



Insights into youth mental health and well-being: existing practices and new trends



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Insights into youth mental health and well-being: existing practices and new trends

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
EYF	European Youth Foundation
EU	European Union
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
GenAI	Generative artificial intelligence
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 have been designed using Napkin.ai templates. The content and choice of illustrations belongs to the author.

Executive summary

Designed as a compass for those working or interested in the field of youth mental health and well-being, this edition of Insights offers accessible information about how this priority has evolved, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, multiple issues have an effect on young people's mental health and well-being, ranging from socio-economic challenges to ongoing geopolitical conflicts, climate change or emerging trends such as use of social media and artificial intelligence (AI). All these elements have a strong influence on how young people perceive the world and shape their own identities.

Acknowledging the previous work of the European Union–Council of Europe Youth Partnership on this topic, complementing the advancement of mental health as a policy priority within both the European Union and the Council of Europe, this Insights work aims to contribute to an understanding of the current realities and emerging trends. The publication is primarily based on the findings gathered from the 2025 study [“Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe”](#) (Stefan et al. 2025) and is complemented by additional desk research.

In this context, Insights offers a general overview of the main factors impacting young people's mental health and well-being and of European and national policies in the field, while highlighting examples of good practice in terms of services and the capacity building of professionals. It looks at all dimensions – policy, practice and research – in an attempt to provide a relevant state of play as well as an indication of emerging issues that should be tackled by both policy makers and professionals in the field.

The publication starts by reflecting on the main contributing factors, clustered into four main categories: socio-economic stability, job precarity and housing; global health, security crises and climate change; the digital transformation and social media; the use of (generative) artificial intelligence. By understanding these factors, practitioners, researchers and policy makers can use them to assess the relevance of their priorities and better plan their future initiatives.

The policy section provides an overview of the main processes and documents (strategies, action plans, recommendations) adopted in the framework of the European Union (EU) and Council of Europe, as well as at the national level. It provides access to relevant resources, while offering an analysis of the national practices and the topics they cover.

The sections on the competences of youth-sector professionals and services offer a collection of good practices, as identified through various projects and initiatives, developed by NGOs, schools and local or national authorities. They aim to inspire those interested in developing new practices and learn from emerging challenges.

Finally, this edition of Insights concludes with a final reflections and recommendations section. Organised into four sub-sections, it aims to provide ideas for action in the field of policy, capacity building, services, and research and data collection.

Introduction: youth mental health and well-being

As young people in Europe experience increased and diverse challenges that have an impact on their mental health and well-being, the topic has also become an important priority for public institutions and practitioners across the globe. Within the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, efforts to understand the impact of various factors on young people’s mental health and well-being began in 2020 with the mapping of the impact of the pandemic on young people. Since then, studies have been published in 2021 (Mastrotheodoros) and 2022 (Mastrotheodoros and Ranta), followed by a volume of the “[Coyote Magazine #32: Well-being?!](#)” (Youth Partnership 2022a). In 2022, the topic was addressed within the context of the [symposium Navigating Transitions: adapting policy to young people’s changing realities](#) (Youth Partnership 2022b). These efforts have been renewed with the 2025 study “[Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe](#)” (Stefan et al. 2025) and a [seminar on young people’s mental health and well-being](#) (Youth Partnership 2025a), which provided important opportunities for discussing the youth sector’s responses and the competences needed for improving youth mental health in Europe. Other Youth Partnership initiatives are expected to provide new resources for both policy makers and practitioners, such as the forthcoming “[T-kit on the well-being and mental health of young people](#)” (Youth Partnership 2025b).

The work of the Youth Partnership is closely aligned to other initiatives of European and international institutions which have engaged in developing policies and concrete initiatives aimed at enhancing young people’s mental health and well-being. While this topic has been on the public agenda for almost a decade, special importance has been given to youth well-being following the Covid-19 crisis and new research findings that indicate certain challenges related to the increased adoption of new technologies among children and young people. Commitments to focus on this priority, including in relation to emerging technologies, have been made at different levels, including within the EU and the Council of Europe.

Within the EU, following President von der Leyen’s announcement in her 2022 State of the European Union speech, the European Commission adopted in 2023 a communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, ensuring that young people’s visions and views were reflected in the making of this initiative. The priority stayed high on the EU agenda, being further developed with special contributions during the Spanish and Polish Presidencies of the Council of the EU. During the Spanish Presidency (November 2023) ministers of youth approved council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people in the European Union, underlining the importance of supporting young people’s mental health and ending the stigmatisation of mental health issues. During an informal meeting of

health ministers (March 2025) organised under the [2025 Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU](#), there were discussions related to the mental health of children and young people in the age of technology and social media. A key milestone in these efforts are the [council conclusions](#), which the Polish Presidency adopted in June 2025 during a formal Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) meeting.

Within the Council of Europe, specific interest in the topic has been shown by different bodies that work to ensure a human rights approach to health. Noteworthy examples include the work of the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO), which is currently drafting a recommendation on respect for autonomy in mental healthcare, and which in 2023 organised a [pilot youth forum on bioethics](#). The event addressed, among other topics, the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) systems on the mental health of young people and professionals working in healthcare and Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2263 (2023) [“Mental health and mental well-being of children and young adults”](#), adopted in 2023.

In this context, this Insights edition builds on previous efforts as it aims to provide an overview of initiatives designed to support young people’s mental health, especially at European and national level. It is primarily based on the findings gathered in the study [“Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe”](#) (Stefan et al. 2025) and should serve as an aid for those interested in learning more about the main factors, policies, services and practices contributing to young people’s well-being and mental health.

Understanding factors impacting youth mental health and well-being

With increased academic demands and expectations, changing social relationships with family and peers, global insecurity or increased exposure to new technologies, young people have also registered increased levels of distress, clearly impacting their mental health and well-being.

It is important to distinguish that while the terms mental health and well-being are often used interchangeably, they are not necessarily synonyms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2013, 2022a) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDCP 2024), well-being is broader than mental health. It includes various aspects of life, such as physical, social and financial well-being. In contrast, mental health is a psychological and emotional state that allows individuals to realise their own abilities, cope with stress, work productively and contribute to the community. Mental health is a crucial part of overall well-being and is defined as a human right according to WHO (WHO 2022a). An important issue among young people is the fact that mental health is crucial for personal development, and exposure to unfavourable circumstances increases the risk of developing mental health difficulties. If these risks occur during developmentally sensitive periods, the effects can be detrimental in the long run.

In this context, it is important to also underline that different factors can disproportionately impact young people based on the specific age group they belong to. Generally, European youth policies define young people as the age group 13 to 30 years old (Youth Partnership 2025c), yet, similar to other societal challenges experienced by young people, it is important to note that young people are not a homogeneous group and various factors might affect them differently. Overall, according to WHO, approximately one in seven adolescents experience trouble with their mental health on a global level (WHO 2024). Girls especially report poorer mental well-being, which also deteriorates in adolescence as they develop. Within the EU, according to the [Eurobarometer on mental health](#) (European Commission 2023b), almost half the respondents (46%) mentioned that they have experienced an emotional or psycho-social problem, such as feeling depressed or feeling anxious.

In order to understand all these influences, this section explores the different individual and societal factors that contribute to young people's mental health and well-being, including socio-economic issues and the persistent uncertainty surrounding young people's insecure work life and financial stability, global conflicts and crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing geopolitical conflicts and climate change, and the digital transformation, the use of social media or newer developments such as the use of generative AI. These factors are even more important, as they have been confirmed as a high priority by young people themselves, as reflected in the EU's [youth survey](#) (European Parliament 2024). Thus, the main topics that young people

would like to see most prioritised within the EU are rising prices and cost of living (40%), environment and climate change (33%), the economic situation and creation of jobs (31%), and social protection and welfare and access to healthcare (29%).

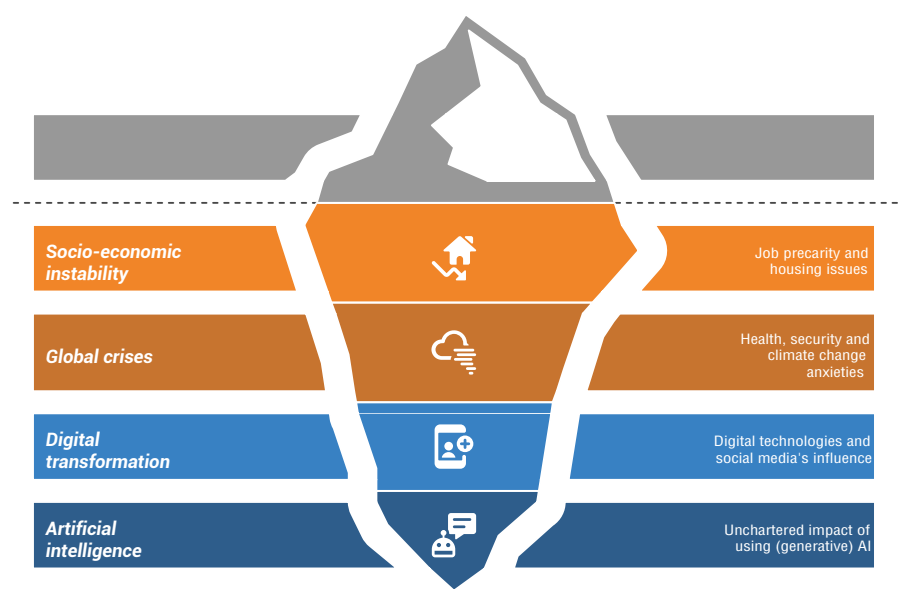


Figure 1. Representation of the main contributing factors

Socio-economic stability, job precarity and housing

Socio-economic status is one of the most important factors that has historically influenced young people’s mental health and well-being. While financial instability is not new in young adulthood, the situation is worsening for the current generation, given the ongoing trends related to global economic instability and the widening wealth gap in society. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, young Europeans have faced job losses and difficulties securing employment, due to limited work experience and temporary work contracts (Eurofound 2022, 2024; OECD 2021). Furthermore, living in a highly competitive society exposes young people to excessive stress and burnout, largely due to educational pressures and career planning (Salmela-Aro et al. 2021). Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are especially vulnerable as their life satisfaction is determined by their sense of lack of control over life and support from social relationships, as reported in a study of southern European countries (Mazzocchi et al. 2024).

Connected to growing socio-economic challenges, another important factor stands out – difficulties in attaining independent housing and the delayed transition to financial independence. Since the 2008 financial crisis, the cost of living and housing has increased, resulting in young people experiencing housing insecurity, financial strain or a lack of a suitable place to live. Throughout the EU, the age at which the majority of people move out of their parental home increased from 26 to 28 years

between 2007 and 2019. Important differences can be found between countries, with Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Belgium, Greece and Ireland facing the largest increase in young adults aged between 25 and 34 living at home between 2010 and 2019 (Eurofound 2023).

Global health, security crises and climate change

A review of literature acknowledges that the Covid-19 pandemic has been a strong disruptor for the lives of young people as a result of social, political and psychological stressors (ERYICA 2023), with the restrictions having the greatest effect on their mental well-being (Eurofound 2022). Yet, the global health pandemic is just one of the many crises young people have had to navigate. New uncertainties have been further deepened by other societal circumstances and crisis situations, such as the Russian war in Ukraine since 2022, overall global insecurity, record-high inflation and sharp rises in living costs (Eurofound 2022).

These stressors influence the way young people shape their hopes and fears for the future (Eurofound 2022, 2024; OECD 2021) and are also associated with an increased risk of developing psychiatric disorders (Schoeps et al. 2023), depression and even suicide (OECD and EU 2022). Some European countries, such as Belgium, Estonia, France, Sweden and Norway, have reported that the depressive symptoms of young people aged 18 to 29 had more than doubled compared to before the pandemic (ibid.). Many young people with pre-existing and severe mental health issues reported that their mental health and well-being were even worse during the pandemic. While the situation has improved since then (Eurofound 2022, 2024), in some countries the prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression, for example, has not declined.

Another type of crisis has been identified as triggering emotions such as worry, stress, anger, anxiety, and grief – climate change (Pihkala 2024). Young people across several countries report being worried and/or anxious about climate change, connecting to how they feel about the future and to their mental health. Various multi-country studies report negative climate-related symptoms such as insomnia (Ogunbode et al. 2023), psychological distress, depression and anxiety (Cosh et al. 2024) or even the perception that the future is frightening (Hickman et al. 2021).

Digital transformation and social media

As digital technologies and social media have become an integral part of young people's lives, their use has brought positive developments as well as new challenges, the full effects of which researchers are still trying to understand. On the one hand, technologies have bridged interactions between young people and promoted access to learning and services. On the other hand, it has led to addictive behaviour with clear implications for youth mental health and well-being (WHO 2020).

Some studies have found that social media use is associated with greater depressive symptoms because of higher body dissatisfaction, sleep problems and online harassment, which are often experienced in relation to digital media (Kelly et al. 2018). These links were especially apparent for young people who use devices intensively, such as more for than five hours a day. Also, these links have often been found to be stronger for girls than for boys (UNESCO 2024). Similarly, correlational, cross-sectional evidence shows that higher digital media use is related to greater

depressive symptoms and suicide attempts in American youth (Twenge et al. 2017). Based on such evidence of the effects on youth well-being, some countries have tried to adopt stronger policies, such as the legislation in Australia banning the use of social media and smartphones for people younger than 16 years (Ritchey 2024). Several countries in Europe have also banned smartphone use in schools, including Italy, France and the Netherlands (Chadwick 2024).

As the policies for banning such technologies are relatively new, their impact is still to be proven. In one of the few impact studies involving schools that adopted such practices, in England from 2022 to 2023, it was suggested that the school ban may not be sufficient to improve behavioural outcomes (Goodyear et al. 2025). The study suggests that a more holistic approach may be necessary, as the school ban limits device and social media use to class time only, rather than reducing overall time spent on these activities within a 24-hour period. In short, to ensure positive behavioural change, policies addressing the technological impact on adolescents' well-being and mental health must extend beyond the classroom setting.

Use of (generative) artificial intelligence among young people – Uncharted territory

The literature review so far already suggests that AI-powered platforms have negative impacts on adolescents and young people, especially when it comes to cognitive functions such as high-order decision making, reward processing, emotion or motivation (De et al. 2025). And since 2022, the power of AI models has increased further with the launch of powerful models known as large language models (LLMs) or specifically generative AI (genAI), such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Grok and many others.

With the increased usage of AI tools for multiple everyday purposes, new trends have also emerged among young people. The 2024 youth survey (European Parliament 2024) found that 57% of young people admitted that they regularly use AI tools. As with any other tools, they can also have beneficial uses, with around a third of those surveyed saying they used them for studying and doing research (36%), schoolwork or creative tasks (28%). At the same time, the novelty of these tools brings new challenges beyond the usual known digital issues, many of which are still being identified through early-stage research.

One of the emerging issues noticed is the use of genAI tools, either the more generic conversational tools or those that are more specialised, such as AI companions (Character.AI or Replika). A July 2025 report published in the USA, "[Talk, trust, and trade-offs: how and why teens use AI companions](#)" (Common Sense Media 2025) reveals the close connection between young people and such tools. Some 72% of those surveyed used them at least once, with 52% using them regularly for various purposes (curiosity or entertainment), accumulating an average of eight hours and 39 minutes of screen time daily. Most importantly for the topic of well-being, while the majority of the participants in the study still report prioritising human friendships over AI interactions (80%), a third of them mentioned preferring AI companions "for social interaction and relationships, including conversation practice, emotional support, role-playing, friendship, or romantic interactions". Going even further, in another study, 25% of young adults believe that AI could replace a real-life romantic relationship (Institute for Family Studies 2024).

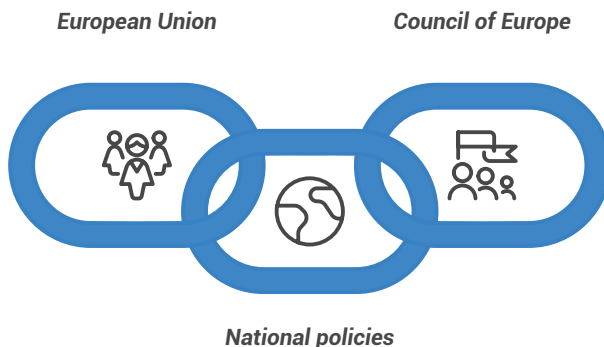
AI companions, which can be described as digital characters powered by AI, either predefined by an online platform or by the user, can assume different roles. As described by a [UNICEF report](#) (UNICEF 2025b), they are “designed to mimic human relationships, offering companionship or personalised interaction; often marketed with promises of emotional support and understanding”. The use of such AI tools becomes specifically relevant as researchers identify systematic issues such as “sycophancy” – a positive reinforcement provided by the AI tool tailored to the user’s own biases and errors (Sharma et al. 2023) – or even the tendency of the tool to mistakenly change their original response in order to please the user, called by researchers an infinite virtual echo chamber.

Acknowledging that more evidence is needed before making a causal connection between the use of genAI and young people’s mental health and well-being, important concerns have already been highlighted by media outlets. Various cases where such tools might have contributed to acts of suicide have been reported in countries such as the USA ([Reiley 2025](#)) or Australia ([McLenan 2025](#)).

All these emerging factors add to an increasingly changing landscape of young people’s well-being. They exacerbate existing challenges and amplify their effects by exposing young people from very early ages to situations that are difficult to anticipate even for professionals in the health sector. As reported by children and youth rights advocates, these issues need to be prioritised with some urgency since current safeguards (policies and the accountability of AI developers) and the readiness of parents, guardians and educators are very limited.

Overview of policy initiatives

After considering the diversity of factors that have an impact on young people’s mental health and well-being it is important to equally identify the policy responses that address them. In the European Union alone, it has been estimated that the annual cost of declining mental health in children and young people is €50 billion (UNICEF 2021). In this context, international organisations and national governments have started to adopt several policies that focus on different aspects of youth development, which directly or indirectly also tap into young people’s mental health and well-being. This section provides an overview of different policy initiatives and strategies at European and national level that focus on young people’s mental health and well-being.



Countries covered by the study: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Spain

Figure 2. Illustration representing the main organisations and countries covered in the section “Overview of policy initiatives”

European Union

While the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth mental health and social and emotional adjustment have varied among young people in the EU, mental health has been placed as a key priority area for policy in the youth sector. Therefore, within the EU, the topical priority is reflected in both general policy frameworks dedicated to children and young people and in specialised mental health initiatives.

The [2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy](#) (European Council 2018), as the main framework for co-operation in the youth field within the EU, specifically prioritises mental health and

well-being as one of the 11 European Youth Goals. Youth goal 5 specifically aims to “achieve better mental well-being and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people”. Other complementing EU initiatives include the legacy of the [2022 European Year of Youth](#) (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021) when a number of health-related initiatives were launched, such as the [Pathways to School Success](#) (European Council 2022) and the expert group for supporting well-being at school. School well-being was noted in the 2022 European Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success and educational outcomes, while guidelines on well-being in schools have been prepared by the Commission Expert Group on supportive learning environments: [Supporting well-being at school: new guidelines for policymakers and educators](#) (European Commission 2024e).

The Communication “[A comprehensive approach to mental health](#)” (European Commission 2023a), part of European Health Union (European Commission 2024b), takes a comprehensive approach to mental health in the EU – it includes 20 flagship initiatives and significant funding of €1.23 billion – and it is designed to support member states in adopting an approach that promotes mental health across policies and to work towards preventing mental health problems, improving access to high-quality mental healthcare and supporting young people to recover and reintegrate into society. Four key initiatives focus specifically on young people: a dedicated mental health network, innovative tools promoting healthy lifestyles and resilience, enhanced protections for children using digital services through the [Digital Networks Act](#) (European Commission 2024c) and the [Better Internet for Kids Strategy](#) (European Commission 2024d), and a [Prevention Toolkit](#) developed by UNICEF together with children and adolescents (UNICEF 2025a).

Additionally, during the informal meeting of health ministers organised under the 2025 Polish Presidency (Council of the European Union 2025), ministers identified addiction to social media and online games, cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, increased anxiety and depression, intensive use of screens, lack of sleep and physical inactivity as the most important problems affecting the mental health of children and young people. They called for action to incorporate digital factors into mental health policies at the EU level and for stronger collaboration between the fields of health, education, social services and digitalisation, strengthening the resilience of young people; banning smartphones from schools; improving the availability of mental health services; promoting the positive aspects of digitalisation for mental health (online therapy); encouraging a greater level of physical activity; and raising parents’ and teachers’ awareness of the dangers of excessive use of social media and games. Furthermore, research into the impact of the digital transformation and social media, accountability of social media providers and the adoption of common standards and guidelines are all needed. Member states are expected to engage in experience sharing of mental health policies for children and young people via a shared collection of best practices – the [EU Best Practice Portal](#) on Public Health (European Commission 2025a) – a central resource for knowledge sharing across Europe. It provides practical, evidence-based practices that are publicly available for inspiration, adaptation and transfer.

During the 2023 Spanish Presidency, ministers of youth approved the council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people in the EU,

underlining the importance of supporting young people's mental health and ending the stigmatisation of mental health issues. Another set of council conclusions on inclusive societies for young people was adopted by Ministers of Youth during the 2024 Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, which integrated the outcomes of the 2025 EU Youth Conference, including a recommendation on health and mental well-being, in order to ensure young people's access to affordable, youth-friendly and personalised quality healthcare and mental health support systems, and the creation of safe and open environments for young people to speak freely and learn about health and mental well-being.

Also relevant to working-aged young people is the 2022 [European Parliament resolution on mental health in the digital world of work](#). It calls on EU institutions and member states to recognise the high levels of work-related mental health problems and provide a strong commitment to actions that regulate digital work, protect mental health and a healthy work-life balance, and reinforce social protection rights in the workplace. The resolution asks for a stronger co-operation with employers and workers' representatives in implementing the new mental health approach and national action plans.

Council of Europe

In the past decade, the Council of Europe has aimed to increase the protection and rights of people with mental health issues and to improve mental healthcare through a number of initiatives (Council of Europe 2024).

In 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued the [Resolution on "Mental health and mental well-being of children and young adults"](#) (Council of Europe 2023), which emphasises that member states should foster an environment where young people feel valued and understood, and in which they can effect change. Inviting young people to parliamentary hearings will help to empower them and support their mental well-being. The Parliamentary Assembly recommended that member states advance young people's right to mental health with timely and appropriate mental healthcare and treatment, with a holistic approach to overall well-being.

Last but not least, as part of a long-term vision to support young people and the wider youth sector, the Council of Europe's [Youth Sector Strategy 2030](#) (Council of Europe 2020) acknowledges the challenges young people face to their well-being, notably mental ill-health caused by anxiety and uncertainty.

National policies

As mental health and the well-being of young people are issues that need to be addressed at national and local level, this section explores the policy responses from national governments. It is primarily based on the findings from the 2025 study "Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe" (Stefan et al. 2025) but also on the insights collected from the Youth Wiki Network analysis report on "[The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

on the mental health of young people: policy responses in European countries” (European Commission 2022) and on the publicly available information online on [Youth Wiki](#) (European Commission 2025b) and its health and well-being chapter.

As illustrated by the Youth Wiki Network report, in order to understand the impact of Covid-19, most European countries conducted or commissioned assessments on the main triggers on young people’s mental health and well-being and potential policy interventions. As a response, after 2020, national policy measures specifically addressed mental healthcare, followed by other interventions in the fields of education, information, youth work, leisure and sport.

In this context, the results of the survey gathered in the framework of the most recent Youth Partnership study on this topic (Stefan et al. 2025) reveal that until 2025, 14 out of the 24 countries analysed have national strategies or policies that deal with the mental health and well-being of young people, even if sometimes they are integrated into wider national health policies. The priorities listed below have been identified from among the analysed documents, which can be fully retrieved from the section Further reading national policies.

Strategic response to the effects of Covid-19. With the global pandemic being the most important trigger for addressing mental health as a national priority, several examples illustrate these national efforts. In Germany, an [interministerial working group on the health effects of coronavirus on children and young people](#) was created with the specific purpose of addressing the psycho-social consequences of the pandemic. In Belgium (Flanders), the [Flemish youth and children’s rights policy plan](#) includes learning from the lessons of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic as part of a whole-school approach. Austria adopted the policy entitled [Healthy out of the crisis \(Gesund aus der Krise\)](#), which primarily focused on quick responses and increasing access to psychological support for young people. After registering on a web page, young people could gain access to 15 counselling sessions available free of charge, among other things. A similar response was adopted in France with the initiative [Santé Psy Etudiant](#), where higher education students were offered access to 8 to 12 free consultations.

Suicide prevention and stigma reduction. Several countries have dedicated measures to prevent suicide and combat stigma, as part of proactive approach to youth mental health. Spain’s [youth strategy 2030](#) and the Czech Republic’s [national action plan on suicide prevention](#) explicitly recognise the importance of providing sufficient resources for detection and treatment in various contexts and fighting against the social stigma that prevents young people from seeking help. Similarly, the [Latvian public health strategy](#) aims to “reduce prejudice against persons with mental illnesses”.

Socio-emotional and life skills development. There is a clear focus on proactive measures to build resilience from a young age. France’s [strategy for developing psycho-social competences](#) is a prime example, aiming to ensure that the “2037 generation is the first to grow up in a continuous environment of support” for these skills. This strategy is multisectoral and includes support for professionals working with young people, evidence-based interventions and a national monitoring system. Similarly, Luxembourg’s [national action plan for young people 2022-2025](#) focuses on helping young people “develop their socio-emotional skills” and “deconstructing negative stereotypes”.

Digital media and online environments. The majority of policies acknowledge the significant impact of the digital world on young people's well-being, while still not including any references to the impact of AI. [Luxembourg's policy](#) includes enhancing skills in the use of social media and promoting digital etiquette. Spain's action plan includes an educational strategy for the prevention of "any type of online violence" and gambling addiction, recognising these as new threats to youth mental health. On the more positive side, countries such as the [Netherlands](#) and [Lithuania](#) recognise the shift in how young people communicate and seek help, thus offering services that provide emotional support via online messaging services or online meetings with peer groups, making psychological assistance more accessible through digital channels.

Early intervention and accessible services. A common thread across countries is the shift towards early intervention and making support services more accessible and less bureaucratic. Austria's "Gesund aus der Krise" initiative is described as aiming to provide free, "uncomplicated, unbureaucratic" access to professional help. In [Belgium](#), the policy is focused on "early and nearby" support, integrating help for finding suitable support locations like schools and youth centres to provide informal, low-threshold assistance. Latvia's [mental healthcare organisation improvement plan](#) promotes early diagnosis and aims to ensure timely and subsequent treatment.

Poverty, social exclusion and vulnerable groups. Some national policies also recognise that mental health is tied to social conditions. Lithuania's policies are tailored to assist young people with fewer opportunities and those who are in NEET situations, acknowledging that these groups face specific challenges related to mental health difficulties. The German policy singles out "disadvantaged young people" as a particular focus of their support measures. The [Serbian national youth strategy for the period 2023-2030](#) includes mental health support for vulnerable groups, particularly young refugees, and encourages extracurricular activities to reduce alcohol use among youth.

In addition to the thematic priorities covered by the policy documents analysed, some additional features can be observed in how national policies have been framed to include not just a crisis response to Covid-19 or any other emerging crisis but a strategic approach. What is particularly evident in this case is the vision for a holistic approach to supporting young people by addressing the needs of the entire ecosystem in which they live – on the one hand, their parents and families, and on the other hand, the school and other spaces they spend most time in (such as youth centres). Equally relevant is the evident focus on developing specialised youth mental policies, in addition to those for the general public. Thus, several national examples provide inspiration not only for the topics they chose to address but also for the mechanisms they put in place in order to design and monitor the policies.

Addressing the needs of families and parents. As several countries have developed comprehensive policies, it can be observed that a specific focus is given to parents and families. In the [Czech Republic](#), policies focus on "improving parents' skills" as a means for improving children's mental health. In Germany, the interministerial working group on the health effects of coronavirus made recommendations

that relate to family support and early help, while also defining policies to provide “low threshold help from educational counselling centres” for mentally ill parents. Latvia has adopted a key planning instrument with the [guidelines for children, youth and family development 2022-2027](#), which promotes family well-being and focuses on modern and accessible early support and intervention services for children, young people and their families. In France, the [strategy for developing psycho-social competences](#) aims to support professionals working with children, young people and families.

Investing in schools and cross-sectoral approaches. Complementing measures addressed to families and closely connected to the Covid-19 responses, various national strategies have emphasised the importance of strengthening school-based programmes and investments in the broader ecosystem surrounding young people. Belgium (Flanders) promotes a whole-school approach to well-being, which encourages schools to adopt comprehensive health policies and integrate lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. In Malta, [the mental health strategy](#) encourages promoting discussions about mental health and well-being during Personal Social, Career and Development classes in both primary and secondary schools. In Luxembourg, the action plan includes strengthening the crisis intervention and psychological support system within schools and introducing non-formal meeting spaces in high schools. In [North Macedonia](#), the strategy calls for developing a system of co-operation between the educational, social and health sectors to strengthen youth mental health. Furthermore, several of these plans aim to equip educators with the skills to identify and respond to mental health issues. In the Czech Republic, psycho-social education and student behaviour management can be integrated into pre-graduate teacher training. In Malta, the national strategy seeks to expand training and skills for educators and other school professionals so they can recognise behavioural changes in children and refer them for support. While in Luxembourg the government’s plan emphasises ongoing training in well-being and mental health for all members of the school community, including teachers.

Developing dedicated mental health strategies for children and young people.

While most of the analysed countries have chosen to integrate interventions dedicated to young people into wider mental health or specific youth-sector policies, some countries stand out for developing policies specifically targeted at children and young people, such as Norway and North Macedonia. The [National plan for children and young people’s mental health \(2019-2024\)](#) in Norway targets children and young people up to 25 years old. It includes measures to ensure that more children and young people experience good mental health and a good quality of life, and that those who need appropriate and effective treatment also receive it. The plan has been developed through a wide collaboration between various ministries responsible for health, children and the family, and public security. The national strategy on mental health for youth 2024-2026 in North Macedonia points to the need for a two-way approach to include young people in relevant policies, programmes and sectors at the national and local levels. It also supports a system of co-operation between the educational, social and health sectors, as well as promoting the integration between mental health services and other relevant

sectors, such as education, social services and employment support. During the implementation of this strategy, it is recommended that a national co-ordinating body of all the providers of activities and projects is established, which will monitor the implementation of the strategy. The institutions responsible are the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth.

Competences of youth-sector professionals in the area of mental health and well-being of young people

This section explores the overall readiness and competences of youth-sector professionals, trainers or educators to deal with young people's mental health and well-being. The realities of professionals working in various countries differ, as there is no common definition or a unique professional standard for mental health specialists, especially in the youth sector, where services and initiatives dedicated to young people can be provided both by professionals and volunteers. At the same time, since the youth sector has often been at the forefront of addressing emerging challenges, such as mental health, new digital behaviours or social and humanitarian crises, its intervention has been primarily driven by the urgency of the situation rather than waiting for the development of competence frameworks or standardised approaches. These situations have enabled experimentation and innovation but have also led to increased fatigue and challenges in understanding how to make the interventions sustainable.

Another important dimension to be taken into account when discussing the readiness of various volunteers and professionals to deal with mental health issues is the vastness of the topic itself. As mental health and well-being of young people are broad concepts, measures aimed at addressing them can have different focuses and approaches.

Understanding challenges to youth mental health

In order to gain a better insight into the existing practices, it is essential to start by mapping the challenges experienced by those engaged in providing services for mental health and well-being. Although not exhaustive, the insights identified below provide a snapshot of the major issues professionals in this field face.

Voluntary versus paid staff. As mental health and well-being services and initiatives are developed with the engagement of both professional paid staff and volunteers, it is important to understand the different outcomes and what can and cannot be achieved by each of them. Higher expectations are often placed on volunteers when they are already dealing with limited resources.

High professional expectations. Professionals engaged in mental health activities can often be overwhelmed by the tasks they have, with many of them experiencing fatigue and mental and psychological stress. An additional burden that youth work professionals experience is the organisational or self-induced expectation that they alone are responsible for the well-being of young people.

Competences for youth workers, educators and school staff. Various specialists perceive youth workers, educators and school staff (school psychologists, counsellors, etc.) as not being sufficiently qualified to deal with young people's mental health difficulties. There is a potential for generating frustration among young people, who might feel more misunderstood, and professionals themselves, who might feel powerless or ineffective in the process. Even where there are programmes for supporting youth workers' competences, they seem to be insufficient, or they do not cover all relevant competences. The pressure felt by professionals (from lack of readiness or a fast work pace) can also translate into a lack of time to reflect on the quality of services or the competences needed to improve their work.

Burden of complex procedures. Another class of challenges includes the complexity of procedures that certain organisations and institutions might require when delivering mental health and well-being services. Considering that mental health interventions are sensitive in terms of the nature of the information they collect about individuals, the procedures for collecting and recording data and consent have been noted as specifically burdensome.

Lack of resources. Similar to other youth-sector issues, activities related to mental health are not proportionally supported with financial and human resources. Funding for such initiatives, including for capacity building of professionals and volunteers, is usually provided by national institutions dealing with health (such as Austria, France and Malta) or youth issues (such as Latvia), by international donors (such as UNICEF and UNFPA), or by NGOs whose efforts reflect their responsibility to contribute to the professionalisation of the sector. However, existing efforts seem to fall short of meeting all needs, lacking sustainability and equal distribution across regions. The very affordability of capacity-building opportunities for youth professionals is also a challenge, as in addition to the lack of opportunities, their cost can represent an additional hindrance. At the moment, not all countries have national programmes that subsidise capacity-building opportunities in this field; thus, not many organisations can afford to organise them or cover the associated expenses.

Dealing with stigma and prejudice. Historically, mental health has been seen as a medical condition, often with negative connotations associated with it. While the scope of services provided for young people's mental health and well-being has expanded in recent decades, professionals working in schools and youth settings feel that the stigma and prejudices associated with those perceptions still prevail. Consequently, additional barriers are experienced in direct work with young people who might lack trust in professionals, ultimately hampering their access to the services offered.

Support mechanisms. Considering the pressure on professionals in this field, along with the lack of resources and capacity-building opportunities, various organisations highlight the need for school staff and youth workers to access support mechanisms, including counselling, contact points, mentoring, coaching and peer networks. Even if efforts have emerged to address this, current work is predominantly perceived as happening in isolation, hence the burden experienced by the professionals.

Access to professional services. While some countries offer access to psychologists and psychotherapists as part of their national health schemes, fully or partly covered by the public health system (such as Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands),

this measure is seen as insufficient. Either because the number of professionals included in the health plan is too small for the needs of young people or because, in some countries, such services are not covered at all (for example, Bulgaria only covers psychiatric services). This limits the possibilities for young people to access such services and, in the long term, discourages them from seeking active support, even when relevant services might be offered for free.

Addressing emerging issues. Mental health and well-being are fields of work that require the capacity to respond to new challenges constantly. Starting with the Covid-19 pandemic, the overall fast pace of AI-powered digital environments and the multiple political and economic crises, the so-called polycrisis that young people are experiencing today adds an equal challenge to specialists expected to deliver mental health services. The situation has often added to the pressure of specialists working in the field as they struggle to keep up with delivering services while also upskilling themselves, without proper guidance or sufficient time to reflect on their own knowledge needs and gaps.

Regulation of specialised professions. Some countries, such as Slovenia, as reported by the Slovenian Youth Council, experience substantial obstacles, as professions such as psychotherapy are not yet regulated. Thus, there can be significant differences in the quality of services provided, which could increase the risks to young people who might access such services. On the other hand, countries such as the Netherlands have a well-standardised system where youth professionals (identified as youth care workers, youth and family professionals, pedagogues or psychologists) must register on the [Youth Quality Register \(SKJ\)](#), a system designed to ensure specialists meet a certain set of criteria while also undergoing professional supervision.

Emerging issues generated by artificial intelligence. On the top of the above-mentioned challenges, AI also becomes a concern for mental health professionals. As with other forecasts that anticipate that jobs will be severely impacted by AI, new trends are also emerging in the field of psycho-social services. A 2025 experimental [study](#) (Ovsyannikova et al. 2025) shows that AI agents (such as ChatGPT) can be perceived by individuals as more empathetic than experts trained to deal with trauma. While the results of such experiments need to be interpreted with caution, it is important to emphasise the need for additional efforts. One of the specific priority needs is increasing the number of professionals in the field. Currently, the shortage of specialists is one of the reasons mentioned for using AI companions – as a more accessible and affordable alternative to professional mental health services. Another important issue is the investment in the well-being of the professionals themselves. Various reports on the future of jobs ([World Economic Forum 2025](#)) indicate that jobs requiring social and emotional intelligence will be the hardest to replace, yet, according to the above-mentioned experimental study, the ranking of AI tools as more empathetic than professionals in the field might also be the result of burnout or compassion fatigue (the direct effect of lack of well-being experienced by professionals in the field). At the same time, the recent surge in the use of AI companions among young people, including for human-like connections (friendship, advice, romantic connections) leads to new requirements for professional training in the field of mental health and well-being.

Examples of programmes and tools enhancing competences and readiness

The practices identified through the study “Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe” (Stefan et al. 2025) bring to light efforts made by both public institutions and the NGO sector working with young people in different contexts. The first part of this section identifies practices that were designed as large-scale programmes to go beyond the effects of a one-off project, including the development of national frameworks, competence curricula or standardised training design. The second part identifies various toolkits/manuals and online opportunities developed through projects or which are offered by organisations to support a lifelong learning approach for professionals working in the field. The last part includes examples of several projects or activities predominantly organised by youth (work) organisations, funded by the EU and other donors, who often fill the gaps in communities where public or systemic interventions do not exist. A full list with references to all mentioned policies, resources and projects can be found under “Further reading competences” section of this publication.

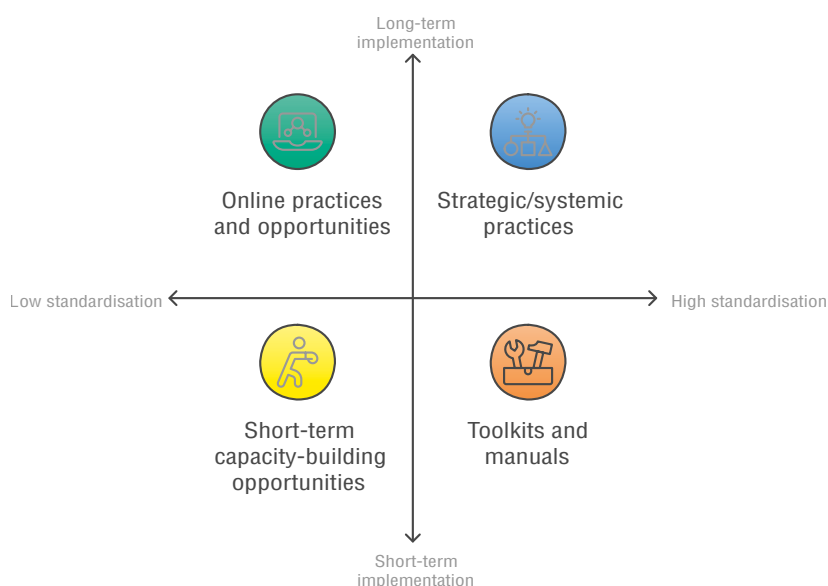


Figure 3. Categorisation of programmes and tools enhancing competences and readiness of professionals

a. Strategic/systemic practices

The practices identified in this section have been designed as large-scale programmes, with effects that extend beyond a one-off project or activity, including examples such as the development of national frameworks, competence curricula or standardised training design.

Wales – an example of a system-wide framework and guidance. The Welsh Government adopted the “[Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being](#)” in 2021. It serves as a guide for school staff to support the well-being of learners and promotes an integrated, systematic approach by defining roles not only for school staff but also for regional bodies, the NHS and other community services like youth offending teams (usually a local partnership that brings together staff from the police, probation, health, education and other community organisations that work with young people and their families). The framework’s content addresses well-being from a resilience and preventive standpoint for both students and staff. To support professionals working in school settings, the framework includes measures such as conducting, documenting, consulting on risk assessments, skills assessments and workload impact assessments. Regarding leadership and staff training, it foresees new elements related to the emotional and mental well-being of learners to be added to the initial teacher education or upskilling of dedicated staff such as school counsellors, school nurses, educational psychologists and education learning support assistants. Overall, it is not a prescriptive tool with a single set of rules; instead, it provides principles and good practices that can offer inspiration.

Latvia and Serbia – examples of professional upskilling and competence development. The “[Youth Workers Excellence Programme](#)”, developed by the Latvian Agency for International Youth Programmes, is designed to upskill professionals who work with young people in local government and NGOs. Implemented since 2022, this residential programme consists of four modules over two proficiency levels and promotes a broad approach to mental health. It includes topics such as psycho-emotional health problems of youth, understanding discrimination and violence, and developing initiatives for young people with fewer opportunities. The second example is provided by the National Association of Youth Workers in Serbia (NAPOR), which developed a [curriculum, training and mentorship for youth workers](#) in 2024, for implementation in 2025. As part of the National Programme for Youth Mental Health, NAPOR created two distinct curricula. One is an initial training programme for youth workers on planning and implementing outreach work, including co-ordinating and supervising peer educators in high schools. The second curriculum focuses on empowering youth workers to create safe spaces, improving their knowledge of youth mental health challenges, raising their awareness of personal capacities and professional boundaries, and teaching crisis-response techniques. In both national programmes, youth workers can benefit from mentorship and coaching.

Luxembourg and France – examples of standardised training modules with a “first aid” focus. “[Mental Health First Aid Youth](#)” is a training programme for professionals in the mental health field and is provided by Formation Enfance Jeunesse Luxembourg, the national institute for lifelong learning for the educational field, under the authority of the Luxembourg National Ministry for Education, Children and Youth. It offers foundational knowledge about common mental disorders (such as depression, anxiety, psychosis and eating disorders) and teaches practical first aid for psychological crises. The training helps participants understand the frequency of these disorders and reflect on how they are perceived in society. The French “[Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)” is a new module implemented since 2022 by the Premiers

Secours en Santé Mentale France (PSSM), a non-profit organisation. It is designed for a broader audience of professionals and adults who work with adolescents aged 12 to 18, including teachers, coaches and parents. The module has two main components: dealing with mental health disorders (depression, anxiety, psychosis, etc.) and managing crises like non-suicidal self-mutilation, suicidal crises, panic attacks and aggressive behaviour. A mandatory mentorship phase complements the training.

Ukraine, a context-specific and trauma-informed programme. Developed in co-operation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine and the All-Ukrainian youth centre, the Council of Europe project [Youth for Democracy in Ukraine](#) introduced the specialist course “Trauma-informed youth work” within the state youth worker programme. A training manual for professionals working with young people was designed and written in [Ukrainian](#) and translated into [English](#), available online free of charge. The training course follows the occupational standard “Youth specialist (youth worker)” in Ukraine (Council of Europe 2023b) which ensures a reflection of youth work realities in a time of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Developed as a result of a 2022 focus group organised by the Council of Europe, the final text of the occupational standard includes the following knowledge and skills: “Ability to identify one’s own needs for improving the professional level and the needs of persons involved in youth work: basic knowledge in the field of mental health; personal, organisational and informational opportunities for receiving special help for oneself and others (professional burnout, stress, knowledge of a traumatic event, compassion fatigue); the ability to determine the need to receive special help for oneself and others (professional burnout, stress, knowledge of a traumatic event, compassion fatigue); and use information about available personal, organisational and informational opportunities for receiving special help”.

b. Toolkits and manuals

This section identifies various toolkits, manuals or handbooks that have resulted from various projects and initiatives. They serve as resources for organisations interested in learning more about the topics and for discovering new tools and approaches to working with young people and their careers in the context of well-being and mental health.

In this section we can also differentiate between resources developed for practitioners and professionals, and resources for peers and youth support.

Resources for practitioners and professionals

Toolkit on mental health, social well-being and healthy habits of young people	Toolbox psycho-social TOPSY	Psychological first aid training manual for child practitioners (PFA)
Created by the Psychosocial Innovation Network with the support of UNFPA Serbia, this consists of theoretical and practical sections covering the topics of mental health, well-being and habits of youth, and was developed through a co-creation approach actively involving youth. It aims to improve the knowledge and skills of local youth offices staff and increase effectiveness and broader applicability of the toolkit by addressing the diverse needs of young people across various contexts.	Developed by the Austrian League for Child and Youth Health (Kinderliga) and the Federal Youth Council (BJV), this was primarily designed for youth workers and healthcare professionals and intended to support awareness raising, destigmatisation, crisis support and networking for interventions relating to mental health crises and mental illness in young people. A training course was delivered based on the toolbox. The ultimate goal was to ensure a sustainable embedding of actionable competences in the respective organisations.	Developed by Save the Children Denmark for the Child Protection Initiative, this is an integral part of training modules dedicated to psychological first aid, focusing on distressed children and primary caregivers. It was designed to support the competences of Save the Children staff, partners and professionals such as teachers, educators, health and social workers or volunteers working directly with children in emergencies or in the aftermath of conflicts, natural disasters and other traumatic events.

Resources for peers and young people

I support my friends	Psycho-educational workshop programme – Handbook for facilitators	Juleica module on mental health toolkit
An initiative developed by UNICEF on the principles of psychological first aid to equip older children and adolescents with the skills and knowledge to support their friends in distress under the mentorship and guidance of trusted adults. Designed as a training programme, it includes resources that can be used in other contexts as well – the theory and implementation guide, general training manual, participants’ workbook and the manual for training of facilitators and focal points.	Developed within the “Youth for change: building the resilience of Serbian youth through engagement, leadership and development of their cognitive and social-emotional skills” projects and implemented by the Psycho-social Innovation Network with the support of EU funding. Intended as a practical tool, the handbook provides educators with a methodology design for activities related to perspective taking and conflict resolution, empathy and acceptance, and strengthening self-confidence.	Created in Germany by the Landesjugendring Brandenburg e.V. association as part of a standardised nationwide training model for young volunteers, the toolkit, complemented by residential training, provides an overall understanding of the concept of mental health and different tools and methodologies that organisations can use directly when working with young people.

Apart from the toolkits mentioned above, it is also important to mention the [European Mental Health Capacity Building Initiative](#), which includes the development of a toolkit for a multidisciplinary approach to mental health capacity building. The European Commission is funding a multidisciplinary training and exchange programme on mental health with €9 million under the Eu4Health programme (EU-PROMENS 2025).

c. Online practices and opportunities

This section offers examples of online learning platforms developed through projects or offered by organisations aiming to support the development of lifelong learning opportunities for professionals working in the field of well-being and mental health.

Online training platforms for professionals

Campus FAD Juventud

An online platform created by the Fundación de Ayuda contra la Drogadicción (FAD) in Spain. The programmes offered cover topics such as well-being, prevention of risk behaviours and gender. During 2024, professionals from public and private organisations had access to resources such as “Young people and screens: use and risks in digital environments”; “Life goes by: selective prevention of cannabis consumption”; and “Purple glasses” (focused on how gender affects addictive behaviours).

Mental health online modules

Offered by Josefstal Studienzentrum in Germany, these include a series of online modules (2-3 hours each) based on videos, reading materials and interactive tasks. They provide the basics of topics such as addiction prevention in child and youth work; mental health in child and youth work; conducting discussions in (school groups); dealing with stress and self-protection online; dealing with crises in children and adolescents; and violence in the digital space.

Specific online information services and discussion platforms

Online information service

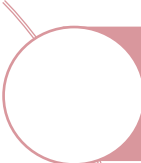
An initiative for school professionals and educational staff focused on pandemic-specific aspects of the mental health of children and young people, developed by Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy (DGKJP) in partnership with the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) during 2021-22. While no longer continued, the platform includes a series of 11 video materials dedicated to school professionals and educational staff interested in mental stress and mental disorders in children and adolescents in connection with the coronavirus pandemic.

Online exchanges

Deutscher Bundesjugendring e.V., an umbrella organisation for youth organisations and regional youth councils in Germany, offers regular online exchanges dedicated to their membership on topics such as mental health on youth trips and international encounters; Mental health and volunteering; or the phenomenon of climate anxiety. This allows the organisation to explore practical questions in an informal way, together with young people and youth psychologists.

d. Short-term capacity-building opportunities

The last section includes examples of various projects or activities predominantly organised by youth (work) organisations, with the support of the EU or other donor funding, often filling the gaps in communities where public or systemic interventions do not exist.



Let's Talk project

The project aims to strengthen youth workers' capacity to support young people's mental health, focusing on the effects of Covid-19 on children and young people and gender-sensitive approaches to mental health issues. It is carried out by a consortium of organisations from Croatia, Greece, Italy and Serbia within the Erasmus+ programme.



Peer School for Youth Mental Health project

The main aim of the project is to train and educate young people on mental health topics in order to become peer educators by ensuring that mental health is dealt with systematically. It is implemented by the Youth Association YMCA Bitola – North Macedonia, within the framework of the regional programme for local democracy in the Western Balkans 2 Reload2, financed by the EU.



Reinforce mental health practices (MIND) project

The project aims to strengthen the capacities of VET professionals to reinforce their mental health practices and promote socio-emotional well-being for VET (vocational education and training) learners in mobility projects. It is organised by a consortium of organisations – ADICE (France), Fundación Plan B Educación Social (Spain) and Volunteers Centre Skopje (Macedonia), within the Erasmus+ programme.

The Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation (EYF) also supports a range of projects on youth mental health and well-being, which provide different training and capacity-building opportunities.

Healthy ME Healthy YOUth	Mental health within youth work
Implemented by Rural Youth Europe in 2023, the project aims to support young people in rural areas to access their right to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health. It builds the knowledge and tools that youth clubs and organisations need to support young people when exploring issues such as healthy living, healthy and sustainable food, the circular economy, exercise and mental health.	A capacity-building activity organised by Don Bosco Youth-Net ivzw in 2023, aimed at improving the skills of youth workers to deal in appropriate ways with young people's mental health. The activity focused on tactics such as relaxation exercises, mindfulness, yoga and healthy diets, instead of counselling, and they also explored the safeguarding policy (for example, youth workers can refer a young person to a psychology or counselling professional).

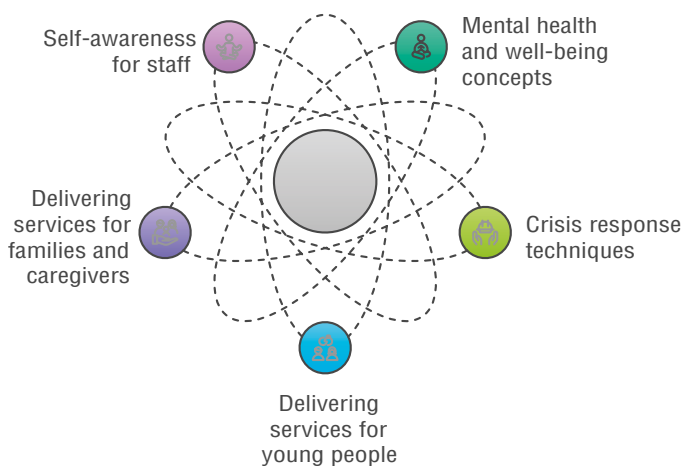


Figure 4. Illustration of the main learning objectives and capacity-building initiatives for professionals working in the field of mental health and well-being

Services and tools for young people's mental health and well-being

This section offers an overview of the mental health services provided by various institutions specifically to young people. The data analysed here are based exclusively on the information gathered via the online survey in the framework of the Youth Partnership study “Advancing youth mental health and well-being: a mapping of policy frameworks, tools and services across Europe”. For this purpose, 46 services have been identified as available to cater for young people's mental health and well-being. The analysis excludes national medical hospitals and university-provided psychotherapy services to maintain focus on youth-specific services provided by national governments, local governments or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), even though it acknowledges the valuable mental health support these units offer to young people.

The identified examples of mental health services can be grouped by three main criteria: by type of provider (local and national governments, NGOs); by age (different age ranges for which services are designed and delivered); and by type of service (online, offline and hybrid). The analysis offers an overview of the major approaches while also emphasising the lack of consistency across countries and stakeholders.

Mental health services by provider. The Council of Europe report on the [mental health and well-being of children and young adults \(Council of Europe 2023a\)](#) recognises states as responsible institutions for providing mental health systems, training professionals, raising awareness within communities, integrating mental health approaches in community services and school. The report specifically emphasises the importance of collaborating with relevant organisations and stakeholders. However, based on the findings of the study (reflected in Figure 5), NGOs are the primary providers of these services, while national and local governments lag somewhat behind. Yet, it is important to notice that many mental health services are delivered through collaborations between national governments and NGOs, even though the primary service providers differ.

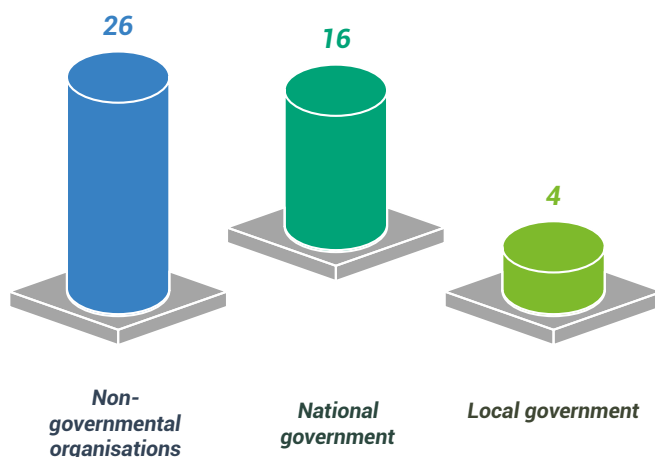


Figure 5. Services by type of provider

Mental health services by age. By analysing services based on the age of their main beneficiaries, the study showcases a diversity of approaches to designing and delivering services, with some having a distinct focus on children (under 18 years old), while others have a mixed approach (focusing on children, adolescents and young adults) or even lack any specific target group (are offered to everyone). In this context, six categories have been distinguished as illustrated in Figure 6.

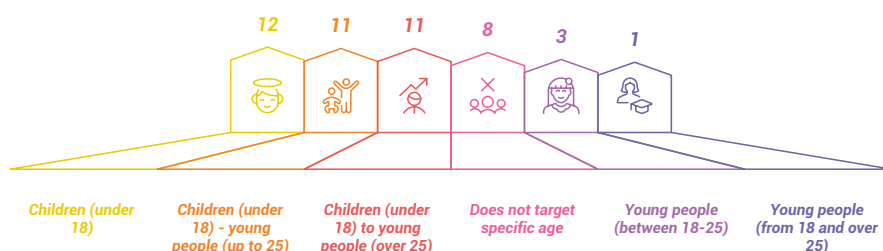


Figure 6. Services by age group

Mental health services by type. When looking at the types of mental health services, three primary formats have been identified: online, offline (on premises) and hybrid (online and offline combined). Online services use only digital tools, including hotlines, chat services, e-mailing, applications, digital training materials and digital consulting services. On-premises services involve physical places allocated to provide mental health services with limited digital material, but not providing consulting services on online platforms; they are traditionally provided within schools, community centres and clinics and are often used for more intensive support needs,

including counselling, assessment, skills training, awareness raising and advocacy actions. Hybrid services combine both approaches by providing services in physical premises and also offering consulting services and a rich array of material on digital tools. This format allows service providers to reach young people across a range of geographic and social settings while preserving the benefits of in-person support. Considering that 97% of young people (aged 16 to 29) in the EU have daily access to the internet compared to 86% of the general population (Eurostat 2024), the provision of hybrid services becomes an important and effective tool to reach young people. Figure 8 below reflects the service by type and responsible institution, with NGOs being highly dominant in hybrid services, while local governments provide mostly on premises service.

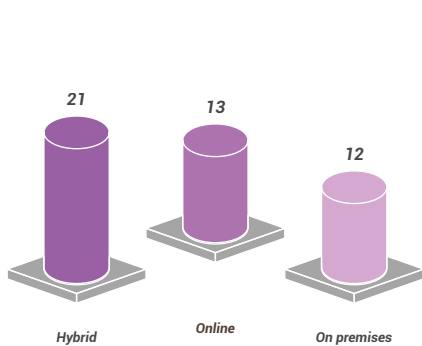


Figure 7. Mental health services by type

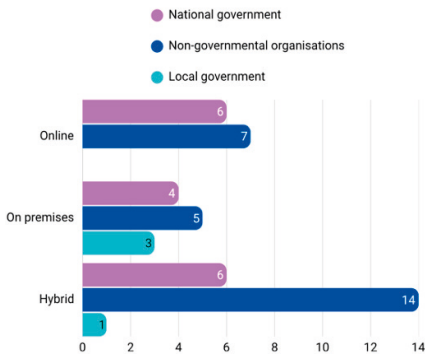


Figure 8. Service by type and by responsible institution

Examples of services at national and local level

The aim of this section is to highlight good practices identified by the above-mentioned study (Stefan et al 2025) and provide inspiration to those interested in developing similar initiatives.

a. Online services

Online services encompass a range of digital platforms and applications designed to provide mental healthcare. These services include counselling, therapy and psychiatric support delivered through e-mails, chats, videoconferences, interactive tools and applications. The aim of these tools ranges from awareness raising to educational resources and training materials.

Norway

National online health services in Norway are offered by the Directorate of Health to increase awareness and accessibility of health services via digital tools. The platform provides a range of health tools: on cancer, kidney disease for the general population, nutrition planning, sexual diseases and well-being for individuals over the age of 13. The mental health tools aim to reduce and prevent mental health conditions and provide accessible tools for young people on mental health information. For this purpose, 17 digital tools are offered to address specific conditions such as depression, psychosis, sleep problems and social anxiety. These tools include self-help material, videos, self-assessment surveys, mental health information provided by experts, online consultations and institutions offering additional support (www.helsenorge.no/).

France

Fil Santé Jeunes is an interactive website supported by the National Public Health Agency of France. The platform aims to reach 12 to 25 year olds and is focused on health concerns in general; sexual and mental health is also included. Chosen topics are not only targeted at mental health but also cover issues such as sugar consumption, the impact of video games on violence, nutrition and many others. The platform also provides access to a forum where individuals can read and share on a topic with their peers and remain anonymous. A chat and phone line are also available to direct questions to doctors, psychologists, educators and counsellors at allocated times (www.filsantejeunes.com).

Nightline France is an NGO founded in 2016 in order to improve specifically the mental well-being of college students. Among other support measures, the organisation runs a phone line and chat service, offering volunteer-based peer-to-peer support between 9 p.m. and 2 a.m. The helpline primarily provides support during emergency situations such as suicidal threats or immediate anxiety and is available both in French and English, giving broader access to students in the country (www.nightline.fr).

Austria

Rat auf Draht was established in 1987 as a contact point for children, adolescents and adults in crisis in Austria. Starting as an individual emergency hotline, the organisation expanded its services to e-mail consultation, web-based information sharing and consulting, a hotline for missing children, online chat consultation options, peer consulting for young people, and a digital information centre for parents with materials that include a podcast series (www.rataufdraht.at).

Czech Republic

The NEPANIKAR project is an initiative that offers the first digital application on mental health in the Czech Republic. Even though they state that they have over 100 volunteers, mainly consisting of students, the tool does not target a specific age group. Their website and application provide quick information on mental health, counselling via e-mail or chat, and a help map where users can access information about relevant institutions, including emergency centres, hospitals and psychotherapists. They also offer paid services such as psychotherapy, training courses for individuals and institutions on crisis information, and workshops for schools, educators or companies on various topics (<https://nepanikar.eu/>).

Germany

JugendNotmail is an online non-profit platform that provides consulting services on web and mobile application-based tools to young people between the ages of 10 and 19. The platform does not offer phone counselling services but has a text-based structure via e-mails or chat options for consulting and advice. Young people can benefit from chat services such as individual chat consulting and group chat options with peers and experts at allocated dates and times (<https://jugendnotmail.de/>).

Mein Kompass is a digital tool developed by the Department of Clinical Psychology at the University of Ulm as a part of the “Healthy for life” funding initiative. It is financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and was implemented between 2018 and 2022. Its aim was to recognise early symptoms of mental health conditions and inform young people about necessary services. The website also provides links to other services from the same programme as well as other sources from which young people can seek help. Although the project duration has ended, the website is still functional (<https://meinkompass.org/>).

b. On-premises services

On-premises mental health support refers to traditional, in-person mental healthcare services. These services include counselling, therapy and psychiatric support provided in settings such as clinics, hospitals and private practices. The aims of these services are varied, including raising awareness, providing educational resources and offering training materials. These types of services offer several benefits as they provide direct, face-to-face interaction that can be essential for building trust and rapport between clients and providers. These services also allow for immediate, hands-on interventions and access to a wider range of therapeutic methods and resources.

France

Quartier Jeunes is a community centre in Paris for youth aged 16-30 under the authority of the Paris municipality. The centre approaches youth well-being with a holistic understanding by providing support on job enhancement, legal advice, access to social and cultural activities and health consultation free of charge.

Germany

The **Mental Health Coaches in Schools** project started in the 2023/2024 school year under the authority of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The programme aims to prevent the emergence and continuation of psychological distress by strengthening the resilience, mental health and well-being of young people (students at secondary level). Mental health coaches in the programme are independent experts in social work, educational science and psychology who are assigned to a school as coaches and work in collaboration with teachers and school social workers.

Serbia

Hey We Are Here! (Hej Tu Smo!) is a programme implemented by the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR), the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMs), the National Association of Youth Offices, the Association of the Local Youth Associations (OPENS) and the Union of Scouts of Serbia with the support of Serbia's Ministry of Tourism and Youth. It has several dimensions in order to reach its objectives: peer educator support is provided by training 15-18 year olds on the signs of mental health conditions and sources that young people can benefit from, a supervision programme and training for youth workers who demonstrate burnout and high levels of stress, advising students and their parents on the preservation of mental health, and providing activities to engage the community in order to decrease stigma.

Croatia

Zagreb Youth and Child Protection Centre is a public service founded in 2002 by the local government to provide effective and immediate support to children and youth up to the age of 18. The centre specialises in traumatised children and their families. This includes sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and neglect, as well as the impact of war or displacement. Children with learning difficulties, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), chronic diseases, preterm infants, children from families with impaired dynamics and at-risk families, and children whose parents are under intense pressure from parenting or general stress and who are assessed as children at risk of neglect, are offered services at the centre.

c. Hybrid services

Hybrid mental health support combines both online and offline mental health-care services. This approach includes counselling, therapy and psychiatric support delivered through a mix of in-person sessions and digital platforms such as e-mails, chats, videoconferences, interactive tools, information and mobile applications. In parallel with online services, this concept has gained traction with the advancements in technology and the increasing demand for flexible care options, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Hybrid mental health services provide the flexibility of online services while maintaining the personal touch of in-person interactions. This approach can enhance accessibility, convenience and continuity of care, allowing users to choose the mode of support that best fits their needs and circumstances.

Austria

Healthy from the Crisis is a joint project of the Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists (BÖP), the Austrian Federal Association for Psychotherapy (ÖBVP) and the Austrian Professional Association of Music Therapists (ÖBM). The project was designed after the emergence of a mental health crisis among youth during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sessions are provided either online or face-to-face based on the user's preferences. Face-to-face sessions take place in the nearest location to the user and on the therapist's premises (<https://gesundausderkrise.at/>).

Luxembourg

Portail d'information sur la santé mentale is a government-led initiative that aims to provide essential information about the mental health services available in the country. The help section of the platform offers access to various resources and support tools such as helplines, psychological and psychiatric support, or therapy groups. Although the platform is not specific to the youth population, it provides information and articles to general users, including a notable focus on youth mental health (www.prevention-psy.lu).

Netherlands

MIND US is an NGO working on the promotion of well-being and prevention of the emergence of mental health disorders among young people aged 12-27. Considering mental well-being in a holistic way, the organisation wants to contribute to transforming communities and leisure-time activities in which young people are involved. Thus, in collaboration with several municipalities, the organisation works to enhance young people's voices within municipal processes as well as providing space for local governments to discuss and learn from each other's experiences (<https://mindus.nl/>).

Ease Foundation is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2017 to provide easy and accessible psycho-social support, preventing the emergence of mental health conditions and stimulating the strength and independence of young people aged 12 to 25. The foundation offers in-person support at 12 locations in the Netherlands, collaborates with schools and parents to raise awareness of the early signs of mental health conditions, provides information about their services and offers digital support on their website. The online chat option on their website offers individual support on specific days and times, working to the same principle as the in-person support (www.ease.nl).

Slovenia

MIRA is a national mental health programme from the National Institute of Mental Health of the Republic of Slovenia. Launched in 2018, as part of Slovenia's first strategic document in the field of mental health for a 20-year period, it aims to connect existing mental health services within the country and establish 50 child and adolescent mental health centres and adult mental health centres. The centres provide individual and group psychotherapy consultation for individuals and parents, and training and awareness programmes for parents and guardians (www.zadusevnozdrazve.si).

Latvia

The Adolescent Resource Centre (PRC) is a non-profit social organisation founded by the Children's Hospital Foundation. The centre provides online and in-person mental health support to adolescents between 10 and 18 years of age for up to six months. Their main specialist programmes are risk reduction of addiction and depression, as well as dialectical behavioural therapy. Consultations are provided in nine cities on physical premises or via online platforms. Their website also offers chat options, videos and blog articles for adolescents and parents. In addition, supporting materials are available for mental health specialists (<https://pusaudzucentrs.lv/>).

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the analysed policies and practices related to young people's well-being and mental health, despite many efforts, a significant deficit of financial and human resources can be noted, which leaves many initiatives underfunded and unsustainable. Professionals in the youth sector, including volunteers, are often overworked and under-supported and lack the specialised training needed to address complex mental health issues, in some cases leading to burnout. From an institutional perspective, cumbersome administrative procedures are perceived as obstructing the delivery of timely care. And the lack of professional regulation for fields like psychotherapy, in some countries, creates a risk of inconsistent and poor-quality services. Overall, although many policies dealing with youth mental health have been developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, they can still be seen as rather reactive rather than proactive, since they have not been easily adapted to address more recent threats, particularly those emerging from the digital world, such as generative AI.

In response to the identified shortcomings, a series of opportunities can be taken and transformed into strategic initiatives.

Policies

- ▶ **Youth focus in mental health and well-being policies.** As young people's mental health is affected by multiple factors, policies at all levels need to identify solutions that address them. In this context, policy solutions need to target young people's needs specifically as a distinct age group by creating tailored policies in addition to other general mental health frameworks. Alternatively, national frameworks should be complemented by clear guidance on how they apply to young people and how they facilitate their access, including key indicators that can be measured periodically.
- ▶ **Youth participation.** In a similar way to other policy priorities, youth voices and perspectives need to be an integral part of any policy and practice designed to cater to their needs. While mental health has been initially integrated into wider health policies, it is essential that new policy processes recognise young people as rights holders when designing the measures that can impact their well-being.
- ▶ **Mapping and monitoring policies with an impact on young people's mental health and well-being.** Considering the variety of factors that influence young people's situations, it is important to have a good overview not only of the policies traditionally dedicated to mental health but also of how other policies address youth well-being, for example those related to climate change, economic development, youth autonomy and conflict management. Such processes should be aligned with prevention strategies and strategic co-ordination of youth policies.

- ▶ **Cross-sector collaboration.** Providing spaces and opportunities for collaboration between different sectors, such as education, health, social, and youth services, or even with technology companies, is essential to create comprehensive support systems for young people. Establishing multidisciplinary teams and crisis intervention units could be one outcome of such a collaboration.
- ▶ **Emerging policies.** In order to navigate the fast developments of AI and other emerging technologies, new mechanisms should be put in place to ensure monitoring of the impact of such technologies on the well-being and mental health of children and young people. New safeguards need to be defined in collaboration with developers of technologies and youth stakeholders.

Capacity building

- ▶ **Understanding mental health and well-being.** Youth workers, school staff and other relevant professionals need more capacity-building opportunities to recognise signs of mental health issues, understand various conditions and provide initial support or referrals.
- ▶ **Key competences.** Future national frameworks or competence development initiatives need to consider the wide range of competences required of professionals, allowing space to upskill their practices in the context of the polycrisis (taking into account current developments and anticipating new ones, such as the impact of generative AI). Specialists need clear methodological guidance, as well as a strong support mechanism (coaching or supervision) that empowers them to work in a safe environment.
- ▶ **Quality assurance and the role of youth workers.** The quality of mental health and well-being services is an essential aspect. While services can be created based on needs and, sometimes, even as a crisis response, it is equally important to ensure they benefit from careful planning and are delivered by qualified staff. Moreover, it is critical to differentiate between three types of service: mental health services provided only by qualified professionals (psychotherapists, psychiatrists); services provided by youth workers and other professionals following specialised training related to young people's mental health and well-being; general youth services that do not require additional training but still contribute to young people's well-being. This differentiation can be critical to ensure the effectiveness of the services, but also to build trust between young people and service providers.
- ▶ **Investing in the transition to the jobs of the future.** With the rise of new technologies such as AI and AI companions, it is important that youth workers and mental healthcare professionals maintain their essential role in human development. This should include initiatives that support the development of core competences specific for socio-emotional support, as well as a strong understanding of the technical and ethical implications of using AI tools.

Services

- ▶ **Strategic planning.** Mental health services can be provided in different forms and by different stakeholders. To ensure a sustainable impact, there is a need for long-term strategic planning and monitoring, including by identifying relevant resources and stakeholders at all levels.
- ▶ **Expand service scope.** Service providers should broaden the range of services to incorporate the perspectives and needs of a range of youth demographics, including marginalised groups. Such solutions could include, among other things, ensuring accessibility of services in rural areas and providing multilingual access.
- ▶ **Service design.** Considering the diversity of age groups in the mapped mental health and well-being services, it is important to ensure that future services are carefully designed, based on the specific characteristics of each age group. Such services should be appropriately tailored to the developmental and transitional needs of every age group at various developmental and educational levels and throughout career transition, providing targeted support that addresses their unique challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, engaging young people in service design could contribute to their effectiveness.
- ▶ **Make use of digital tools.** NGOs and government institutions can utilise the flexibility of digital tools to bridge accessibility gaps, ensuring that mental health services are available to all young people, regardless of their location, identity and specific needs. This approach requires mindfulness and understanding that digital tools also have their limitations and might not be as effective as other traditional approaches.
- ▶ **Maintain physical premises.** Due to the scope of their services, physical centres need to be well equipped and accessible, notably by expanding to rural areas in order to provide comprehensive, multifaceted support. However, it is equally important to diversify the choices of tools and consider complementing physical premises with digital options, when suitable.

Research and data collection

- ▶ **Enhanced data collection of services.** Service providers and policy makers should have in place data-collection and impact analysis procedures. The outcomes should feed into assessment mechanisms looking into the effectiveness and potential scalability of mental health services.
- ▶ **Inventory of services.** In order to ensure sustainable development and use of mental health and well-being services, it is essential to ensure they are known and visible. In this context, a national inventory or repository of available services is recommended. Such inventories can include services provided by state and non-state actors.
- ▶ **Future research.** As identified throughout the publication, future research needs to complement present findings. From the policy perspective, additional research is needed to understand how states include the voice of young people in their mental health policy design and how they are addressing all factors

that aggravate young people's mental health and well-being. From the services perspective, it is important to know how service design is developed and the specific challenges to ensure their sustainability. From a capacity-building perspective, it is important to also look into what the commitments of public and private stakeholders are, including any need to design new standards or improve current qualification frameworks.

- ▶ **Monitoring emerging trends.** As new technologies have the potential to impact young people's well-being and mental health from early ages, more research should be focused on this area, particularly looking into the long-term effects of using generative AI, as well as the relevance of existing safeguards (such as the effectiveness of measures put in place on platforms and the appropriateness of platforms advertising as offering mental health support).

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Approximately one in seven adolescents experience trouble with their mental health at a global level, with almost one in two respondents within the European Union experiencing an emotional or psychosocial problem, such as feeling depressed or anxious. Some of the factors affecting young people's mental health and well-being include socio-economic status, job precarity or lack of financial stability, ongoing geopolitical conflicts, climate change, as well as digital transformation and increased social media use.

This issue of Insights aims to contribute to an understanding of the current realities of young people regarding their mental health and well-being. It offers a general overview of the main factors affecting young people's mental health and well-being, followed by an overview and analysis of European and national policies in the field. The publication also draws attention to competences of youth sector professionals and services that offer a collection of good practices, as identified through various projects and initiatives, developed by NGOs, schools and local or national authorities. They aim to inspire those interested in developing new practices and learn from emerging challenges.

This issue provides ideas for action around youth mental health and well-being in the area of policy, capacity building for professionals, services and research and data collection, while acknowledging the note-worthy efforts already undertaken.

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