young people.

Among the factors that discourage active participation are misinformation, i.e. the lack of effective communication through the right channels, and social anxiety that prevents people from showing up alone at events and activities. Instead, family and peer support help young people understand what their personal interests are and guide them in identifying preferred active participation activities.

Experiences abroad, such as volunteering or youth exchanges, have an educational and orientation impact, influencing young people's choices regarding future study and work paths.

Multiple benefits of active participation are highlighted. It increases sociability, counteracting the tendency towards individualism, especially in the post-pandemic period. It also strengthens self-esteem and self-confidence, with positive results on psychological well-being.

To promote these beneficial effects, the participants propose a decisive involvement of young people personally in the creation of initiatives, supported by targeted funding to transform their ideas into reality. The hope is for young people to play a leading role in the bottom-up planning process of activities tailored to them.

## Questionnaire for youth workers

The results of the questionnaire administered to youth workers were analysed regarding various aspects of the mental health of young people and youth workers. The aim is to understand the perception of interviewees on these issues and identify any critical issues or ideas for improvement.

### Profile of participants

The responses show that 70% of those interviewed are women, with different roles within their organisations (teachers, educators, volunteers, etc.) and experience in the youth sector ranging from 3 to 30 years. It is therefore a heterogeneous sample in terms of roles and seniority.

### Youth participation

Young people are mainly involved in extracurricular workshops, participatory projects, and volunteering activities. Strategies to promote active participation include listening sessions, empowerment, skills enhancement, and team-building activities.

### Impact on mental health

Interviewees perceive a positive impact of active participation on young people's self-esteem, sense of belonging and personal fulfilment. However, they do not have structured methods for measuring changes in emotional well-being before and after activities.

### Risk factors

The most cited risk factors for mental health are psychological (50%) and social (80%) in nature, as well as negative experiences such as bullying (70%) and social exclusion (50%). Biological factors are not mentioned.

### Symptoms in youth workers

Regarding symptoms they may have felt related to their work, 60% complain of recurring headaches, 30% insomnia and difficulty concentrating. Almost 70% say they do not have a healthy work-life balance. This may indicate high levels of work-related stress.

### Training on the topic

The majority of interviewees reported that their organisations do not have specific training programmes on mental health for young people and youth workers. Some provide generic refresher courses.

### External collaborations

There are few structured collaborations with other organisations or professionals on these topics. Where present, they concern training or leisure activities for young people.

### Innovative techniques

Of those affirming to have used innovative approaches to address youth work challenges, it is useful to mention general non-formal learning techniques. In particular, responders mentioned approaches of relaxation and mindfulness before group activities and moments of experience-sharing between colleagues.

### Digital tools

There are no specific digital platforms used by organisations to support emotional well-being. Some practitioners use meditation apps on a personal level.

## Conclusion

The mental health and youth participation situation in Italy is a complex issue. However, there are a number of things that can be done to improve the situation. The results of the questionnaire and focus group highlight how young people have a fair awareness of the impact of mental health on social participation. Good resilience skills and a prosocial orientation emerge.

Self-esteem, assertiveness, professional support and stress management can also be improved. Empowerment, social skills, healthy lifestyles and greater access to psychological support services should be fostered. Promoting mental well-being will allow young people to fully express their potential for social change.

Focus group participants suggested some key recommendations to improve the state of participation in Italy. They recommend providing more spaces and resources for extra-curricular activities designed by and for young people. Young people should be actively involved in planning bottom-up initiatives. They also recommend improving the promotion and support from schools, educational institutions and organisations in general. The educational role of international mobility experiences should be enhanced in order to encourage more youth to participate. Also, misinformation and socio-psychological barriers to participation should be countered. Active participation has demonstrated positive effects on sociability, self-esteem and self-confidence. Further research could explore concrete solutions to remove obstacles and promote youth leadership in various fields.

The feedback from Italian youth workers highlighted the need for greater attention to the mental health of young people and youth workers, through specific staff training, a more structured measurement of the impact of the programmes, and targeted collaborations with external professionals. Organisations should also consider introducing innovative digital tools to support emotional well-being. Finally, the stress levels complained of by youth workers indicate the need to improve the work-life balance.

By increasing access to mental health services, raising awareness of mental health issues, and supporting youth participation, we can help to **create a healthier and more just society** for all young people.

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## NORTH MACEDONIA

### National context

Over the past half-decade in Macedonia, the state of young people's mental health and youth participation has become a matter of concern. This summary aims to shed light on these issues by examining recent studies and identifying the needs related to these topics.

### Youth mental health

Macedonia has taken strides in prioritising youth mental health through the National Strategy for the Advancement of Mental Health 2018-2025. However, recent research highlights concerning trends.

The NGO "Youth Can" has compiled a publication addressing mental health care, drawing from diverse data sources. Within this publication, they reference a study conducted by the "Youth Educational Forum" in December 2021, which focused on 820 individuals aged 15 to 29. The study reveals that compared to older age groups, young people between 15 and 19 experience higher life satisfaction levels. Additionally, the same study investigated perceptions of psychosocial support availability within and outside of schools. The findings indicate that approximately one-third of participants do not perceive the presence of psychosocial support either within the school environment or outside (Mihailovska, 2022).

A survey conducted by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation found that 21.4% of individuals aged 18 to 29 experienced a decline in their mental health during the pandemic and more than a third of these young people point out feeling angry, anxious and lonely all the time or often (Mihailovska, 2022).

A study conducted by Mozaic among 3rd and 4th-year high schoolers (aged 17-19 years) from Skopje revealed that 19% of young people experience moderate to severe depression. Additionally, 58.44% of the students reported feeling constantly sad and depressed throughout the year. Close to 14% of the participants mentioned difficulties in carrying out their day-to-day tasks, while around 47% of students exhibited various forms of anxiety (Mozaic Meik - Skopje, 2023). Another study carried out by the University Clinic of Psychiatry similarly underscored concerning levels of mental health issues among young people. This particular study included a sample of individuals aged 12 to 18.

The findings showed that approximately 30% of participants had moderate to severe depression, and 48.4% experienced extended sadness. Disturbingly, 25.5% had self-harm thoughts. Additionally, 42.1% faced significant anxiety. Key issues were depression and generalised anxiety, with symptoms like sadness, loss of interest, sleep problems, worry, fear, and physical symptoms (University Clinic of Psychiatry - Skopje, 2023). Given the alarming

statistics highlighted by these studies, it is essential to focus on meeting the requirements and suggestions for enhancing the mental well-being of young people.

Proposed strategies to tackle this issue encompass awareness campaigns, peer-support initiatives, inter-institutional cooperation, promotion of mental health, and utilisation of technology-based services (University Clinic of Psychiatry - Skopje, 2023).

### Youth participation

In terms of the degree of youth participation in Macedonia, it remains noticeably low. According to a 2019 study, 90% of young people (aged 15-35 years) have never been part of a civic/non-governmental organisation or initiative that works on social issues and only 8% have taken steps to solve a particular societal problem (Galevski, 2019). As indicated by another study, merely 20.3% of young individuals (15-29 years old) engaged in any form of decision-making, be it schools, colleges, municipalities, or governmental bodies.

The statistics reveal a higher percentage of 30.6% of youth who actively voiced their opinions on social media platforms, discussing subjects like education, the environment or mental health. Nevertheless, the data also reveal that only 32.2% of respondents confirm the presence of organised volunteer work within their communities (Georgievska, 2021).

When inquired about their most common activities, responses often revolve around environmentally friendly efforts, providing free legal assistance, donating clothing and food to the homeless, undertaking humanitarian initiatives, and participating in workshops. Notably, only 12.3% of young people would decline volunteering. Despite this, there is significant dissatisfaction among young individuals, with an average rating of 2.38 on a scale from 1 to 5, regarding their current level of involvement in youth policy-making processes. Moreover, only a fraction of the youth population is familiar with the Macedonian Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, as well as The National Youth Strategy (Georgievska, 2021).

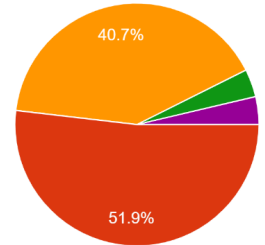
To enhance youth participation in Macedonia, recommendations include educating young people about participation benefits, using digital tools for accessibility, empowering civil society to promote youth-related laws, encouraging local youth council engagement, fostering volunteer activities, integrating youth work into education, and involving civil organisations in policy creation (Georgievska, 2021).

## Questionnaire for youth

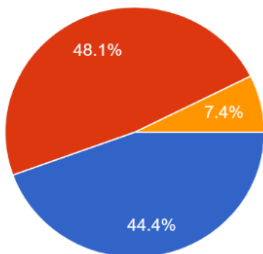
The Keep Dreaming questionnaire for youth was distributed in Macedonia gathering 27 responses. The findings are as follows:

### Profile of participants

The majority of respondents, **51,9%**, fall within the **18 to 20** age range. The following group, which consists of **40,7%** of respondents, are young people **21 to 25** years old. Only 2 individuals who took part in the questionnaire were 26 years old or older.



The majority of respondents (**66%**) identify as female, while a smaller (**33,3%**) but significant number identify as male.

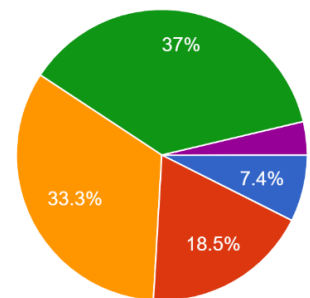


### Well-being

In response to the question regarding their overall well-being, most respondents (**92,5%**) described it as either excellent (**44,4%**) or good (**48,1%**). Only 2 respondents found their well-being to be fairly satisfactory.

### Participation

The data from Macedonian youth reveals varying degrees of involvement in events and actions where decisions are made about policies and programmes that influence the lives of young people. Only **7.4%** of respondents reported participating in these activities very often, **18.5%** often, and **33.3%** indicated occasional involvement. Additionally, **37%** of respondents reported rare participation, and **1 respondent** stated that they had never been involved in such events or actions.



The **desire for change (66.7%)**, **helping others (59.3%)** and **making friends (51.9%)** were the most frequently selected motivations, reflecting the importance of personal and social factors in driving respondents' involvement in decision-making actions.

Only **5 respondents** had a single primary motivation for their involvement in decision-making actions. The rest chose, as stated in the question, all options that apply to them.

**Sixty-three percent** of respondents are involved in civil participation, where they volunteer, participate in socially beneficial work, or engage in local projects, indicating a strong

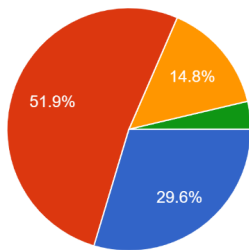
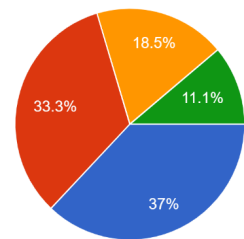
commitment to making a positive impact in their local communities. Another significant aspect of their involvement is participation in youth-led organisations or organisations for youth (different events and actions) **(59.3%)**.

Considering that the questionnaire targeted young people who had previously expressed interest in participating in Erasmus+ projects, it's notable that **51.9%** of respondents also selected the option "Taking part in international projects and mobilities".

### Well-being and leisure time

The most common activities include spending quality time with friends and family **(81.5%)** watching movies or TV shows **(66.7%)**, reading **(59.3%)** and sports **(51.9%)** each of which received multiple mentions. Activities like gardening and playing musical instruments are mentioned less frequently compared to others. One person also selected the option 'other' where they stated that during their free time, they read the Bible or pray.

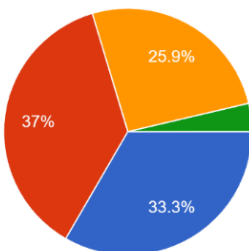
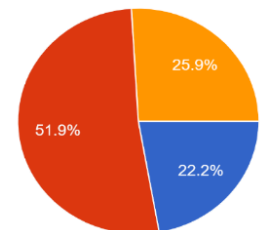
Exactly **37%** of respondents reported engaging in physical activities or exercise on a daily basis, indicating a commitment to regular exercise. **Thirty-three percent** mention participating multiple times per week, which also reflects a consistent effort to stay physically active. In contrast, **11,1%** respondents mentioned rarely or only exercising once a week **18,5%**.



When asked how often they engage in activities to relax and unwind, **29,6%** of respondents engage in such activities daily, indicating a strong commitment to relaxation and stress reduction. A significant number of participants **(51.9%)** do it multiple times per week, reflecting a regular practice. Some individuals **(14,8%)** do so once a week, while only **1 person** reported doing it rarely.

### Self-esteem and confidence

This question collected positive answers from the surveyed young people. The majority of respondents rated their overall self-esteem as either good **(51.9%)**, fair **(25,9%)** or excellent **(22.2%)**.

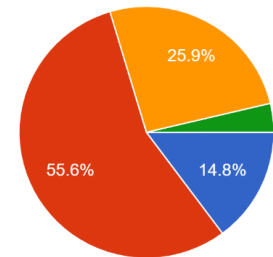


Out of the respondents, **70.3%** express confidence in sharing their opinions with others. Among them, **33.3%** feel very confident, while **37%** feel somewhat confident. About **25.9%** remain neutral, and only one person indicates feeling somewhat unconfident.

Most of the respondents **(51.9%)** expressed that they feel most comfortable discussing personal challenges with their close friends. About **33.3%** mentioned

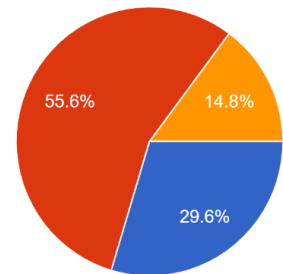
family members as their chosen confidants, highlighting the role of the family as a trusted source of support. Collected data shows that young people in Macedonia choose close relationships over teachers and mentors or online communities.

The majority of respondents consider supportive relationships to be of high importance, with many describing them as "very important" (55.6%) or even "extremely important" (14.8%). About 25.9% of respondents mentioned that supportive relationships are somewhat important, indicating that while they are generally important, there may be exceptions.



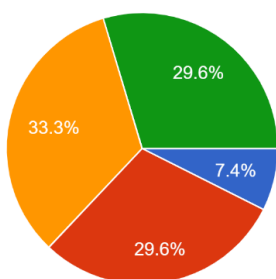
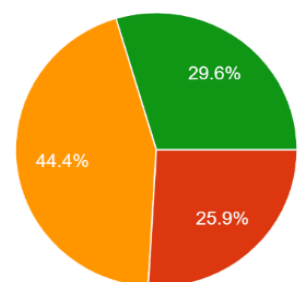
### Resilience and mental health

The respondents expressed a high likelihood of recovering from difficult situations and continuing their participation, with many describing it as "very likely" (29.6%) or "likely" (55.6%). This reflects a resilient and determined mindset among the young people who took part in the questionnaire, emphasising their ability to overcome obstacles and persist in their engagement. About 14.8% of respondents reported a neutral stance, indicating that their likelihood to recover and participate may vary depending on the situation.

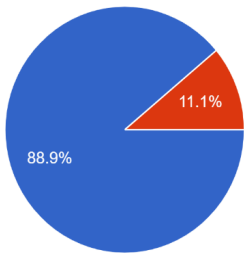


Many respondents (74.1%) believe that every problem has a solution, which emphasises the importance of problem-solving and maintaining a positive mindset among youth. Exactly 44.4% also stated that they notice things that can trigger them and calmly solve them. Some respondents mentioned that shifting their focus away from personal matters and tackling other tasks helps them with their well-being.

Regarding seeking help from others when struggling with their mental health, 29.6% of respondents indicated that they rarely seek assistance, while others mentioned that they do so only sometimes (44.4%). On the other hand, a significant portion- 25.9% of the respondents seek help often.

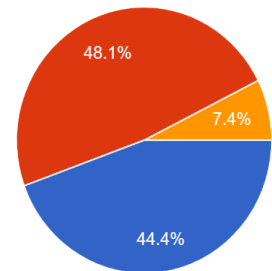


Twenty-nine point six percent of individuals reported never avoiding activities due to mental health concerns and 33.3% sometimes, suggesting a high level of resilience or effective coping within the group of respondents. On the other hand, a quite large group of the participants mentioned refraining from activities occasionally (29.6%) and frequently (7.4%), indicating that they may let mental health issues affect their engagement in activities.



The majority of respondents (**88.9%**) mentioned that their engagement significantly increases when they are feeling very good or excellent mentally. This suggests that mental well-being has a positive influence on their participation in different aspects of life. Interestingly, 3 participants (**11.1%**) stated that their engagement remains unchanged when they feel very good or excellent mentally, indicating that they might have a consistently high level of engagement regardless of their mental state.

Most participants either strongly agree (**44.4%**) or agree (**48.1%**) with the idea that promoting mental well-being among young people could positively impact their active participation in society. Only a minority (**7.4%**) remain neutral. This indicates a broad consensus among the respondents that promoting the mental well-being of young people can undeniably exert a positive influence on their active participation in society.



### Suggestions for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and active youth participation:

- *Active participation in projects and activities related to anti-stress: physical activities, art, music, and conversation.*
- *I believe that the promotion of such youth actions and organisations should be increased because a large part of young people do not know the positive things that they can acquire and learn there, and also that these same organisations exist.*
- *A space where young people will be actively supported, and will be surrounded by people who will understand them and offer them hope and support*
- *Suggest group activities for young people in which everyone will feel themselves and be carefree. Activities in which everyone will understand their value and the essence of their existence, where everyone will have the opportunity to stand out and feel appreciated by the other participants and thus we will also achieve increased self-confidence and upliftment of the mood, with which we have a product of feelings that help us think positively about all life's "problems".. :/*
- *More events organised by non-governmental organisations that aim to raise awareness in young people about how important their mental health really is and how sharing your difficulties with other people is crucial.*
- *It's not always in the middle, I think it's an individual decision to take care of yourself. If there's a chance to change the environment, it's nice to have an environment that promotes healthy habits, real values, etc...*

- *I think that more attention should be paid to that topic, especially in schools where it is not enough. To encourage classes and projects for young people under that theme.*
- *To organise more projects under the theme.*
- *Potentiation of the harmful effects of aimless scrolling on social networks; activities that increase the unity of generations; perceiving ways to focus on them instead of constantly seeing problems locally, and rather globally, ways that will help us to actually ground ourselves and optimistically see potential and opportunity for improvement. Because today's young people are mostly preoccupied with how we look, how we present ourselves, how others see us, and with our preoccupation with problems we can't handle ourselves, we don't even think outside the box. This is not such a concrete answer, but organising some sports activities, humanitarian workshops, etc., so that the product of the activity will significantly affect someone else.*
- *An environment where there is no judgement and everyone is open to new ideas and innovation*
- *Organising more activities that encourage mental well-being and promoting them well*
- *Workshops that would offer both skill learning, artistic expression as well as lecturing and interaction with attendees*
- *Communication in groups, reading books, watching movies and talking about them afterwards, thinking out loud.*
- *Online activities*

## Focus group with youth

The Macedonian focus group involved six participants aged 19 to 25 in Skopje on September 26, 2023. The participants were students engaged in both university activities and part-time employment.

### Main results

The group has been actively involved in volunteering and local community activities ranging from environmental concerns to cultural diversity and inequality, while also using their skills and interests to make a positive impact.

Participants highlighted the importance of promoting opportunities through engaging videos and social media. Collaboration between educational institutions and organisations was emphasised to make information more accessible. Additionally, proactive outreach, personalised engagement, and workshops were discussed.

The participants stressed the need for educators to show genuine care and understanding for students' interests and needs, as it serves as a strong motivator for active engagement in both academic and extracurricular activities.

The participants talked about the importance of fun activities to spark curiosity, and short, interactive workshops and events connecting like-minded people. As motivators, the participants mentioned raising awareness about important issues, helping others, meeting new people, and expressing their passion. However, some common discouragements were also identified, such as concerns about taking on overwhelming responsibilities, fear of being labelled, safety concerns, and a belief that individual efforts may not create meaningful change.

For some participants, personality and stepping out of their comfort zone played an important role in becoming more active. Others mentioned friends, peers, school, or programmes like Erasmus+ as sources of motivation.

The focus group participants saw positive effects of active participation on their well-being, including reduced anxiety, feelings of accomplishment and self-worth, and a deeper sense of purpose when helping others.

They also explained that active participation has positively impacted their personal growth by making them more open and confident and reminding them of the significance of working on their beliefs and values. Engaging in meaningful actions has also brought happiness and a sense of importance.

## Questionnaire for youth workers

### Profile of participants

The surveyed organisations from Macedonia represent a diverse array of cultural, environmental, and youth-focused groups operating in the region. The respondents within these organisations hold diverse roles, ranging from executive positions such as director or president, programme and project coordinators, to programme associates and general members. They also have varying years of experience working with young people, from 4 years to 30 years with the majority having more than 15 years of experience in the field. The youth workers are located in cities such as Skopje, Bitola, Shtip, and Prilep, where there is a significant youth population and a recognised need for their services.

### Participation of young people

Young people participate in the organisations' activities and programmes through various means. They take part in educational programmes or workshops as participants in Macedonia and abroad, volunteer for different initiatives, or take the initiative to initiate and implement



their own projects. Involvement extends to project activities and initiatives at the local, regional and international level, with physical presence, online participation, or a combination of both.

Young people are included through public calls shared on the Internet, social networks, direct meetings, and promotions at schools and universities. Some become acquainted with the activities through friends or their social circle.

### Strategies or methods the organisations use to encourage active youth participation

The organisations that took part in the questionnaire have diverse strategies to encourage active youth participation. These include involving young people in creating activities, participating in decision-making with institutions and local self-government, shaping strategic documents and contributing to local youth councils.

Targeting specific youth groups, such as members of local youth councils, involves continuous training through non-formal education to develop detailed action plans. Additionally, the Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA has developed the online tool [iniciraj.mk](https://iniciraj.mk) for digital youth participation based on the European platform [opin.me](https://opin.me), motivating young people to participate on the local and national levels.

Strategies also involve collaboration with schools, mentoring and supporting student organisations, sharing information about opportunities (youth programmes, volunteering, employment), and advocating for youth opportunities at the local level.

The use of social media and sharing of successful activities on these platforms can effectively motivate young people to participate in upcoming events. Additionally, some of the organisations occasionally organise entertaining events as another strategy to engage their audience. Local activities should be designed to be interesting and unique, incorporating various forms of art or nature walks, which are proven to be attractive to young people.

### Mental health and involvement of users

The respondents believe that being actively engaged in youth programmes or activities has a positive influence on the emotional well-being of young people.

Active participation not only provides young people with opportunities for learning and personal development but also gives tools to improve their emotional well-being. Participation leads to noticeable improvements in self-confidence, behaviour or empathy and promotes inclusion. For some, it can also serve as a maturing process.

Beyond personal growth, active participation significantly contributes to socialisation, helping youth to make friends and better understand the functioning of society and their rights.

When asked about the most prevalent factors that young people face that influence the development and maintenance of their mental health, the majority of respondents chose social factors (90%) and structural issues (80%), as the most prevalent factors that young people encounter in their organisations or activities.

Other factors such as educational experiences, experiences of bullying or other trauma, and psychological or biological factors turned out to be less important.

When asked for specific examples of how youth engagement influenced the mental health outcomes of participants, one of the respondents explained that workshops with students raise their desire and motivation to learn, while volunteer activities provide tangible goals. Also, international projects contribute to the awareness and understanding of the conditions of youth in other countries.

Another person mentioned that active participation in an organisation's activities has been shown to resolve personal dilemmas, boost self-confidence, and empower participants to overcome obstacles.

On a different note, another representative of the organisation noted that the shift to online communication has diminished opportunities for socialisation and quality interaction, potentially affecting communication skills and increasing social pressure.

While specific examples were not provided by some organisations, there is a general agreement that youth engagement has a positive impact on mental well-being, fostering self-improvement and a more optimistic outlook on life.

The youth workers who took part in the questionnaire did not have any specific methods to assess or measure the changes in the mental health of young people in the activities. However, two mentioned that they perform a pre- and post-evaluation of young people's participation.

### **Situations of the young people they work with and involvement in their well-being**

When asked if they had experienced mental health symptoms related to their work as a youth worker, a significant percentage of youth workers reported experiencing mental health symptoms related to their work. The most prevalent issues include irritability (70%), insomnia (40%), forgetfulness (40%), and difficulty concentrating (40%). Other reported symptoms include changes in appetite (30%), tearfulness (20%), panic attacks (20%), and recurring headaches (10%). Only 20% of respondents stated that they did not encounter any of the listed mental health symptoms, which highlights the demanding nature of youth work.

A minority of youth workers (30%) expressed confidence in having a healthy work-life balance, while a larger portion (40%) felt that they sometimes achieve a balance between work and personal life and (40%) believe that they do not have a healthy work-life balance.

## Resources and activities for improving youth mental health

Two of the organisations that took part in the questionnaire do not offer direct training in dealing with mental health but emphasise this aspect through workshops or activities they have. One respondent explained that their organisation offers training for young people who want to become youth workers, with specific modules dedicated to mental health. Another organisation is currently in the process of developing similar programmes and 6 out of 10 respondents stated that their organisations do not have specific programmes or workshops addressing mental health issues.

Two respondents have collaborated with associations that focus on mental health topics, including partnerships with psychologists' associations, and two others have engaged in joint activities on mental health topics with other organisations. However, there are 6 responses where such collaborations have not been established.

While 5 out of 10 of the respondents indicate that they have not yet implemented innovative approaches or work with well-known methods, others mention specific strategies. These strategies include organising activities in nature or co-working environments, facilitating team-building activities with youth workers, and sharing informative and useful materials on mental health. Furthermore, one of the respondents mentioned participating in seminars and international events as a way to learn from best practices. The last organisation shared that they have prepared risk assessment documents with a group of project coordinators to guide youth workers on how to respond to specific situations.

Most of the respondents indicated a lack of usage or familiarity with such tools, as expressed in responses like "We don't use [them]," "Not familiar with," and "No." On the other hand, one respondent mentioned specific platforms, such as [www.razgovor.mk](http://www.razgovor.mk), which are available throughout Macedonia, and the Facebook page [Anima Centar](#), which belongs to the Center for medicine, psychotherapy and education and which offers free counselling sessions in Bitola city. Another respondent noted the use of digital tools for online youth participation and social networks but specified the absence of a dedicated tool for mental health. Additionally, one respondent recommended the [Headspace](#) meditation app.

## Conclusion

Based on current knowledge and the research results, the connection between youth mental health and youth participation in Macedonia is yet to be explored. However, the well-being of young people and their active engagement in shaping society demand comprehensive attention, education, and collaborative initiatives. Despite the lack of existing studies, recognising and understanding this relationship is crucial for the development of youth.

Results from the questionnaires and the focus group interview show that many youth in Macedonia do see a **positive connection between active participation and mental well-being**. However, they may not always be aware of how they can participate, so more work should be done to promote these kinds of activities to youth. Respondents also highlight the importance of providing a space where young people will be supported and surrounded by like-minded people, where they will feel accepted and not judged by others. Activities should be tailored to youth's interests and give all participants the chance to stand out and feel valued and appreciated by others.

Regarding what kinds of activities to offer, some of the most common choices were art, music, reading, sport, social interaction, and participation. Workshops and online activities were also suggested, though more respondents stressed the importance of in-person activities. Several also mentioned the importance of offering more activities and events regarding mental health and well-being specifically and promoting positive mental health practices among youth.

The results of the focus group yield many observations and ideas regarding how active participation influences mental health. **Key strategies for encouraging youth participation** include social media promotion, proactive outreach, collaboration between educational institutions and youth organisations, and interactive workshops. Motivators for participation include raising awareness, helping others, and expressing passion. Friends, peers, school, or programmes like Erasmus+ are sources of motivation, too. To create a supportive environment, policymakers should prioritise youth's needs, shift focus to long-term benefits, encourage intergenerational dialogue, and actively involve youth in policy making. Active participation positively impacts personal growth, well-being, and self-esteem. It also influences life choices and career aspirations, and contributes to a sense of purpose.

The results of the youth workers questionnaire show that while there is awareness of mental health in the youth work field, more work needs to be done. The shift to online activities and learning during the pandemic affected people's mental health significantly.

Some suggestions are to **involve young people in making and preparing the activities themselves**. They could also be included in local decision-making processes. Collaboration could be done with schools and student organisations to share opportunities. Activities should be designed to be entertaining and relevant to young people.

Youth workers agree that active engagement in programmes or activities could have a positive influence on youth's emotional well-being. It could also improve their self-confidence and empathy, and help them mature and feel included in society. The main factors that influence youth's mental health are social factors and structural issues, so participation in community activities could help address them.

Most youth workers who responded have experienced **poor mental health symptoms related to their work**. A small minority expressed that they have a healthy work-life balance.

This suggests that youth workers in Macedonia may be under a lot of stress and have demanding jobs.

The majority of organisations did not have specific programmes or workshops addressing mental health. Some respondents mentioned strategies for working with mental health and tools available to them. However, there is still room for improvement in these aspects.

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## GREECE

### National context

The COVID-19 pandemic has hugely impacted the mental health of young people in Greece. Based on recent research by Koutra, Pantelaiou and Mavroeides (2023) approximately 35.5% of the 485 participants reported experiencing mental health problems. Among these individuals, the most common issues were anxiety symptoms (58.1%), depressive symptoms (16.9%), and other stressors like family or academic problems (25.0%). The study indicates that young adults from ages 18-25 generally hold positive attitudes toward individuals with severe mental illness, although some negative stereotypes persist. Self-stigma regarding help-seeking is a significant concern, especially among those who fear that seeking assistance might undermine their self-worth. Gender, prior help-seeking experience, and demographic factors appear to influence these attitudes.

Moreover, based on the National Road Map of Greece of the project Let's Talk, the primary reason for seeking psychological help is a profound sense of loneliness. This trend existed even before the pandemic but has intensified since, particularly among young people in Athens, especially those moving to the city for university studies. This transition to a bustling metropolis can be overwhelming, especially for introverted individuals, leading to heightened anxiety levels. While it's unclear if this anxiety directly results from loneliness, it closely relates to academic stress and uncertainties about the future. As adolescents reach independence at age 18, family and peer issues reduce as reasons for seeking help. However, professionals agree that emotional scars from these experiences often motivate them to seek assistance in adulthood, often tied to low self-esteem. Psychologists also note other referral factors, such as sleep and eating disorders like bulimia, which may signal deeper concerns. Common diagnoses for young adults seeking help include anxiety disorders, like generalised anxiety and social phobia, along with depression and eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia.

A study by Kokkinos, Tsouloupas and Voulgaridou (2022) found that participants' perceived psychological, academic, and financial impacts of COVID-19 were significantly correlated with their general mental health (GMH) and subjective well-being (SWL). Specifically, perceived COVID-19 impacts were negatively associated with SWL, while GMH was positively correlated with these impacts. Gender differences were observed, with males scoring higher on perceived COVID-19 impact on academic performance. In contrast, females scored higher on perceived COVID-19 impact on psychological functioning, GMH, and SWL. Perceived COVID-19 impact on financial status and psychological functioning had significant indirect effects on SWL through GMH, while the impact on academic performance had an indirect effect as well. In general, this research sheds light on the complex interplay between perceived COVID-19 impacts, general mental health, and subjective well-being among university students, emphasising the importance of mental health support and interventions during the pandemic.

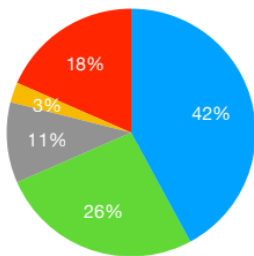
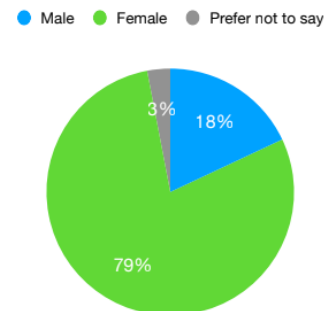
This study involved 1,654 Greek-speaking university students, with an average age of 26.10 years, of whom 27.1% were males and 72.9% were females. Most participants (65.9%) were undergraduates, while the rest were graduate and doctoral students. The majority (62.6%) fell in the 18-25 age range, while 32.4% were aged 26-50, and 3.5% were 50 years or older.

## Questionnaire for youth

The Keep Dreaming questionnaire for young people was distributed in Greece gathering 33 responses. The findings are as follows:

### Profile of participants

The majority of respondents were 26 or 27 years-old. There was also a significant number of respondents in their late teens and early 20's. **Seventy-nine percent** of the participants identified as "female", while **18% percent** of the participants identified as "male" and **3%** of the participants preferred not to mention their gender.

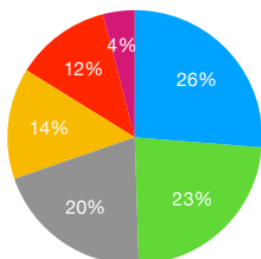
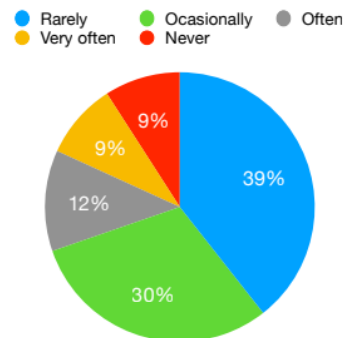


### Well-being

When asked about their well-being, **42%** of respondents said they have good well-being, **26%** have fair well-being, **11%** have low well-being, and **3%** have very low well-being. Only **18%** have excellent well-being.

### Participation

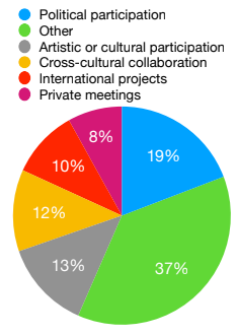
More than a third of the participants, **39%**, reported low participation. Thirty percent said they have an occasional participation, compared to 12% with a high participation. Nine percent of the participants said they had a very high participation, the same proportion for the people that never participate in community activities.



**Twenty-six percent** of the participants state that their motivation for taking part in these actions is the **desire for change**. **Twenty-three percent** are motivated by the desire to **help others**, 20% are motivated by the desire to gain personal experience, while 14% are motivated by the idea of feeling better about themselves. Twelve percent of participants say that they participate in these activities to make friends, and 4% are motivated by other unspecified reasons.

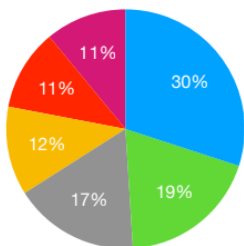
When asked about different ways in which they get involved in their community or address issues that affect them, **37%** of participants opted for **other reasons not specified in the**

**multiple-choice options. Nineteen percent** said they were involved in **political activities**; 13% were involved in artistic or cultural participation (music, dance, theatre and visual arts); 12% were involved in youth exchanges or cross-cultural collaboration activities; 10% in international projects and mobilities and 8% in private meetings.



### Well-being and leisure time

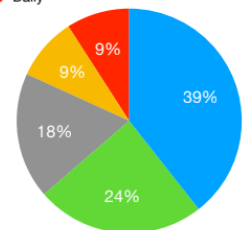
- Other
- Socialising with friends and family
- Watching movies or TV shows
- Reading
- Sports
- Arts and crafts



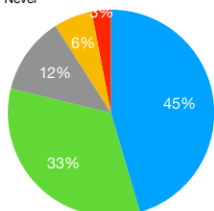
When asked what kinds of activities they do in their free time, **30% of the participants chose the option "other entries"** to express their preferences regarding the use of their leisure time. Some **19%** opted for **"socialising with friends and family"**, 17% for watching films and TV shows, 12% for reading, and 11% for sports, the same as participants inclined to the arts and crafts (11%).

The participants describe their participation in sport as follows: **39%** percent of the participants say that they **exercise once a week**, **24%** exercise several times a week, 18% exercise rarely, and 9% never exercise. This percentage - 9% - is the same for participants who exercise daily.

- Once a week
- Several times a week
- Rarely
- Never
- Daily



- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Daily
- Rarely
- Never

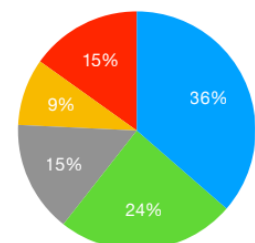


Regarding the frequency of their participation, **45%** of respondents claim to participate **several times a week in activities that provide them with relaxation and rest**, 33% do these activities once a week, 12% of the participants say that these activities are always present in their daily lives, compared to 6% who do them rarely, and 3% who never do them.

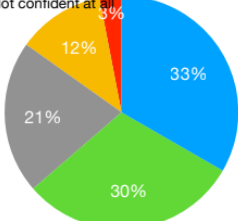
### Self-esteem and confidence

In terms of their self-esteem and confidence, **36%** of respondents say they have **medium-good self-esteem**, **24%** of the participants say they have **high self-esteem**, compared to 15% of the participants who consider their self-esteem to be low. The same percentage -15%- is attributed to participants with excellent self-esteem, and only 9% of the participants claim to have poor self-esteem.

- Medium-good
- High
- Low
- Poor
- Excellent



- Neutral
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident
- Somewhat unconfident
- Not confident at all

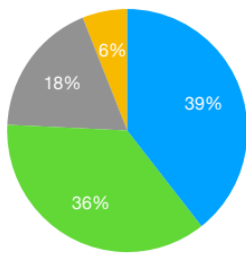
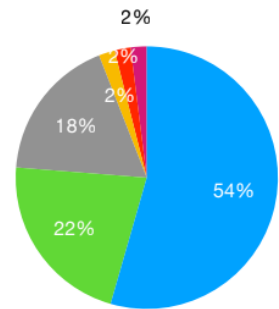


When asked how they feel about sharing their opinions in a group, **33%** of participants indicated a **neutral confidence in sharing their opinions in a group of people**. **Thirty percent** said they feel **somewhat confident** for this purpose and 21% showed the highest degree of confidence. In



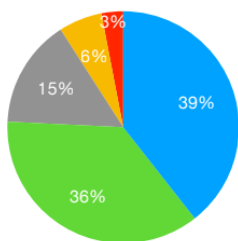
contrast, 12% of respondents said they had low confidence in expressing themselves in a group, and 3% were not confident at all.

When asked who they prefer to seek support from, **54%** of participants' responses referred to **increased trust with close friends** for this purpose. **Twenty-two percent** of them expressed a greater degree of trust with their **family members**, 18% said they trusted a mental health professional, 2% in online communities, 2% chose the option of "other entries" and 2% preferred not to reveal it.



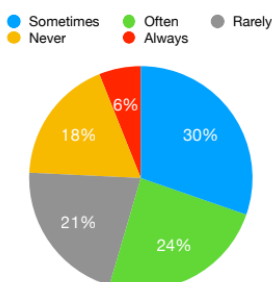
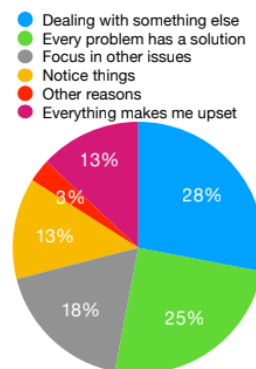
When asked how important supportive relationships are in encouraging their participation, **39%** of the participants chose to consider this type of relationship as **very important** for this purpose. **36%** considered them **extremely important**, and 18% chose the option "somewhat important". 6% of the participants considered these relationships as "not important at all".

### Resilience and mental health



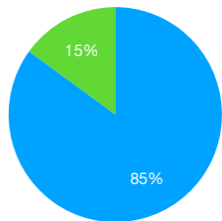
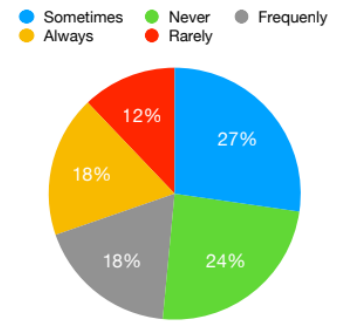
When asked how likely they were to recover and continue to participate in activities after experiencing difficulties, **39%** of the participants considered that these difficulties played a **neutral role in their continued participation in activities**. **Thirty-six percent** felt that they could continue with these activities **easily** and 15% very easily. Six percent did not feel that, after the difficulties had arisen, they could continue with ease in these activities, and 3% did not feel able to do so.

When considering their well-being in their work and professional engagements, **28%** of the participants chose the option "**dealing with something else makes me feel less of the problem in my head**". Only **25%** believe that **every problem has a solution**; while 18% think that for them it is good to focus on other issues. Thirteen percent of respondents chose the option "I notice things that can trigger me and calmly solve them", the same proportion for "everything makes me upset if I cannot focus". Three percent of the participants chose "other reasons".



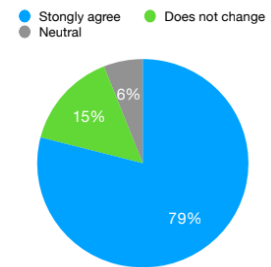
When asked how often they seek help from others when struggling with their mental health, **30% of the participants stated that they sometimes seek help**. While **21% rarely seek help**, 18% said that they never sought help from others in matters related to their mental health, and 6% said that they always seek help.

Regarding participation and their mental health, **27%** of the participants stated that they **sometimes refuse to participate in activities because of mental health issues**. **Twenty-four percent never** did so, compared to 18% whose participation was frequently affected by such issues. The same proportion - 18% - always have their participation interfered with because of the quality of their mental health, and 12% rarely stopped participating in activities for this reason.



**Eighty-five percent** of the participants stated that **their participation in the different areas of their life grew in situations of good mental health**, compared to **15% who said they were not influenced** by the state of their mental health in their personal and social development.

In regards to the statement, “promoting mental well-being among young people can positively impact their active participation in society”, **79% of the participants fully agree**, 15% agree, and 6% do not have a clear opinion on this issue.



## Focus group with youth

InterMediaKT conducted a focus group interview with 7 young people, ages 18-29, on November 27, 2023 in Patras, Greece.

### Introduction

In this discussion the following topics related to the general objectives of the project were addressed:

- Perceived impact of participation in youth activities (work and/or volunteering) on personal mental health and well-being.
- Particular context (economic, social, affective, etc.) in which participation takes place. Personal interests and challenges.
- Changes or initiatives at public/social level to improve the inclusion of young people in different activities related to their community or other communities.

### Main results

Participants have different participatory experiences, but all have been involved in youth activities and understand the concept of “active participation”. They have all participated in European projects related to the following areas: education and training, web design and

communication, artistic projects, environment, entrepreneurship, care for children in vulnerable situations and mental health.

In general, participants report that their participation in the activities has a positive impact on their mental health, allowing them to identify with other members of the group and to express their own feelings. Interaction with other participants/workers/target population affects participants' personal confidence through interpersonal skills training: active listening, emotional expression and linguistic expression.

Participants affirm that the general population have numerous facets that they can connect through participation. Yet, access to this participation is not equal for all. More intervention is needed in the most vulnerable groups, and it is important that their participation is meaningful to their community of origin. Young people's access to participation in different activities is very unequal: it depends on the country of origin and the residential area. In less populated areas, there is the problem of lack of opportunities and information, as opposed to big cities, where it is difficult to find your place.

Young people need to be more aware of the different activities they can participate in. This should be achieved through outreach strategies (social media, face-to-face events) that enable young people to feel involved in their community or other communities, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups.

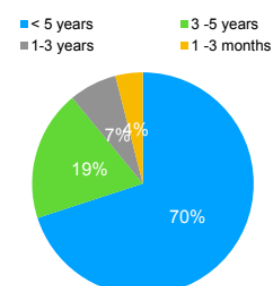
## Questionnaire for youth workers

The Keep Dreaming questionnaire for young people was distributed in Greece gathering 27 responses. The findings are as follows:

### Profile of participants

The participants come from a variety of organisations, including NGOs (7), youth organisations (2), a vocational education centre (1), information centres for protected areas (2), an association for lifelong learning (1), and other types (14). Their roles include trainers (2), a head of an information centre (1), a career counsellor (1), a training officer (1), an information centre manager (1), a training programme implementer (1), a volunteer (1), and various other roles (19).

**Seventy percent** of the participants have been **working with youth for more than five years**. Only 19% have been working with youth for between 3 and 5 years, 7% have been working with youth for 1 to 3 years, and 4% for 1 to 3 months.



## Participation of young people

When asked how young people typically participate in their organisation's activities or programmes, the answers were diverse, but can be summarised as follows. In general, the participants state that young people are active in their organisations as volunteers, and that most of them already have an awareness of civic participation. The volunteers' choice of organisation is motivated by a personal interest (e.g. gender equality or care for the environment). These organisations often offer volunteers different resources to extend their participation to other areas: European cooperation projects, youth exchanges, etc. Once volunteers decide to participate, they are often motivated to do so, although there are always cases of volunteers with a somewhat passive presence in the activities.

Young people can participate in the activities of the organisations in person or online, although face-to-face participation continues to predominate. At the beginning of the volunteering, these organisations are in charge of introducing themselves (mission, vision, values and target population of their activities) so that volunteers can get to know them in detail. Normally, organisations usually make open calls for young people to participate in various non-formal education programmes, either hosted in the same city where the organisation is located or abroad. Applications are evaluated and the best relevant applications are selected where they show interest in the programme and meet the requirements set from the beginning.

## Strategies or methods that their organisations use to encourage active youth participation:

- Verbal information on current activities throughout the year. Sending newsletters and messages via *Viber*.
- Through synergies with all levels of education.
- Experiential workshops, role plays, interactive activities, dynamic experiences, question and answer sessions, maieutic method.
- Designing programmes, initiatives and communication strategies that respond to young people's interests, concerns and preferences.
- Using social media to communicate with youth and provide information about the organisation's activities and opportunities.
- Develop programmes and events specifically tailored to the needs and interests of youth participants.
- Skills development opportunities.

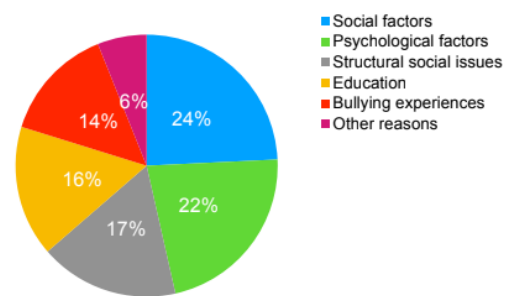
- Implement mentoring programmes where experienced individuals within the organisation mentor young participants.
- Recognition through certificates, reinforcing a sense of achievement and value.
- Ensuring that participation opportunities are flexible and accessible.
- Establishing feedback mechanisms to collect feedback from new participants. This may include surveys, focus groups or feedback forms, allowing them to express their thoughts on the organisation's activities.
- Use of online platforms and technology to facilitate communication and participation.
- Cooperation and synergy with the Directorates of Education at all levels.
- Learning by doing; reality simulation actions.
- Methods of non-formal education combined with dialogue with local authorities.
- Playful teaching, experiential teaching, discovery methods.
- The method that encourages the participation of young people in activities is through the initial discussion of the needs that the participants themselves feel they want to develop and then the creation of activities focusing on the development of these needs.

### **Mental health and youth involvement**

Participants pointed out that the impact that participation in different activities has on the emotional health of young people is very important in helping them to socialise and preparing them for their professional futures. Also, participation in these activities is presented as an opportunity to deepen their own interests and acquire new ones, as well as to learn how to cope with the difficulties of everyday life. One of the contributions we can point out as essential to this purpose is that the active participation of young people in a certain project gives them a feeling of belonging to a group, as well as a purpose in life. This group cohesion, which allows identification with other members of the group, promotes individual self-esteem and confidence and reduces the feeling of loneliness, which was considerably accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "group trust" built up over time in a group of people who share a common goal can result in increased individual trust, encouraging each member to take initiative, contribute their own opinions or solve a particular problem. Unfortunately, the impact of these activities on the well-being of participants is not always positive. If the group building methodologies are not adequate, or if there are no tools to deal with internal conflicts, youth participation can be considerably reduced.

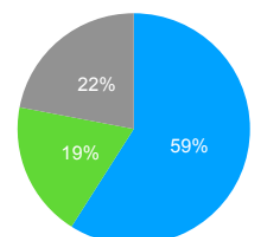
When asked about the most prevalent factors that young people in their activities or organisations face that influence the development and maintenance of their mental health, **24%** of respondents stated that **social factors have a strong influence on the mental health of the participants**. Psychological factors (early care experiences, family experiences) were considered important by 22%. Seventeen percent chose the option "structural (social) issues (experiences of social inclusion or exclusion, equality or inequality" and 16% chose "Experiences in the field of education". Fourteen percent considered bullying experiences important in this respect, and 6% chose other reasons.



### Examples of how young engagement has influenced the mental health outcome of participants:

- European Sustainable Development Week 2023\_OFYPEKA - Protected Area Management Unit Of Hope - Information Centre Of The National Park Of Tzumerka, Peristiou And Harada Arachthos (Agnada, Central Tzoumerka Arta), Action: Making Traditional Cornbread, Kouloura, at the Folklore Museum of Tzoumerka. With the active participation of the students of the High School of Agnanda, from the process of making, baking and tasting the bread, learning things about their place in the past. Two new students to the school and to the area, together with their parents, played a particularly active role, and learned about the past of the place they chose to move to, in an interactive way. The activity took place at the Folklore Museum of Tzoumerka, in Agnanda, Central Tzoumerka Arta.
- Coaching and mentoring programmes.
- Participation in youth exchanges.
- Community engagement programmes.
- Online programme on emotional intelligence in the workplace.
- Skills development opportunities.
- Recognising the different needs and commitments of young people, it offers flexible participation options.

The majority of participants - **59%** - **do not** have **methods to assess changes in the mental health of young people before and after their participation in the relevant activities**. Nineteen percent claim to have such methods, while 22% ticked the option "sometimes".

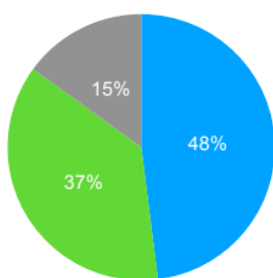
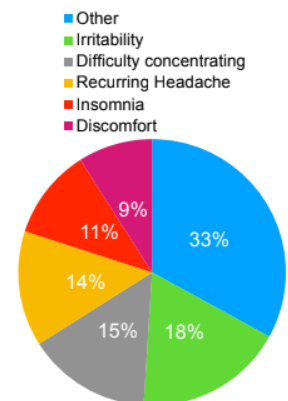


The participants who answered yes to the previous question reported to have evaluation tools such as questionnaires, personal interviews and focus groups. For some organisations, these resources are applied before, during and after the participation of young people in a volunteering activity, such as the European Voluntary Service. These regular meetings take place in a safe place, with a discussion about how the volunteer feels in general and in particular in relation to:

- the activities in which he/she is involved;
- with the target group with which he/she is co-organising the activities;
- with the group of young volunteers;
- with the coordination team from the organisation.

The periodicity of these meetings allows them to monitor the emotional development of each young person throughout the whole volunteering process. Another tool that they encourage volunteers to use is journaling, as an additional tool for self-evaluation/self-measurement of changes.

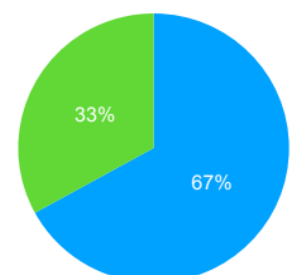
When asked if they had experienced any **poor mental health symptoms** related to their work as a youth worker, **33%** of participants ticked the option "**other**" on this question. **Eighteen percent** said they had experienced **irritability** in their work as a young worker, and **15%** said they had **difficulty concentrating**. Fourteen percent said they had recurrent headaches in relation to their work, 11% said they suffered from insomnia, and 9% of the participants related their work to some discomfort.



Only **37%** of the participants consider that they have a **healthy work-life balance**, compared to 15% who think they do not. Even so, 48% of the participants considered that only sometimes their work-life balance is healthy.

### Resources and activities for improving youth mental health

When asked if their institution had **training programmes or courses** aimed at **improving employees' skills in dealing with youth mental health issues**, **67%** of respondents answered "**no**" to this question compared to 33% who said that their institution does have resources to help employees deal with mental health issues of young people.



Some examples given were:

- Emotional intelligence projects.
- Mental health projects for the general population (not only youth) in an initial phase.
- Mental health as a transversal line or competence in all projects carried out in their organisation.
- Psychological support and training in listening skills and psychological care.
- Courses belonging to the Erasmus+ programme (ESC) in Greece.
- Work with vulnerable groups: personal development and outdoor education.
- Promotion of mental health awareness for youth workers. One of mindfulness methods in working with young people.

**Examples of innovative approaches or interventions that you have implemented to address the challenges faced by youth workers:**

- Actions in schools.
- Model of collective care: team members have a framework for dialogue in which they can express personal difficulties.
- Partnership with external partners - psychologists and psychiatrists - in order to consult on mental health issues for the volunteers when there is a need.
- Programme to identify and address situations that trigger anger.
- Training programmes and enhanced mentoring for personal development.
- Emotional intelligence empowerment programme.

Participants gave the following answers regarding collaboration with other professionals to enhance the well-being of the youth they serve or work with:

- NGOs, Social Structures and Groups, Social NGOs, Environmental Education Centres.
- Cooperation with Environmental Education Centres around Greece and especially with the one in Pramanta, North Tzoumerka, Ioannina.
- Cooperation with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH).
- The most important thing is that all stakeholders are involved in the cooperation because each of them deals with the situation differently



- SOPSY PATRAS.
- KA2 project on mental health: the project created targeted information campaign materials and synergies in the mental health theme.
- Open collaboration with mental health specialists.
- Cooperation with Horizons, which is a mental health organisation for the prefecture of Kozani, as well as with Iasis, which is a similar kind of organisation of national scope.

### Digital tools or online platforms that your organisation has found effective in providing mental health support

- DISAWORK (<https://disawork.eu/>): emotional intelligence in the workplace -self-assessment tool and e-learning course.
- “YOU in the moment - Basic mindfulness course for youth workers” (<https://hop.salto-youth.net/courses/youinthemoment>). The aim of the course is to equip learners with mindfulness methods and techniques to support youth workers' wellbeing and mental health, efficiency and active participation, and to present opportunities to integrate mindfulness into youth work activities.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, in Greece, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on young people's mental health, with a significant percentage reporting anxiety and depressive symptoms. While individuals generally hold positive attitudes towards severe mental illness, there is still some stigma associated with seeking help, particularly among those who fear it may diminish their self-worth. Loneliness, exacerbated by the pandemic, has become a prominent reason for seeking psychological help, especially among young adults. The **transition to the city for university studies can be overwhelming**, leading to increased anxiety. Emotional scars from family and peer issues during adolescence frequently drive individuals to seek help in adulthood, often related to low self-esteem. Additionally, the pandemic's impact on university students' mental health and well-being underscores the importance of mental health support and interventions during these challenging times.

The results of the youth questionnaire show that Greek youth are **aware of the importance of taking care of their mental well-being**, but there is still a lot to be done. Additionally, respondents do not report high levels of participation.

Respondents have some suggestions for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and active youth participation. First, they stress the importance of improving the educational system: both in formal and non-formal education. Different teaching-learning

methodologies should be used and there should be an introduction to participatory methodologies, as well as improvement of psychological care. There should be dedicated mental health care days for teachers/trainers, participants and volunteers. Direct mental health care (psychological support) and indirect mental health care (improvement of workers' rest, quality leisure time, physical exercise, etc.) should be provided. There should be open discussions about stereotypes associated with mental health. Special attention should be paid to people in vulnerable situations, whether physically, psychologically or socio-economically. More emphasis should be placed on awareness of the importance of citizen participation in mental health care. There should be easy and equal access to actions creating a safe environment. Finally, interculturality should be embraced: promoting the exchange of impressions between young people from different countries. Volunteering should be promoted from a young age.

The focus group interview shed more light on additional guidelines to improve young people's active participation. Respondents recommend that active participation should be promoted in national and international organisations in order to build a sense of community. Additionally, training in personal skills, such as active listening and identification with the other members of a community, should be provided. This could help build more cohesive communities. There should also be intervention with the most vulnerable groups: guaranteeing equal access to social participation in the most depopulated areas, as well as in groups with fewer economic resources. Many respondents do not participate actively, so there should be a greater accessibility to information. Organisations should prioritise the dissemination of youth participation programmes so that people are aware of how they can take an active part in them. Lastly, it is important to ensure that the different forms of youth participation are meaningful for the participants' home community, thus making their contributions relevant and significant.

The responses to the youth worker questionnaire in Greece show that youth are involved in diverse ways in their organisations and most are aware of the importance of civic participation. These volunteers are involved in both online and face-to-face activities. However, there are always some young volunteers who are a bit more passive in the activities.

Youth workers use different strategies or methods to encourage young people to participate. They often try to engage with young people on the platforms that they use, such as social media. Additionally, they offer diverse activities that are appealing and relevant to them, such as skills-building workshops or mentoring programmes, and often try to provide feedback or award certificates so that their participation is recognised. Different methods are used, too, to encourage youth to participate and offer them different ways to learn.

Respondents recognise the **important impact that active participation has on young people's emotional health**. It helps them to socialise and prepare for their professional futures. Additionally, it makes them feel like they are part of something bigger, like they belong

to a group. This helps with loneliness, a problem that increased significantly during the pandemic.

However, Greek youth workers warn that if the right group methodologies are not employed, participation does not always have a positive impact. According to respondents, social factors have a strong influence on participants' mental health, so this aspect should be taken into account when considering which methodologies to use.

Some work has been done by youth workers to help young people with mental health. Respondents mentioned specific projects, community programmes, coaching/mentoring and youth exchanges as some examples. However, the majority of Greek youth workers do not have methods to assess changes in mental health of young people before and after their participation in activities.

Regarding their own mental health, Greek respondents suffer different mental health symptoms related to their work, such as irritability or trouble concentrating. Only 37% believe that they have a healthy work-life balance.

The majority of their organisations **do not have training programmes or courses to improve their skills in dealing with mental health issues**. A small number did mention some examples, such as specific projects regarding mental health or emotional intelligence, psychological support and training in listening skills, Erasmus plus courses, promotion of mental health awareness, workplace care protocols, etc. They also mentioned some digital tools and online platforms that their organisations have used. While some organisations do have set protocols to follow and provide their staff with training, a lot still needs to be done.

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## SPAIN

### National context

Mental health and social participation of young people in Spain have been issues of great importance and concern since the pandemic. The characteristics of today's society, such as hedonism, lack of tolerance for discomfort, the medicalisation and psychologization of daily life, the loss of values and external support, and exposure to inappropriate content on the Internet, are responsible for the mental imbalances in young people. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the historical and cultural context to understand mental health problems in adolescents, according to López Diago and Sánchez Mascaraque (2023).

Focusing on mental health among Spanish youth, the study conducted by López et al. (2021), shows a significant increase in problems since 2021. Academic stress, high expectations, and social pressure have contributed to this serious problem. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the emotional challenges faced by young people in Spain (García, 2022).

The technological advance describes a negative impact of the excessive use of mobile devices on the mental health of adolescents, stated in the report by Dolz, et al, (2021) affecting their quality of life, socialisation, academic performance and increasing the risk of suffering depression, anxiety and attention deficit (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Currently, there is concern about the increase in self-harm and suicidal behaviour in young people, with technology being used as a tool for cyberbullying, extortion and information about suicide. ANAR (2022), an entity that helps children and adolescents at risk, reveals that 45.7% of the cases of suicidal thinking or attempts are related to technology. The report published by ANAR (2021) also highlights the main concerns of young people (suicidal ideation, self-harm, anxiety and depression) and records a significant increase in consultations on suicidal behavior and self-harm compared to previous years.

Lack of access to adequate mental health services has also been identified as a major problem. According to a report published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), it is estimated that only 25% of young people with mental disorders in Spain receive adequate treatment. This lack of access to adequate care further aggravates the situation (Gómez, 2023).

With respect to what was previously stated in relation to the mental health of young people, another point that is affected is their participation in social life. Social participation of young people in Spain has also undergone significant changes since 2021. According to Pérez (2022), an increase in youth activism and participation in social movements has been observed. Spanish youth are increasingly committed to issues such as climate change, gender equality and human rights.

The study by Martínez (2022) analyses the active participation of young people in the formulation of policies and programmes related to mental health. It highlights the need to include young people in decision-making, since their perspective and experiences can offer valuable ideas in order to improve social services and support in this field.

This idea is supported in the study by Sánchez et al. (2020) where, when examining the role of education in promoting mental health among young people, the importance of implementing educational programmes that address issues such as stress management, resilience, and emotional awareness is highlighted. These programmes may help young people develop skills to cope with life's challenges and promote their mental well-being.

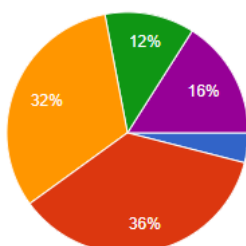
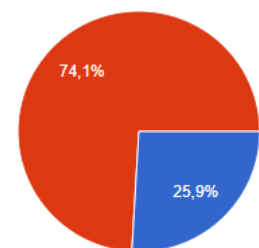
Additionally, advances in technology and social media have played an important role in youth civic and political engagement. A study by González et al. (2021) revealed that young people use social networks to express their opinions, mobilise other young people and promote social change.

However, there has also been an increase in apathy and disinterest in traditional political participation. According to various studies, less and less young people are involved in political parties and vote in elections. This poses challenges in terms of citizen representation and participation.

## Questionnaire for youth

### Profile of participants

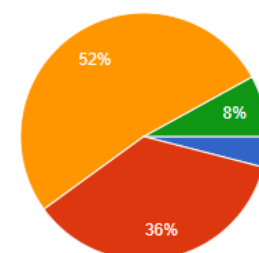
The questionnaire was sent to 25 Spanish youth. Approximately 8 out of 10 respondents identified as females and the rest identified as males with no other responses.



As for the age, **36%** of the respondents were between **18-20** years olds, closely followed by **32%** from the age group: **21 to 26**. The sum of both groups represents more than 50% of the responses, with less than 20% of representation of, in order, 30 and older, 25 to 29 and less than 18.

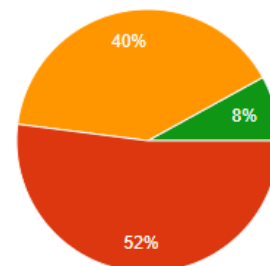
### Well-being

When asked how they would describe their overall well-being (comfortable, healthy, or happy), **52%** of respondents stated that it was **fair**. The next largest group, 36%, responded, "**good**". There are more responses (8%) who stated their well-being was deficient than excellent (4%)



## Participation

In terms of their involvement in events and actions where decisions are made about policies and programs that influence the lives of young people, either directly or indirectly, the answers were quite close as well. Out of all respondents, **52%** pointed out that their involvement was **frequent** against **40%** who mentioned a **rare involvement** and **8%** who stated that **they never get involved**. **None** of the participants of the Spanish questionnaire stated a **very frequent** participation.

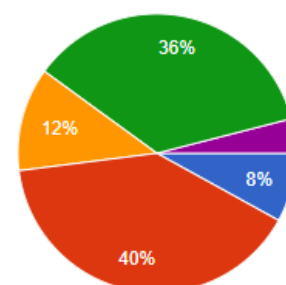


Participants were also asked about their motivation to get involved in these decision-making actions that impact the lives of young people. They had to select all of the answers that applied to them. Their responses ranged from the **“desire to change”** chosen by 84% of the participants, followed by not even close with 60% choosing **“personal experience”**, 56% **“helping others”** and 44% “to feel good about myself”. Only 24% chose the option “making friends” with only one respondent answering “learning” or “employment”.

Respondents also considered different ways they actively engage and participate in their community or in addressing issues that mattered to them. After selecting all answers that applied to them, the preferred answer to this question was **“civic engagement activities”** (68%) followed by **“political participation”** (52%). With 40% of the answers and following the previous one both “Participation in youth-led organisations or organisations for youth” and “artistic or cultural participation” followed the number of answers. With 36%, both “online engagement” and “taking part in international projects and mobilities” followed the previous answers. Only 32% also mentioned their participation in “engaging in youth-led research or data collection projects”. The rest of the answers were chosen by less than 24% of the respondents: “Being active in eco actions and/or actions for protection of the environment and fight against climate change” was the most chosen within this range and the rest of the options were chosen by less than 20% of the respondents.

## Well-being and leisure time

Respondents were also asked about the type of activities that they are involved in in their free time. The most popular activity, chosen by **92%**, was **“socialising with friends and family”**. The next most chosen activity was **“watching movies or TV shows”**, chosen by **76%** of respondents, and **reading (68%)**. The rest of the options were selected by less than 50% of the participants: “doing sports” (48%) was the most chosen in this range. This was followed by “cooking” with 36% and 20% choosing “doing arts and crafts” and/or “meditating”. The rest of the options were chosen sporadically.

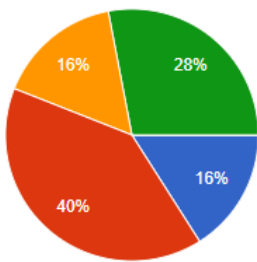
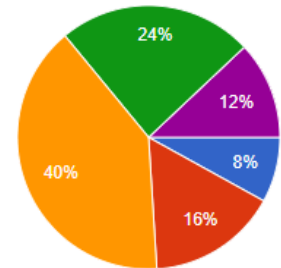


When asked how often they engage in physical activities or exercise, **40%** of the respondents indicated that they practise sports **several**

**times a week** whereas **36%** of them stated, “**rarely**”. This was followed by once a week (12%), daily (8%) and never (4%).

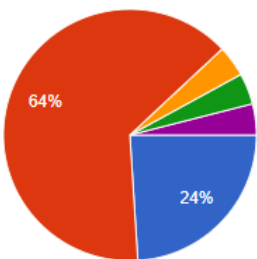
### Self-esteem and confidence

Participants were asked to rate their overall self-esteem from low to high. The majority of respondents (**40%**) chose “**neutral**”, followed by “**moderately low**” (**24%**) and with less than 20% of the respondents stating: moderately high (16%), low (12%) and high (8%).



When asked how confident they felt when sharing their opinions with a group of people, the answers changed. Despite their neutral or moderately low self-esteem, the respondents were **somewhat sure (40%)**, **somewhat unsure (28%)** and equally with 16% of the respondents either neutral or really sure. None of the respondents lacked sureness when sharing their opinion with a group.

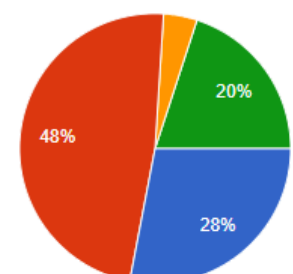
Respondents were also asked who they felt most comfortable with when discussing personal challenges. The options given were: close friends, family, teachers/mentors, online communities, I prefer not to share. Spanish youth were most comfortable talking about personal challenges with **close friends (88%)**, followed by **family (44%)**. The rest of the options were chosen by less than 15% of respondents.



Respondents considered the importance of supportive relationships in encouraging their participation in various activities, ranging from social activities to personal activities. With **64%** of the responses, Spanish youth pointed out that it was **very important** to count on supportive relationships that encourage participation, and **24%** said it was **extremely important**. The rest of the responses did not reach 5%.

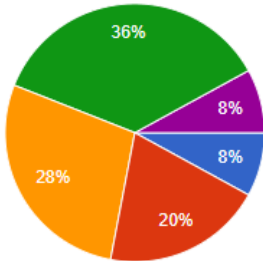
### Resilience and mental health

Participants were asked to think about their mental health and resilience. They contemplated how likely they were to recover and continue participating in activities after encountering difficulties. The majority of respondents (**76%**) stated that it was **likely (48%)** or **very likely (28%)** that they would pick up and continue with the activity. Nevertheless, **20%** indicated that it was **unlikely** for them to do so. A small minority of participants remained neutral whereas no participant stated that it was very unlikely.



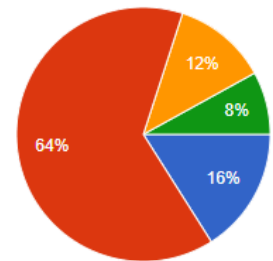
Youth were asked to consider factors that influence their well-being during work and professional engagements. They were given a list of different factors and the answers were

divided. No single option reached over 40% of the responses. With **40%** of the responses, the interviewees agreed that **“every problem has a solution”** and **“taking care of something else makes the problem fade away”**. The next biggest response, with 36%, was “I acknowledge triggers and try to solve the problem calmly”. Then, 20% of the interviewees selected “everything becomes a trigger if you can’t focus”.

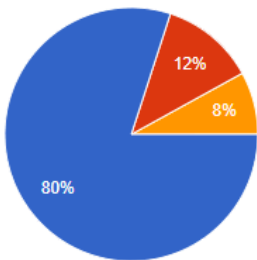


When asked how often they seek help from others when struggling with mental health problems, the answers were also divided. The most selected answer was **“rarely”** with **36%** of the responses, followed by **“sometimes” (28%)**. With **20%** of the responses, **“often”** was selected. And, representing the opposite ends, **“always”** and **“never”**, only 8%.

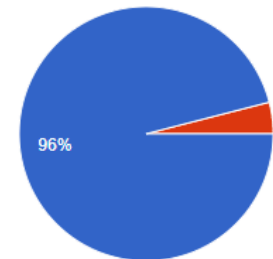
Participants were asked if they ever stopped participating in an activity due to concerns about their mental health. Over two thirds of the participants (**64%**) expressed that they refrain from participating **“sometimes”** due to concerns about their own mental health. This was followed by **36%** of the respondents answering frequently (16%), rarely (12%) and never (8%) respectively.



Respondents also considered how feeling good or excellent mentally could affect their engagement with different areas of their lives. The majority of those interviewed stated clearly that their **engagement improved (80%)**, and only 12% confirmed that it wouldn’t have any special differences, and 8% of them stated having a decreasing engagement.



The final multiple-choice question for the questionnaire asked participants if they agreed that promoting mental well-being among people could positively impact their active participation in society. A **hundred percent** of the participants stated that either they **absolutely agreed (96%)** or at least they **agreed (4%)**



### Suggestions for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and active youth participation:

- *Catering to the **diversity and individuality** of the participants by making them feel that they are part of a group with all that they are, i.e. making them feel that they are not “spoiled” but that they are part of a group despite how they feel.*
- *The stop button. I think that if we were to make visible through a button and a marker how many times we would anonymously ask for a breather, we would realise that our barometer is broken. The post-pandemic period has left us with a scenario with a lot of emotional instability that has been slow to surface.*



- *Increase **networking** among youth.*
- *To show that the **opinion of young people counts** and is useful.*
- *The key would be to develop a **safe space** and to teach the group what it is all about, but this may not work for every type of participation medium.*
- *Support groups.*
- *Create more prevention and **awareness-raising activities on mental health** problems, because if a young person does not know that they have these problems, it will be very difficult for them to participate in society.*
- ***Invest in youth mental health** programmes. Work with families of teenagers and young people. Create spaces for youth participation free of prejudice.*
- *To avoid the invisibility of mental health problems of young people, to educate from youth centres. Raise awareness of the help or solutions available.*
- *Activities where you can meet new people to have different points-of-view and where something (environmental activities, artistic activities, etc.) is promoted.*
- ***Access to mental health specialists** should be facilitated and there should be more compulsory lectures in schools and workplaces on mental health or other issues affecting groups more likely to suffer from discrimination, which leads to poor mental health.*
- *Musical activities that generate confidence, where they are talked about from the approach to them so that they feel that it is a space for themselves, to share, a space where nothing or nobody is going to be judged, where communication is encouraged, whether verbal or non-verbal, as would be the case if we carry out a musical activity.*
- *Forms of healthy leisure in community or creation of common spaces in which to do things like playing board games in groups, dancing, playing video games, playing pool or table football, an escape room, etc. There should be several activities to choose from depending on the day and a board with the times of these activities should be published on social networks.*
- *The most important thing is **not to judge anything**, everyone has their own problems and some may seem more important than others, but for the person concerned, that small problem can be their whole life. Also understand that if a person does not want to participate, we will not make them participate, but we will try to see where this dislike of participation comes from and we will encourage them to participate in the future, little by little.*

## Focus group with youth

The Spanish focus group was conducted on October 13, 2023 in Villamayor (Salamanca), Spain. There were a total of 8 participants between the ages of 16 and 22.

### Main results

Participants in this group are active in different ways but have trouble understanding the concept of participation in general. Although they participate in different community-building activities, such as Scouts or a feminist platform, the most popular activities among the group were physical activities. They like to be surrounded by peers with common interests and have fun together.

In order to improve young people's active participation, those interviewed highlighted the importance of free access through public initiatives. When they request space or want to pursue something that is interesting to them, there are usually limited spots and they often need to pay. They also feel that the resources they know about are not up-to-date or adapted to their motivations. Dissemination and the importance of using the right channels to reach young people were discussed as well.

Participants felt that schools/educational institutions do not offer activities that interest them, or at least they are not aware of any. They also see school-related activities as an obligation. Whenever they try to propose new activities, they encounter administrative and logistical barriers. Possible solutions proposed are through promoting clubs and extracurricular activities that interest young people, providing resources and logistical support for proposed initiatives, and creating an inclusive and welcoming environment which may motivate young people more.

Youth organisations, their workers and, in general, non-formal education also play an important role in promoting such activities. However, participants attached great importance to the resources that are offered which they feel do not meet their needs.

Regarding motivation, many of the participants seem to have an economic reward mentality in the sense that they do not understand or feel a commitment to their community. They think that if they are not helped and provided for, they lose out. The problem seems to be that they do not understand the concept of social participation. They also have limited time.

Families sometimes impose participation and this already provokes a commitment that they are happy to make once they get involved. The most directly highlighted reward mentioned was meeting like-minded people. Social networks do a lot to motivate them to get involved or disengage from participation.

Young people feel that participation gives you an outlet, you feel understood, it helps you to de-stress, it makes you connect and creates a supportive, productive feeling. They are gaining experience that they can then build on at work. Overall, the feeling is positive, related to social and support networks, as well as emotional stability at the level of mental health. It highlights the importance of having a space of understanding.

Young people say that active participation can have an influence on well-being because it makes you feel part of something, helps you feel connected to other people, feel useful in society, gain knowledge and experience in a field of your interest, and learn about yourself.

Young people focus on their professional careers so they see it as an opportunity to develop and focus their professional life, to know what they could study, rather than personal and community development. They consider it as an opportunity for networking, self-confidence, self-reliance and autonomy. But this learning process is also a path where there are moments of insecurity and doubts. They also feel frustrated when they see and feel that sometimes not everyone gets involved or collaborates and this can cause anger that leads to less involvement or more demotivation.

There is a lot of frustration with policy-makers. They feel that they are not looking for the benefit of the community, only for their own benefit. There are barriers and the distrust of policy-makers that make young people more reticent. They need to know that their opinion counts and that it is as valid as others, "to feel listened to".

The proposals that have been discussed are: providing resources, listening to the needs of young people and encouraging initiatives that are put forward, and feeling listened to.

## Questionnaire for youth workers

The questionnaire for youth professionals was distributed in Spain gathering 10 responses. Coming from different professional profiles within the youth work field, respondents' experience working with youth ranges from one and a half years, three to five years (30% of the answers), to over seven years and up to 19 years of experience (60% of the participants).

### Youth participation in your organisation

When asked how young people participate in their organisation's activities and projects, there was a wide range of responses. There were professionals who stated that "participation is difficult, there is a lack of commitment and understanding of its importance" which was seconded by another participant that highlighted that "(participation comes) with a lot of difficulty, they find it very hard to move proactively".

On the other hand, some professionals answered that the key was to “actively (allow) participants (to design) activities that are aimed at education in values and collaboration with society” which is in line with another participant who said that “(youth) actively participate (when they) own activities and the actions that they want to carry out within their free time”.

Youth workers were also asked about strategies and methods that their organisations use to promote active youth participation. These strategies included the following:

- *We want them to be the ones to propose and carry out the activities, thus, making them feel that the service is theirs through democratic participation.*
- *Detached youth work, visibility of community activities.*
- *Workshops, meetings, recreational activities, assemblies, organisation of activities.*
- *We design strategies so that they are responsible for their learning and free time, getting involved in their municipalities, and becoming agents of active transformation.*
- *Creating spaces for participation, fostering civic education, promoting the development of social skills among young people.*
- *Social networks. Promote their own spaces for young people. Assemblies.*
- *Education through action. They are involved in projects designed by themselves, thus encouraging their motivation to carry them out.*
- *Games, independence, useful and practical knowledge, a sense of belonging.*
- *The link with them, closeness, active listening.*
- *Advice for organisations, training for organisations, providing of space, creation of subsidies.*

### Mental health and youth participation

Youth workers considered the influence of mental health in youth participation. **A hundred percent** of the professionals answering the questionnaire **agree that psychological well-being highly influences youth participation.**

When asked to rate several different factors that most influence the psychological well-being of young people in their organisations, interviewees had similar views. All of the participants agree that the main factors that most influence the psychological well-being of young people in their organisations are “**social relationships**”, followed by “**psychological factors**” (**selected by 90% of respondents**). These were closely followed by, “**social factors, such as exclusion**” (**chosen by 70%**). The next most-selected factors were “traumatic experiences” and “biological factors”, which were chosen by 60% and 50% of the respondents respectively.

Less than 25% of respondents selected “educational experiences and multicausal experiences”.

Youth workers were asked to give specific examples of how participation has influenced young people’s mental health. They provided the following answers:

- *It increases self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills and communication skills.*
- *It has been empowering and has generated more social networks among peers.*
- *By improving their participation, they create relational bonds within the group, bring their experiences closer together, and they learn to debate and communicate assertively. They significantly reduce disrespect among peers and start to think from the self towards the group.*
- *One example is empowerment, and the development of autonomy makes them feel self-confident and improves their self-esteem.*
- *Support network.*
- *By participating in the projects generated by their own group they create a sense of belonging/usefulness/commitment which brings them psychological well-being and therefore positively influences their mental health.*
- *Participating in the activities has improved one young woman's self-esteem. She had no friends and thought everyone looked down on her. Working in a group and realising that not everyone looked down on her, she made friends and learned to value what she has that is positive.*
- *People with no motivation in their studies and with residual leisure have changed their behaviour by participating in associations.*

Youth workers shared methods to measure/assess the mental health changes of young people before and after their participation in activities. The methods highlighted in the questionnaire were:

- *Clinical scales and qualitative assessments.*
- *In all activities I have nothing objective and quantitative, but through observation and behaviour I assess more informally.*
- *Nothing concrete beyond questionnaire-type assessments. But it is very noticeable in the qualitative part of the daily relationship with them.*
- *Seeing how they interact at the end (of the experience).*
- *Talking to them, their experience and their opinions. If they feel better, we do group evaluation and individual written opinions.*

- 360 evaluation, questionnaires, and above all continuous evaluation.

### Mental health while working with youth

The questionnaire also explored youth workers' own mental health while working with youth. Participants were asked if they experienced certain symptoms as a result of their youth work. The most chosen answer was "**irritability**", with **60%** of the responses. This was followed by **difficulties to focus** (**40%** of the responses). The rest of the options were chosen by 30% or less of respondents. The answers, from the most chosen in this range to the least were: insomnia, bad memory, sadness, recurrent headaches, panic attacks or fear. Only 10% of the respondents chose none of the answers and no one chose changes of appetite.

Youth workers were asked if they had a good work-life balance. Half of the respondents agree on having a good work-life balance, whereas 40% of them answered to having it sometimes. Only 10% of the respondents selected that they do not have a good work-life balance.

### Resources to improve mental health

Respondents were asked about resources to improve mental health. When asked whether their organisations offer training programmes or workshops to enhance the capacities of their youth team to work with youth mental health issues, **70%** of respondents answered affirmatively.

Interviewees described successful collaborations of their organisations with other organisations or professionals to improve the mental health of young people or youth workers. The collaborations among the organisations and other third parties appointed were as follows:

- *(Collaboration) with the Diputación de Salamanca (Salamanca Provincial Government) to promote personal development and self-organisation.*
- *Courses on burnt out and care in the organisations.*
- *Through ETLIM (school with courses for recreation instructors), training is offered to instructors in the field of mental health, but possibly insufficient at present.*
- *Agreement with Aldeas infantiles (Children's villages), emotional well-being programme.*
- *Organisation of inter-association fairs and initiatives from the partnership.*

Youth workers interviewed also gave examples of innovative techniques that they have applied to address youth work challenges. These were some examples:

- *Carrying out action bound for the analysis of safe spaces in the neighbourhoods of Salamanca for young people.*
- *We have developed socio-educational activities through small informative pills with adolescents to tackle the problem of violence on social networks.*
- *Experienced practices, mentoring, space for care, catharsis.*

When asked if they knew of any online or digital resources that they considered useful for psychological support, only two participants responded. The examples they gave were an online emotional diary and mental health guides and publications by the Spanish National Institute of Youth (INJUVE).

## Conclusion

In summary, since 2021 mental health and social participation of young people in Spain have been complex and multifaceted issues. Although in terms of mental health and access to adequate services it is hampered either by economic or social barriers. It is important to address these issues holistically and ensure adequate support for Spanish youth in all areas of their lives. The impact of the pandemic, the participation of young people in decision-making and the role of education are key aspects to consider. It is essential to implement strategies and policies that promote mental health and provide support to young people in this area.

The results from the youth questionnaire demonstrate that the majority of Spanish respondents **participate frequently in activities in their communities**. They take part in a diverse range of activities, mostly related to civic engagement or political activities, and most of them are motivated by a desire for change.

Despite relatively high levels of participation among Spanish respondents, the majority of them would **rate their overall well-being as “fair”** rather than “excellent” or “good”. While most did not rate it “poor” either, there is still room for improvement.

Respondents suggest ideas for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and active youth participation. It is important to offer activities that cater to diversity and individuality and make participants feel like they are part of a group and that their opinions matter. More opportunities should be given for youth to network amongst themselves and safe spaces should be provided where they can feel comfortable sharing their opinions and feel supported by others. A variety of activities should be offered where young people can develop life skills and learn how to express themselves in different ways. Spanish youth also believe that more attention should be given to prevention and awareness-raising activities in mental health and investment should be made in youth mental health

programmes. Additionally, access to mental health specialists should be facilitated and there should be more talks and lectures about factors that could lead to poor mental health.

The focus group interview provided similar results. Respondents stress the importance of activities where they can be with their peers and have fun. Activities should be free and adapted to young people's interests. It is fundamental to use the correct social media channels to disseminate information to young people and stay up-to-date with current trends. Additionally, educational institutions and youth organisations should promote relevant clubs and extracurricular activities, provide support for proposed initiatives, and create an inclusive and welcoming environment. Youth are interested in activities where they can gain skills and experience that will help them in their future careers. This is something that youth workers should take into account while planning their activities, too.

Overall, Spanish youth agree that **active participation has a positive impact on emotional well-being and mental health**. It provides them with an outlet for stress release and a space to meet others and learn together.

The results of the youth worker questionnaire demonstrate varying levels of participation in their organisations' activities. Respondents claim that it is difficult to get young people to participate and there is a lack of commitment. It is especially challenging to encourage them to be more proactive in activities.

Spanish youth workers highlight the **importance of involving young people in the design and implementation of activities**. This gives young people a sense of ownership, thus making them more likely to continue participating. Other strategies that respondents use for youth participation are community activities, detached youth work, providing practical knowledge and creating spaces for participation.

All respondents agree that psychological well-being highly influences youth participation. Factors that influence psychological well-being of youth are mainly social relationships, psychological factors, and social factors such as exclusion.

Active participation influences young people's mental health in many ways. It helps them to build self-esteem and confidence, and gives them a sense of empowerment. It allows them to develop their social and communication skills and form bonds with others. It also gives them a sense of belonging, makes them feel useful, and motivates them to be autonomous.

Although Spanish youth workers do not use many specific methods to measure or assess changes in the mental health of young people before and after participation in activities, a few of them mentioned some that work for them. These methods include observation, questionnaires, qualitative assessments, 360 evaluations, and continuous evaluation.



Regarding their own mental health, respondents note symptoms like irritability and difficulty focusing related to their work. However, half of them believe that they have a good overall work-life balance.

Almost 70% of respondents say that their organisations offer resources, workshops or training programmes on mental health. Many of these resources are given in tandem with local or regional government initiatives, but others are courses about different mental health topics, or emotional well-being programmes. Related to youth work challenges, respondents often do an analysis of safe spaces for young people in different neighbourhoods, organise socio-educational activities about topics relevant for young people, oversee mentoring programmes, and provide spaces for care. Few online or digital sources were mentioned, other than keeping an online emotion diary and checking out guides and publications on mental health by the INJUVE (Spanish National Institute of Youth).

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# FINAL CONCLUSIONS



Keep  Dreaming

## Current situation regarding mental health and youth participation

In all four partner countries, **mental health problems have increased since the covid-19 pandemic** and young people have experienced a decline in their mental health. Youth are facing heightened levels of anxiety, depression, ADD, ADHD, and suicidal thinking. Research also shows increased feelings of loneliness and isolation. Notably, the pervasive use of mobile phones and social media has exacerbated these issues, contributing to heightened anxiety and a sense of disconnection among youth. Unfortunately, access to mental health care is still low.

Despite this, the majority of **young people surveyed would rate their well-being as “good” or “fair”** and consider themselves to be resilient when faced with adversity. In their free time, most of them socialise with friends, and at least a third of them practise sports once a week, both activities that help to maintain positive well-being.

On the contrary, they would view their **self-esteem and confidence as just “neutral” or “fair”** and a significant number of them have refrained from participating in activities due to concerns for mental health. They have different coping mechanisms, but most of them agree that problem-solving is important. There is also a large number who choose to distract themselves with other activities to forget about their problems, which they believe will eventually fade away. While this strategy may be helpful in the short-term, problems can resurface in the future if they are not properly resolved. Social relationships, psychological factors and structural issues seem to influence young people’s mental health the most. Other factors, such as bullying, seem to be less important. This suggests that young people need more assistance with stress management and self-esteem.

The results suggest that **young people do not often seek help from others** when they are struggling with their mental health. They sometimes speak with family and friends about their mental health, but rarely with teachers/mentors and even less with mental health professionals. This may be due to limited access or knowledge about available resources in their country, the stigma regarding mental health, or a combination of factors.

In terms of **youth participation**, it still remains low in some partner countries. According to studies in Macedonia, in 2019 90% of 15-35 year-olds never participated in a civic organisation or NGO on social issues. Other countries have seen an increase in youth participation. In Spain, there has been a clear increase in youth activism in the fields of climate change, gender equality, and human rights at the grassroots level. However, efforts still need to be made across all partner countries to include youth in decision-making processes.

Although levels of participation vary across the partner countries, most respondents do not participate regularly in events and actions where decisions are made about policies and programmes that influence their lives directly or indirectly. When they do participate, they are motivated by a desire for change, as well as opportunities to help others, gain personal experience or make friends. Some of the most common ways they participate are through

volunteering, civic engagement, involvement in youth-led organisations or organisations for youth, youth exchanges, cross-cultural collaborations, and participation in political activities. Other popular ways to get involved were through artistic/cultural initiatives and online participation.

Unfortunately, **opportunities to participate are not always easily accessible for young people**. Bureaucratic obstacles often deter youth from participating, especially taking into consideration that they have very limited free time. Likewise, youth may face discrimination based on country of origin, cultural background and other factors which would dissuade them from participating. Others may be hesitant to participate due to social anxiety, especially when they may have to go alone. Also, depending on the area they live in there may be more or less opportunities. Generally speaking, less-populated, rural areas have less activities, whereas large urban areas have many options, but it may be difficult to access them.

Youth workers surveyed agree that young people participate in different ways in their organisations. However, many noted a passive presence, lack of commitment and the need to be more proactive. Although this may be due to lack of time since young people are quite busy, it is sometimes due to low self-esteem or confidence and poor mental well-being.

Youth workers have different techniques to work on mental health and well-being with young people. Some examples are nature activities, non-formal education activities, mentoring, emotional intelligence programmes and practising mindfulness.

Despite a great deal of youth workers believing that they have a healthy work-life balance, the results show that many still need to improve this part of their lives and **reduce stress in the workplace**. Many experience irritability, recurrent headaches, forgetfulness, insomnia and difficulty concentrating due to the stressful nature of their jobs.

These results show that, although some organisations offer training and workshops, more needs to be done to help youth workers better prepare themselves to work with youth on mental health. In Spain and Greece, it seems there is support, whereas in North Macedonia and Italy, it is not as common. In general, not many youth workers surveyed would say that their organisation engaged in successful collaborations with other organisations or professionals to improve the mental health of young people and youth workers. A few mentioned specific collaborations in projects, or with psychologists' associations, or workshops, but there are not many examples.

After analysing the results from the four countries, **it is evident that young people's mental state affects their participation**. The vast majority, at least 80% of respondents from each country, agree that their engagement in different areas of their lives increases when their mental health is in a good or excellent state.

Likewise, youth workers in all four countries agree that **active participation has a positive impact on young people**. They believe that it helps young people's self-esteem and self-confidence, gives them a sense of belonging, fosters a desire to learn, and improves both personal development and personal relationships. It helps them develop their empathy, maturity, and skills for their professional futures. It also serves as a way for them to build trust in others and themselves.

The results indicate a broad consensus among young people and youth workers from the four countries: **promoting mental well-being among young people has a positive impact on their active participation in society**.

### Suggestions for promoting mental well-being and active youth participation

The research shows that more needs to be done to raise awareness on mental well-being, increase access to mental health care and improve mental health resources. **Young people should be informed about how to take care of their mental well-being**, and how to manage stress and anxiety. It needs to be talked about more in order to clear taboos and the existing stigma and encourage young people to seek help from professionals when needed. Adults-especially youth workers-need to understand the importance of talking about this topic with young people as well, and more should be done in schools and workplaces to encourage this.

Youth workers should also organise **more activities for young people in their communities** that would appeal to their interests, concerns and needs. Youth like to participate in activities and events that help them to build and develop important skills, while at the same time, making new friends and helping to make the world a better place. By providing them with community spaces where they can explore their interests and meet others with similar interests, young people have at their disposal a safe space and outlets for stress-relief. It is also important to involve them in creating the activities and even, sometimes, implementing them themselves. This gives them a sense of purpose and ownership, as well as responsibility, and could increase their active participation.

Although online activities offer more flexibility and can serve to connect people, in-person activities are extremely important since they allow youth to improve communication skills and give them opportunities for social interaction. For group activities, it is essential to use proper team building methodologies and have tools available to deal with internal conflicts.

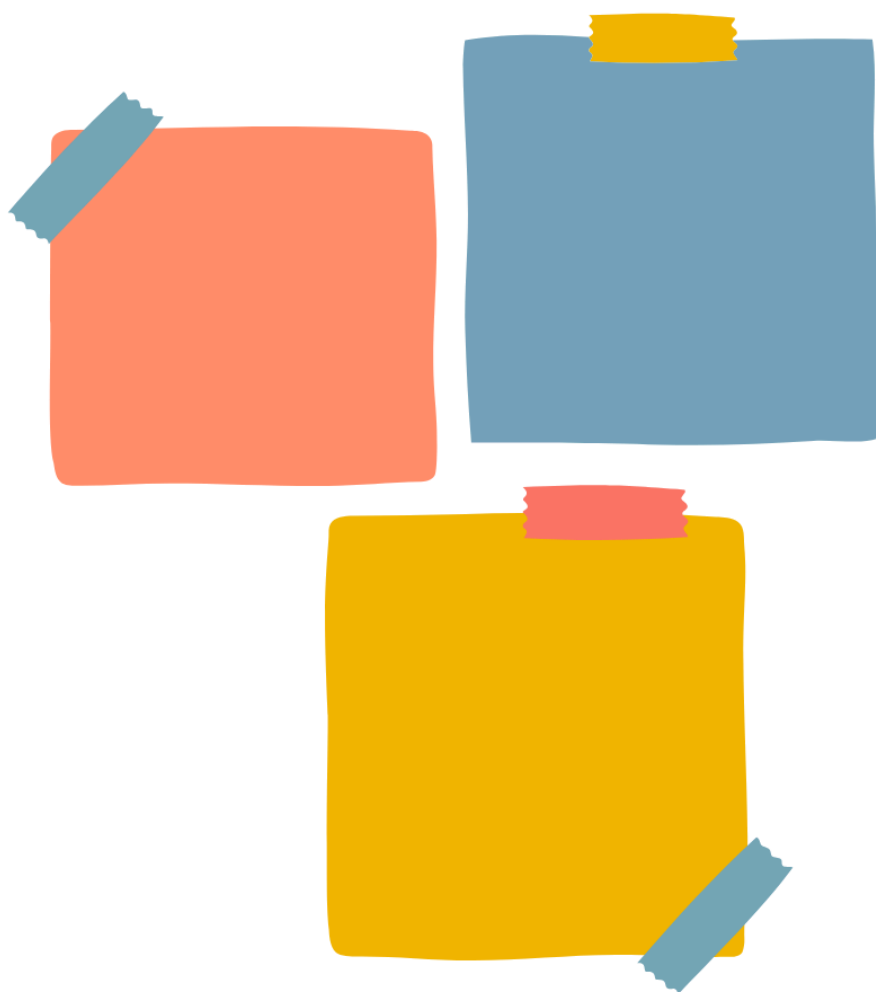
There are many ways to promote opportunities for participation to young people, but **it is essential to use platforms that young people use**. For example, in some countries young people are less active on Facebook than on Instagram or TikTok, so it may be more beneficial to promote events on those platforms. As some respondents recommended, youth workers

could also do a mapping of their neighbourhoods to see which places are most frequented by youth and promote their activities there. As other respondents suggest, organisations can also launch open calls and evaluate applications, though these should always be simple and not very time consuming.

**Youth workers should also take care of their own mental health** and their employers should provide them with resources to help them deal with work-related stress. Organisations may also want to consider introducing staff to innovative digital tools and online platforms, as well as implementing mental health awareness training both for youth workers and the young people they serve.

Although some youth workers do have tools that they use for measuring participants' well-being before and after activities, such as 360 evaluations or questionnaires, more work needs to be done in this area. Young people should also be encouraged and given the **tools to self-evaluate**. This empowers them to recognise early signs of distress, build resilience, and seek help proactively, fostering a stronger mental well-being and higher likelihood of their continued participation.

# ANNEXES





## Questionnaire for youth template

The “Keep Dreaming” project aims to enhance the experience of social participation and volunteering of young people in community actions through the enhancement of their mental health.

Your insights through this questionnaire will play a great role in creating guidelines that could positively impact both the mental well-being of young people and their active participation.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts!

The “Keep dreaming” project is co-financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme, coordinated by Fundación Plan B Educación Social (Spain) and implemented in partnership with Idee in Movimento (Italy), InterMediaKT (Greece) and Volunteers Centre Skopje (VCS) (Macedonia).

### 1. How old are you?

- a) 15 to 17
- b) 18 to 20
- c) 21 to 25
- d) 25 to 29
- e) 30 and more

### 2. How would you describe your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Prefer not to say
- d) Other

### 3. How would you describe your overall well-being (being comfortable, healthy, or happy)?

- a) Excellent
- b) Good
- c) Fair
- d) Poor

### Youth participation

#### 4. How frequently are you involved in events and actions where decisions are made about policies and programs that influence the lives of young people, either directly or indirectly?

- a) Very often
- b) Often
- c) Occasionally
- d) Rarely

e) Never

#### 5. What drives or motivates you to be involved in these decision-making actions that impact the lives of young people? (select all that apply)

- Personal experience
- Making friends
- Feeling good about myself
- Helping others
- Desire for change
- Other

#### 6. What are the various ways you actively engage and participate in your community or in addressing issues that matter to you? (select all that apply)

- Civic engagement activities (volunteering, community service, local projects)
- Political participation (voting, political campaigns, attending public meetings)
- Membership in youth councils
- Involvement in student government or school-related decision-making or representative bodies
- Participation in youth-led organisations or organisations for youth (different events and actions)
- Online engagement (social media activism, online petitions, virtual forums)
- Artistic or cultural participation (music, dance, theatre, visual arts)
- Social entrepreneurship or initiatives with a social/ environmental focus
- Engaging in youth-led research or data collection projects
- Interfaith or intercultural dialogue activities
- Participation in global youth exchanges or cross-cultural collaborations
- Involvement in media or journalism projects
- Taking part in international projects and mobilities
- Being active in eco actions and/or actions for protection of the environment and fight against climate change
- Other

### Well-being and leisure time

#### 7. What types of activities do you get involved in during your free time? (Select all that apply)

- Reading
- Watching movies or TV shows
- Playing sports
- Gardening
- Cooking or baking
- Arts and crafts
- Meditation or mindfulness
- Socialising with friends and family
- Playing musical instruments
- Engaging in volunteering activities
- Other

#### 8. How often do you engage in physical activities or exercise?

- a) Daily
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

#### 9. How often do you engage in activities that help you relax and unwind?

- a) Daily
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

### Self-esteem and confidence

#### 10. How would you rate your overall self-esteem?

- a) Excellent
- b) Good
- c) Fair
- d) Poor

#### 11. How confident do you feel when sharing your opinions with a group of people?

- a) Very confident
- b) Somewhat confident
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat unconfident
- e) Not confident at all

#### 12. Who do you feel most comfortable discussing your personal challenges with?

- a) Family members
- b) Close friends
- c) Teachers or mentors
- d) Online communities
- e) Mental health professionals
- f) I prefer not to share

#### 13. How important are supportive relationships in encouraging your participation to various activities ranging from social activities to personal activities?

- a) Extremely important
- b) Very important
- c) Somewhat important
- d) Not very important
- e) Not important at all

### Resilience and mental health

#### 14. When you encounter difficulties how likely are you to recover and continue participating in activities?

- a) Very likely
- b) Likely
- c) Neutral
- d) Unlikely
- e) Very unlikely

#### 15. My well-being during my work and professional engagements often comes down to: (Select all that apply)

- I believe every problem has a solution
- I notice things that can trigger me and calmly solve them
- It is good for me to focus on work with other issues in my life
- Dealing with something else makes me feel less of the problem in my head
- I cannot work if I have to deal with my own things
- Everything makes me upset if I cannot focus
- Other

#### 16. How often do you seek help from others when you're struggling with your mental health?

- a) Always
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely

e) Never

**17. Have you ever refrained from participating in an activity due to concerns about your mental health?**

- a) Yes, frequently
- b) Yes, sometimes
- c) Rarely
- d) Never

**18. When feeling very good or excellent mentally, my engagement with different areas in my life:**

- a) Increases
- b) Doesn't change
- c) Decreases

**19. Do you believe that promoting mental well-being among young people can positively impact their active participation in society?**

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

**20. What suggestions do you have for creating an environment that encourages both mental well-being and youth active participation?**

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**21. Anything else you want to add**

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Final comment

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the questionnaire.

If you would like to be kept informed of the project's progress, please enter your e-mail address.

GDPR

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In accordance with the European law on personal data protection - the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - we would like to inform you that the data, which you have just provided will be used for research purposes only.

In order to provide your answer, you are required to agree on the provision of the aforementioned collected data. If you do not provide this information, we will not be able to account for your response.

If you have additional questions or need more information about our Privacy Policy, please do not hesitate to contact us using our contact form, by email to (email of the person in charge of delivering the questionnaire).

## Focus group interview script

**Q1. Can you describe your experience with active participation in various activities or initiatives? What kinds of activities have you been involved in?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q2. What, in your opinion, are effective strategies or support systems to improve and encourage participation among young people? Are there any specific resources or initiatives that you believe would be beneficial in increasing youth engagement?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q3. When thinking about the role of schools and educational institutions, how can they better support and facilitate young people's active participation in both academic and extracurricular activities?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q4. When thinking about the role of youth organisations, their workers and in general, non-formal education, how can they better support and facilitate young people's active**

**participation in both academic and extracurricular activities?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q5. What motivates or discourages you from participating actively in your community or areas of interest? Are there any specific challenges that you face when trying to get involved?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q6. In your own lives, how have personal situations, such as family support, education, or employment, influenced your ability and willingness to participate actively in different activities?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q7. Can you describe any instances where active participation has positively impacted your personal growth or life outlook? Have there been tangible benefits or positive outcomes as a result of your involvement?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q8. How do you believe active participation impacts your mental health and overall well-being? Can you share any personal experiences or observations regarding this aspect?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q9. Are there any notable examples from your own experiences where active participation in a specific activity or project significantly influenced your life choices or career aspirations?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q10. Reflecting on your experiences, how has active participation affected your self-esteem and self-confidence? Can you share specific instances where it had a positive or negative impact, and why?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

**Q11. In your opinion, what steps can communities and policymakers take to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for young people to engage actively and realise their potential?**

Notes (Any appreciation, comment or any other thing that should be taken from the discussion of this question.)

Highlights (Any remark that should be taken from the discussion. Please keep in no longer than 2 sentences.)

## Questionnaire for youth workers

### Section 1: Demographics

- 1.1. Name of your organisation:
- 1.2. Your role/title within the organisation:
- 1.3. How many years have you been working with young people?
- 1.4. Where are you based?

### Section 2: Participation of Young People

- 2.1. How do young people typically participate in your organisation's activities or programs?
- 2.2. What strategies or methods does your organisation use to encourage active youth participation?

### Section 3: Mental Health and Involvement of Users

- 3.1. How do you perceive the impact of active participation in youth programmes or activities on the emotional well-being of young people?
- 3.2. What are the most prevalent factors that young people in your activities or organisation face that influence the development and maintenance of their mental health?

*Biological factors (biological-genetic factors)*

*Psychological factors (early experiences of caregiving, family experiences)*

*Social factors (social relationships)*

*Experiences of bullying or other trauma*

*Educational experiences*

*Structural (societal) issues (experiences of social inclusion or exclusion, equality or inequality)*

- 3.3. Can you share specific examples of how youth engagement has influenced the mental health outcomes of participants?
- 3.4. Do you have any methods to assess/ measure the changes in the mental health of young people before and after their participation in your activities?

### Section 4: Situations of the Young People You Work with and Involvement in their Well-Being

- 4.1. Have you experienced any of the following mental health symptoms that you think are related to your work as a youth worker?

*Insomnia*

*Irritability*

*Tearfulness*

*Changes in appetite*

*Forgetfulness*

*Difficulty Concentrating*

*Recurring Headache*

*Panic attacks*

*None of the above*

- 4.2. Do you believe you have a healthy work-life balance?

*Yes, Sometimes, No*

### Section 5: Resources and Activities for Improving Youth Mental Health

- 5.1. Does your organisation offer training programs or workshops designed to improve the skills of youth workers in dealing with mental health issues among young people?
- 5.2. Can you describe any successful collaborations with other organisations or professionals to enhance the mental well-being of the youth you serve or/and your youth workers?
- 5.3. Do you have any examples of innovative approaches or interventions you've implemented to address unique challenges faced by youth workers?
- 5.4. Are there specific digital tools or online platforms that your organisation has found effective in providing mental health support?

# Keep Dreaming



Co-funded by  
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