YOU.STAND.OUT

YOUng people STANDing OUT through the promotion of local heritage in rural areas

KA220-YOU – Cooperation partnerships in youth

Project No. 2021-2-IE01-KA220-000051251

Research (Need Analysis) on Social Media Marketing Skills among NEETs in Rural Areas

Consortium Report

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YOU.STAND.OUT PROJECT

YOU.STAND.OUT project's HYPOTHESES

In the EU, youth from rural areas experience scarcity of formal and informal education and training, lack of employment prospects, climate-driven pressures on land and other resources, and geographical isolation. Furthermore, rural areas are affected by a higher share of NEETs, namely young people who are not in education, employment or training, while at the same time a higher proportion of the population faces the risk of social exclusion compared to the cities. These severe issues confronting young people have led to increasing "rural flight," namely the exodus of youth from rural areas. Thus following recent data that clearly show a gap between youth in urban and rural areas, the project will tackle the need for a development of local digital strategies that can bridge this gap between urban and rural areas and prevent a further intergenerational gap in the use of digital tools.

YOU.STAND.OUT project's GOALS

This project has as a main objective the strengthening of young people's key digital competencies, employability and sense of initiative, with a particular focus on those who are NEETs.

The first specific objective is to activate processes of social inclusion, increasing employability and active participation of young people supporting the promotion and development of rural areas. To do so the project foresees to provide them with digital marketing skills making them become the protagonists of the promotion and enhancement of local heritage, such as culture, food, artefacts, built and natural environment. Youth empowerment will positively affect local rural communities, which will benefit from the "social ripple effect".

The second specific objective is to increase the capacity of youth associations in rural areas to trigger social change through participatory processes and active citizenship.

To this purpose, Ideation Labs and specific training on participatory methodologies will be organized.

The third specific objective is to raise awareness of young NEETs issues and their potentiality to propose feasible solutions to improve their territories.

Introduction

Many young people from rural areas across Europe face the challenge of finding secure employment in the current labour market and being in professional demand without fear of losing their job. However, the rural labour market situation is ambiguous, and even more so since the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Traditional jobs are no longer sufficient for the working-age population, resulting in higher youth unemployment rates. By increasing digital skills of rural youths, the number of jobs and the level of wages will rise, and acquiring these skills will help to equalise living standards in both urban and rural areas as digital competencies are most in demand in the labour market (EN Council, 2022).

The research analysis from each partner country is the first project result (PR1) of the You.Stand.Out project, and it will be the basis on which all the remaining activities will be developed, thus playing an essential role for a successful implementation of the project. The research analysis conducted across the partner countries aims to understand the needs of the target groups in order to develop proper training material.

This research report explores the current youth unemployment status in each partner country, the employability of rural youth in a digital work environment, and outlines best practice examples that will be helpful to the You.Stand.Out project. Based on data provided by national research, the report will point out distinct results characterizing the situation in one country while at the same highlighting the differences that become visible when comparing the data from national reports. Furthermore, the report will also provide an insight of rural European youths' current digital and social media marketing skills, which digital skills they would most like to learn and improve upon for a smooth transition to a digital economy, as well as an understanding of young people's connection to the themes of heritage, culture and active citizenship. This will be achieved through an analysis of NEETs' needs concerning social media marketing, composed of questionnaires and guided interviews.

As regards the first section of the report, data have been collected through two different kinds of research: a primary research aimed to collect information directly from interested stakeholders.

142 anonymous online questionnaires have been submitted among people aged 18-29, to youth mostly living in low demographic rate municipalities and/or rural areas. In addition, 28 interviews have been conducted, in order to collect further and more detailed answers in addition to those contained in the questionnaire. A secondary research was made to deepen the analysis of the national contexts regarding the phenomenon of NEETs in rural areas, their unemployment and their need for training in the field of digital marketing.

Before taking a deeper look into the data collected by our primary research, a few introductory remarks on the subject as well as some key findings from the desk research will be given as follows.

Who are the NEETs?

The phenomenon of NEETs is considered a major issue of contemporary European policies. However, although NEETs concern all European countries, there are several countries, like Greece or Italy, where a significant increase of the number of young people being out of work, neither in education nor in training has been seen. Consequently, additional interventions are required and need to take place.

NEETs constitute a "new type" of a vulnerable social group, which emerged through social pathologies and the decline of the welfare state and was quietly added "resoundingly" alongside traditional and now classic vulnerable social groups. The European Union emphasizes this in the new category of social vulnerability due to an increase in the number of young people becoming so-called NEETs as official statistics show. Of course, it should be noted that this particular attitude of "abstinence" is in most cases not a personal "choice". On the contrary, the situation of a large number of young people left outside institutions is interpreted as a weakness and a failure of the dominant value system, the failure to contain, inspire and give meaning to the social paths of young people in particular. At the same time one needs to acknowledge that there is no homogeneous group of NEETs. This is related to the different circumstances why someone might

appear as NEET in any official statistics. It is only to remind us that a certainly limited number of European youth will decide voluntarily to stay off the labour market, at least for some while, after school or education, to go abroad, to travel or to maybe simply enjoy life. As the findings from our research will show there are, in addition to that, differences characterizing the NEETs in each partner country. We will therefore take a closer look at gender, age and where the majority of them are living, whether in urban or in rural areas. In any case, the EU itself continues to give high importance to the subject, and as a result, the EU strives to lower the rate of young people who are NEETs for people aged between 15-29 to 9 % by 2030.

Youth unemployment and EU figures on NEETs

Young people (aged 15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training, 2011 and 2021
(%)
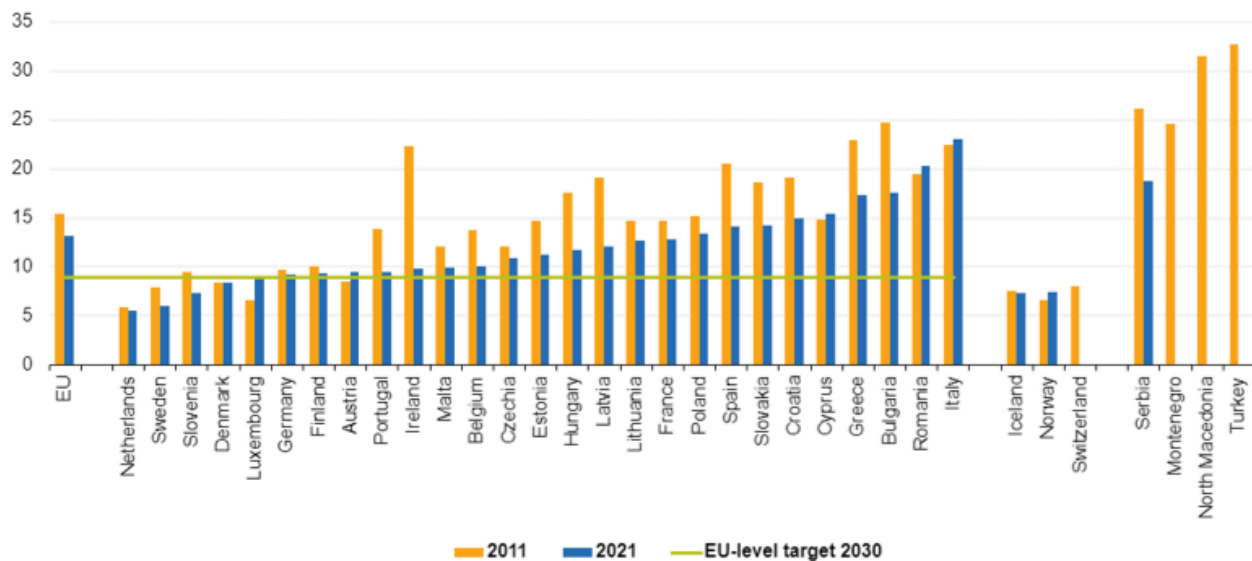
According to Eurostat (2021) the percentage of NEETs with 15 to 29 years of age is 13.1% in the European Union. You.Stand.Out partner countries Italy (23.1%), Greece (17.3%), Cyprus (15.4%)

and Poland (13.4%) are above this EU-wide average, while in Ireland, France and Germany the data for NEETS in 2021 is relatively lower.

After the financial crisis of 2008 and the partly dramatic effects in some European countries, especially in Southern Europe, as well as after temporarily declining figures with regard to unemployment, especially among the younger population, a new crisis was added with the Covid19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020, the effects of which can only be fully assessed gradually.

Nevertheless, it can already be stated that throughout Europe young people were and are among the most severely affected by the consequences of the pandemic. For example, unemployment among 15-29 year olds increased by 1.4 percentage points to 13.3% in the first year of the pandemic compared to 2019, and the NEET rate increased by 1.2 percentage points to 13.6%. Thus, the increase in this group was larger than in the groups with people of higher age.[1]

This increase in youth unemployment meant that in 2020, of all 14 million unemployed people in the EU-27, about one fifth were under 25.[2] If, as in the You.Stand.Out project, the age group is defined somewhat more broadly, i.e. up to and including the age of 29, then according to Eurostat 13.1% of 15-29 year-olds in the EU in 2021 can be assigned to the group of so-called NEETs - i.e. these 13.1% were neither in employment nor in education in 2021 (Eurostat 2021).[3]

Precisely for this reason, and in order to address these difficulties faced by young people in terms of employment, the labour market and life in general as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, the EU itself extended its definition of "young people" in its Youth Strategy in 2020 to include people aged 15-29 (previously the term only covered people aged 15-24). Furthermore, the enhanced Youth Guarantee was reintroduced in October 2020 to provide employment opportunities for this age group.

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[1] Cf. Eurofound, *Die Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf junge Menschen in der EU,* 2021.

[2] Cf. Sozialpolitik aktuell, *Arbeitslosigkeit der jüngeren Bevölkerung in ausgewählten EU-Ländern 2000 - 2020,* 2020.

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training

Gender gap

In the EU, the risk of being NEET is generally higher for women than for men, though not all EU Member States show this phenomenon of feminisation, i.e. a high proportion of NEETs among women. In countries such as Ireland, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and France, the ratio of young men in the NEET group is higher than that of young women, so the opposite phenomenon of masculinization is happening, though not less worrying. Countries like Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Italy have equal proportions.

As data shows, the situation in Poland regarding NEETS is determined by a pattern of: women, inactive, inexperienced, highly skilled, "discouraged workers". The situation can be described similarly for You.Stand.Out partner countries Greece and Italy (as well as for Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania). This pattern is found in countries with high proportions of NEETs, who face structural barriers to young people's transition from education to the labour market. NEET status in Poland is not a matter of choice, and there is a much higher proportion of women, economically inactive people and people without work experience (or with work experience below the EU average) in the category, although in many cases these are highly qualified individuals.

The latter is also proven by data from our research as we will see later on in chapter Q4, surveying the educational level. Generally speaking, there is no direct and compulsory link between a low level of education and the risk of becoming NEET or simply unemployed one day though it might increase the risk of becoming it in many cases.

A rural divide?

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates)
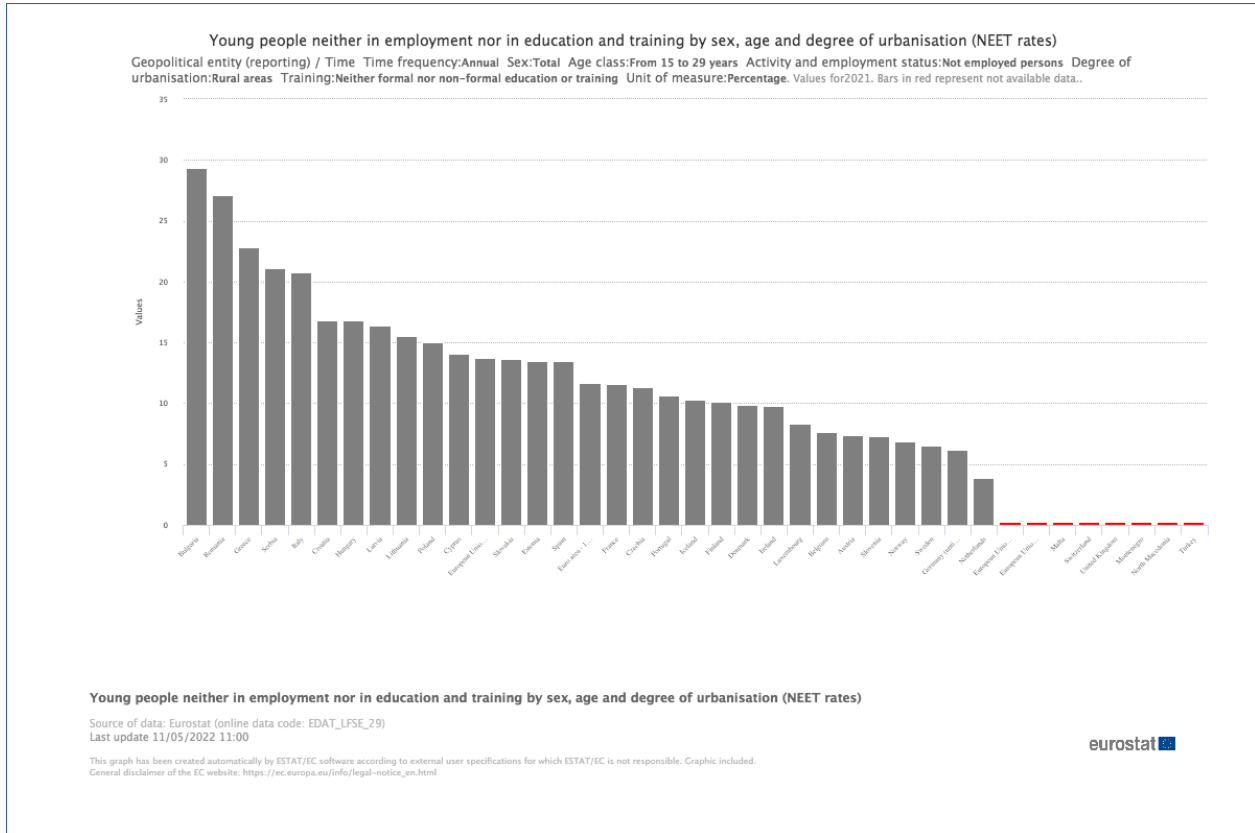
In some countries a clear disadvantage of rural areas is given compared to job chances that urban areas can offer.

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates)

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: EDAT_LFSE_29)
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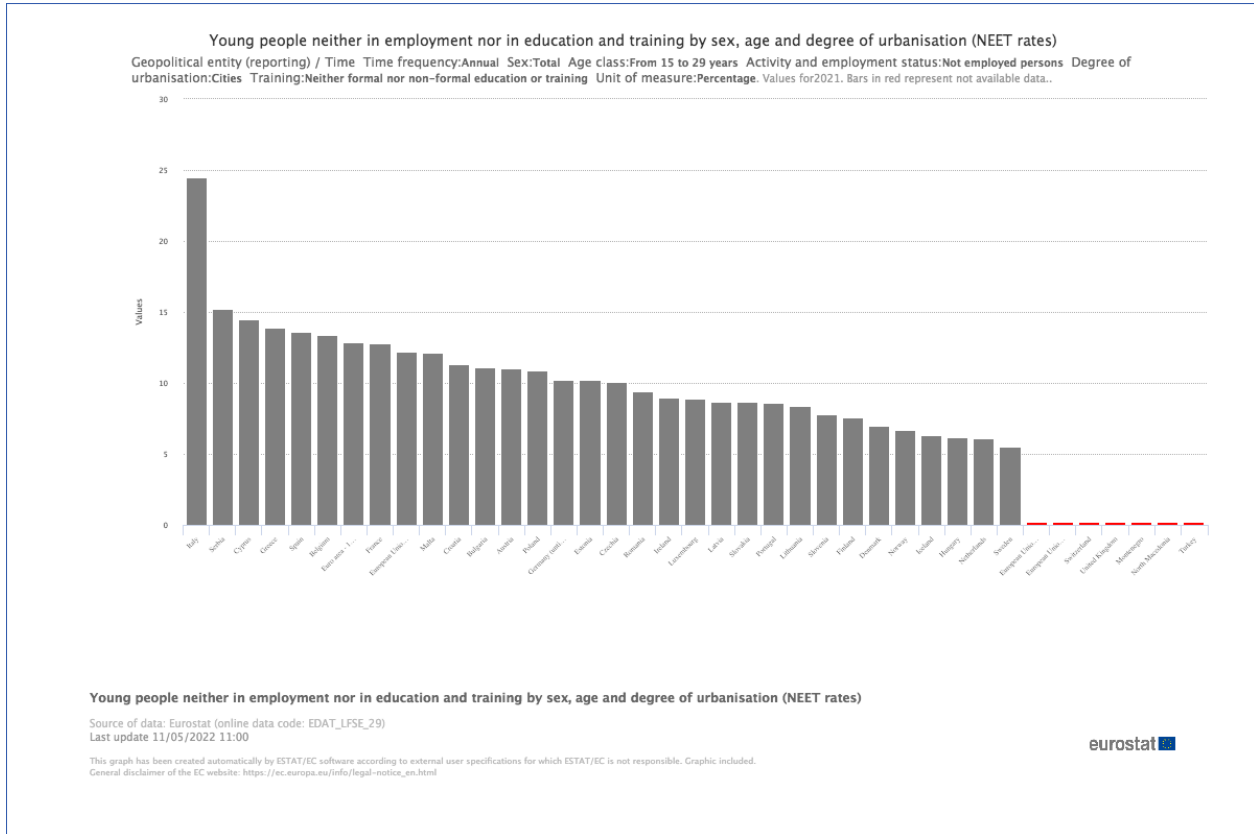
As data from European statistics show there is a gap between urban and rural areas. It is therefore also important to recognise the existing differences in the individual countries and not to play one reality off against the other. On the one hand, it is true that there are more job opportunities in the cities and urban agglomerations. This is known to be one of the central factors why people leave the countryside and move to the cities. At the same time, however, this also creates a higher density of competition, which in turn explains the comparatively high number of those who have only poor opportunities for work, and if so, only for low-skilled work in the low-wage sector.

A look at the data of the countries involved in You.Stand.Out already shows these existing differences in the urban-rural comparison. While in Germany or Italy a higher number of NEETs in cities is recorded for 2021 (Italy: 24.5%; Germany: 10.2%), this ratio is reversed in the case of

Poland and Greece. Here the difference is more than 4% for Poland and almost 10% in the case of rural areas in Greece (rural: 22,8%; cities: 13,9%). Both countries are thus recognisably or significantly above the EU-wide average, which shows a share of 13.7% for NEETs in rural areas.

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates)

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: EDAT_LFSE_29)
Last update 11/05/2022 11:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT/EC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT/EC is not responsible. Graphic included.
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In Ireland, France and Cyprus, the differences in the urban-rural comparison are rather small. Ireland and France are also below the EU average. For Ireland, moreover, this represents more than a halving of the figures compared to the 2013 values, where the share was still 20.9%. The development goals of the Digital Ireland Framework are likely to help ensure that these figures will fall even further in the coming years - if they are met. Making connectivity available to everyone, including through the National Broadband Plan, Remote Working Hubs and Broadband Connection Points, with a target of having all Irish households and businesses covered by Gigabit

network no later than 2028 and all populated areas covered by 5G no later than 2030, that are some goals of the Digital Ireland Framework that will give rural areas in particular the chance to benefit from digital opportunities.

It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the generally positive trend across Europe in reducing youth unemployment in rural areas will continue. Clearly, there is a need to explore the greater proportions of rural NEETs that occur in European countries with sub-protective welfare regimes and who fail short to support school-to-work transition among the most vulnerable youths (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019).

Why digital skills are important for rural youth

The development of information and communications technology (ICT) in rural areas can lead the population, especially young people, to become more mobile, changing their socio-economic, professional positions yet allows them to remain in their rural communities at the same time. ICT helps to reduce rural depopulation as it enables rural youth to achieve their personal goals through digital platforms and online services for education, employment, health, administration, tourism, and commerce. Digital technologies are quickly becoming increasingly important in counteracting the depopulation of rural and remote areas, and for the sustainability of rural communities. They support generational renewal by helping to make rural areas fit for the future by enabling people in rural areas to have equal access to the opportunities that are available in urban areas. Digital technologies make rural areas places where young people can thrive (Neagu et. al, 2021).

Access to digital technologies and development of digital skills are the greatest tools that can have a long-lasting impact on youth and their career paths, particularly in rural areas. Digital skills empower rural youths and provide more opportunities for employment, education and training, as well the ability to leverage a global community of people who have similar interests to theirs through platforms such as virtual classrooms, webinars and various other digital resources (Molefe, 2020). Developing the right technology infrastructure and equipping young people in

rural or remote areas with adequate digital skills allows for socio-economic growth of both rural youth, and the communities in which they reside.

Current barriers to rural youths' digital capabilities

Although at least some of the partner countries from this project show currently some of the lowest rates of youth unemployment in the EU, young people in rural areas across the EU often do not have the same access to education and jobs as youths in urban areas. This is due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure in rural areas, such as equitable delivery of public services, public transport, data connectivity, housing opportunities for young people and lack of employment opportunities.

The recent report by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) 'Digital Inclusion in Ireland: Connectivity, Devices & Skills' shows that those living in rural Irish areas are more poorly engaged with digital technology, and have lower levels of education and lower incomes. This report highlighted the fact that they tend to have poorer broadband connectivity, less access to ICT devices, poorer skills, and lack confidence to engage with ICT (O'Sullivan, 2021).

As for Cyprus, one finds only little available programs that approach the specific target group of NEETs in rural areas. Regarding the percentage of NEETs they are very much needed though. Still, what is already undertaken to improve the situation, too often goes along with practical obligations and less attention on creating digital as well as soft skills while training for a job environment.

This in turn closely corresponds to the findings from the research in Italy. As is pointed out here, the majority of the participants of a survey conducted by Salesforce do not feel ready to operate in a digital-first world. In other words, the widespread use of digital technology and tools in private life is not automatically an indicator of how well equipped and skilled the young people perceive themselves in regards to the world of work. Consequently, a well-tailored training will not only increase the digital capabilities of many young people, it will also be a boost to their self-confidence.

Following our research for Greece, there remains the question of the effectiveness of many training and educational measures aimed at the so-called NEETs. The fact that You.Stand.Out strives to achieve a high degree of congruence between the expectations and needs on the one hand and the qualification offered on the other is due to the project's desire to achieve maximum effectiveness and thus also sustainability.

NEETs and Digital Marketing

The world of Digital Marketing is growing steadily. This activity goes hand in hand with traditional sales strategies and is sometimes even the primary one. Digital Marketing has been a very active sector in recent years, especially for companies' interest in the internet as a way to reach their customers and for private individuals who can achieve a huge visibility for their own business or activities. Most of modern communication moves on the Internet, especially on Social Networks. Precisely for this reason, it becomes essential to know how to use and make the most of them, especially in the workplace. Various professionals are emerging and establishing themselves who work solely with social media and are able to promote a company or product thanks to entirely new techniques, methods and tools.

Digital Marketing is therefore a powerful tool to train the new generations and reduce the employment imbalance, which constitutes a serious problem in parts of Europe... a phenomenon closely linked to early school leaving and subsequently to the difficulty of finding a useful occupation. Such numbers increased if compared to 2019 and this is attributable to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic: young people are among the most affected[4] because, together with the unemployed, they continue to feel excluded from society, remaining also exposed to a greater risk of depression.

Given the example of Italy and other European countries, attention to young people who have left the training system without (yet) having found full access to the world of work has been continuously growing in recent years.

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[4] Eurofound, *Die Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf junge Menschen in der EU (The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People in the EU)*, 2021.

One such field of work that the You.Stand.Out project is focusing on is social media marketing for the purpose of promoting local cultural heritage.

Promoting cultural heritage through digital practices

The promotion of cultural heritage, aimed at supporting innovative and sustainable management models, can represent an important prerequisite for the development of territories and for the enhancement of a value that – since it regards the cultural aspects – is both economic and social. The innovation of work processes offers the possibility of establishing new and important connections between traditional knowledge and new knowledge also for the recovery of traditional sectors of activity and the promotion of a new development.

The policies for the promotion of the cultural industry open the doors not only to new sectors of activities and new jobs closely linked to the 4.0 company model, but also to a framework of innovative skills, skills being of transversal and transformational character related to digitization, to the internet of things and to artificial intelligence. All this within a model of circular economy aimed at the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage in a context of circular and sustainable development.

It is significant to underline how innovative models for the management and use of cultural assets can represent ideal basins for the development of one's own youth employability because they involve digital and transformational skills that are part, and in some ways substantial, of the curriculum and training of young people nowadays.

Thus, If we can overcome the limits imposed by a lack of digital skills and access to digital technologies, we have the potential to empower young people as the beneficiaries of digital rural employment, and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities.

Consequently, the You.Stand.Out project has to take into account the European Youth Goals that aim to specifically support the younger generation. The 11 European Youth Goals, formulated

from a survey of almost 50,000 young Europeans in 2018, highlight the issues affecting young people across Europe, and identify their priorities for a sustainable and successful future. They range from "Quality Education" and "Quality Employment for All", to achieving a "Sustainable Green Europe", whereby all young people are environmentally active and making a difference in their everyday lives.

While the You.Stand.Out project can potentially support and address many of the European Youth Goals, in relation to the ideology and aims of the project, the European Youth Goal that we must give precedence to is Goal #6 "Moving Rural Youth Forward". Much like the You.Stand.Out project, this goal is dedicated to the challenges that young people in rural areas face, where there are fewer opportunities, making it harder for rural youth to realise their ambitions and goals.

European Youth Goal #6 has been subdivided into seven targets, to ensure:

European Youth Goal #6

Moving Rural Youth Forward

- appropriate infrastructure in rural areas - equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people
- sustainable, high-quality jobs, accessible to young people are created in rural areas
- the decentralisation of different activities by, for, and with young people to support their inclusion and to benefit local communities
- young people in rural areas are actively participating in decision-making processes
- equal access to high-quality education for rural youth
- a positive image of rural areas
- the protection of rural traditions (Lodeserto, 2020).

These seven targets combined present an opportunity to empower young people and improve

their socio-economic integration, and support a policy of social cohesion that will create social and economic growth in rural communities across Europe, in alignment with the opportunities created for rural youths by the You.Stand.Out project.

The European Youth Goals are included in the EU Youth Strategy, which is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, and centres around three key words: Engage, Connect, and Empower. The EU Youth Strategy should contribute to realising this vision of young people by mobilising EU level policy instruments as well as actions at national, regional and local level by all stakeholders (Europa.eu, 2020).

European Youth Goal #6 is strongly supported by the You.Stand.Out project as both aim to improve the conditions of young people in rural areas and fight demographic and socio-economic decline by unlocking rural youth potential.

Research Analysis - A summary of the field and desk research's findings on NEETs in rural areas and their needs and skills in a digital (work) environment

In order to conduct a thorough analysis of NEETS needs regarding social media marketing skills, two different methodologies were applied, that is, primary (field research) and secondary (desk) research.

For the primary research, each partner began by surveying 20 young people, aged 18 - 29, anonymously. So this primary research ended up, in total, with 140 surveys completed, plus 28 guided interviews. A questionnaire was used to find out about the areas they reside in, their familiarity and skills in relation to social media marketing, and if they would like to broaden their knowledge of this subject.

So the following data analysis is based on answers from 168 respondents overall. The data presented here, as well as the charts, encompass data given from the national reports. Where it seems appropriate or necessary, this basic data from the national reports will be given as

additional information.

The following chapters will analyse and explain the data collected to finally draw conclusions for further steps to be taken within the You.Stand.Out project.

Q1. Gender

Gender

NON-BINARY
2.5%
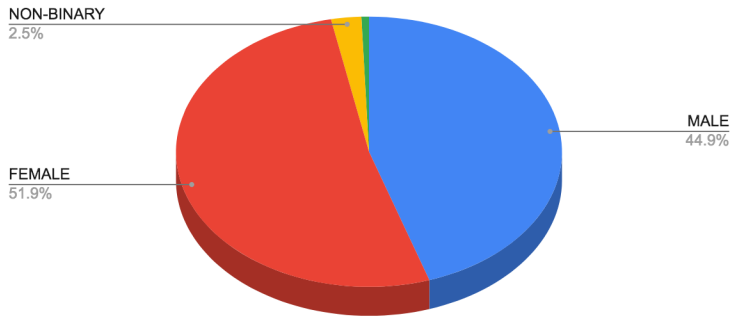
FEMALE
51.9%

MALE
44.9%

Of the respondents from the seven partner countries, a slight majority identified themselves as 'female' (51,9%). 'Male' have been 44,9% of the respondents, while another 2,5% identified as 'non-binary'.
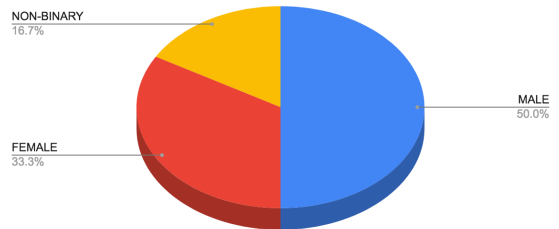
Only in Poland and in France the numbers for 'male' respondents have been higher than for 'females'.

Poland's 24 respondents by GENDER

NON-BINARY
16.7%

FEMALE
33.3%

MALE
50.0%

Q2. Age

We divided the target group for youth (18-29) into two subcategories. One included those being 18-23 years of age, and the other those being 24-29 years old. The first group will clearly encompass more respondents that just left school or maybe just started further education but have not finished it yet. The second group can be assumed to include more respondents who might already have some work experience or who might have finished studies or any kind of professional education. One question then is, if there is a higher risk for being NEET when being older, and for remaining with NEET status.

In total, about two thirds of the respondents to our study are from 24-29 years old (64,5%), while 35,5% stated being 18 to 23 years of age when asked.

Age of participants

18-23 years
35.5%

24-29 years
64.5%
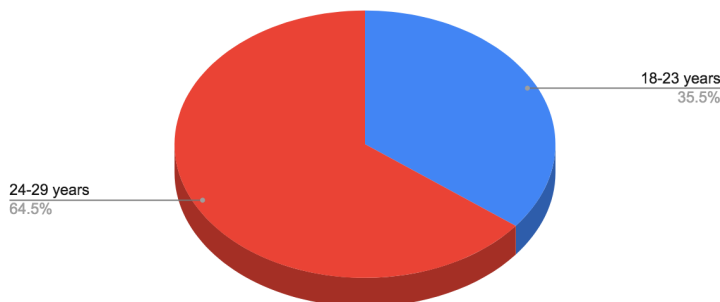
The respondents came from the seven partner countries of the You.Stand.Out project - from Poland, France, Greece, Ireland, Cyprus, Italy and Germany.

In most of the cases the participants owned the respective citizenship of their country, in a few cases they answered with being of different nationality (Spanish, Ecuadorian, Egyptian).

Q3. Population

Regarding our target group mainly living in rural areas, several categories had been given to choose from during the interview. We asked if the respondents lived in a place with

➔ less than 1.000 inhabitants

➔ 1.000 to 4.999 inhabitants

➔ 5.000 to 9.999 inhabitants

➔ 10.000 to 19.999 inhabitants

➔ 20.000 to 50.000 inhabitants

➔ or in a place with more than 50.000 inhabitants.

number of inhabitants: total % from 7 partner countries
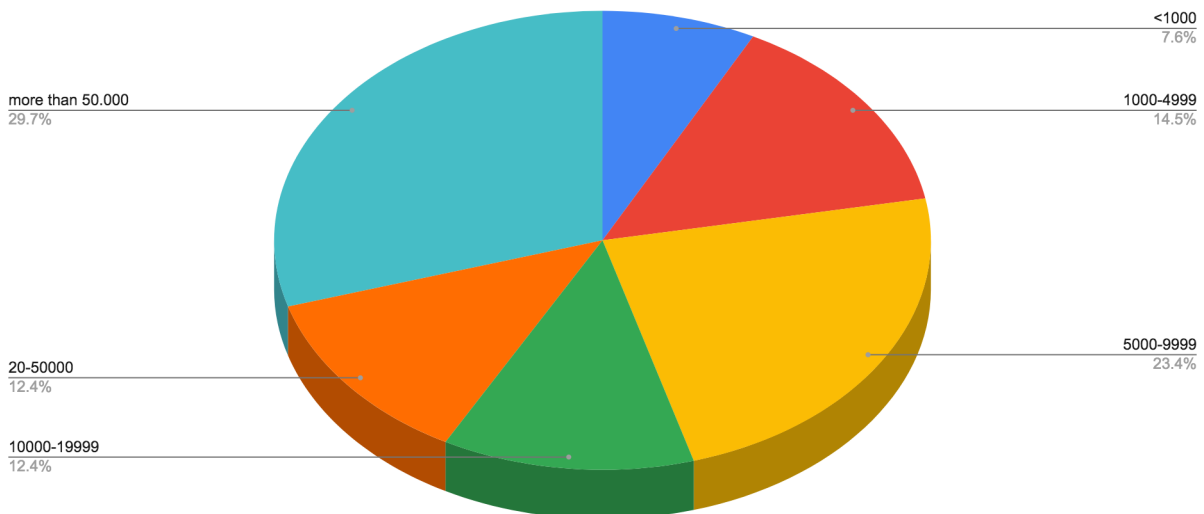
As the figures show, about 70% of our respondents live in small towns and rural regions. With 29.7% of the respondents living in places with more than 50,000 inhabitants, a shift of the focus to the suburbs or more urban areas is obvious. However, it must be said that an above-average number of participants in the study in Italy had to be assigned to this category (i.e. the Rome metropolitan area), even if the actual living spaces and conditions on site correspond more to small-town and suburban milieus.

Q4. Educational level

Educational level: total % for 7 partner countries

less than secondary
2.1%
secondary school
8.3%

high school
37.9%

university degree
51.7%
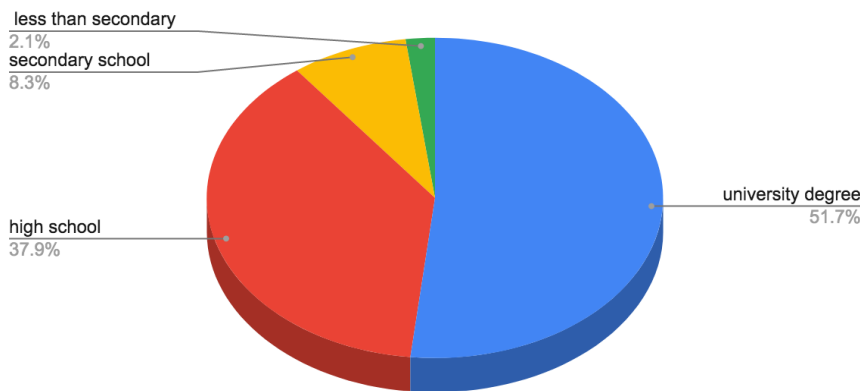
As the figures indicate, about half of the respondents (51,7%) have completed some form of higher education, having obtained a university degree, e.g. bachelor or master. Another 37.9% finished high school. Only about 10% of our respondents left the educational system in their respective country after secondary school or even earlier.

According to these numbers, especially when taking into account the question about current employment, it is interesting to highlight that there is no correspondence between people with a lower level of education and those who are NEETs.

As in the case of Italy, where data shows a percentage of 28,6% of the respondents to the survey being NEET, one needs to acknowledge that these numbers are constituted for 50% by respondents who obtained a university degree and for the other 50% by people who obtained a school diploma as a highest educational certificate.

Attualmente, sei impegnato in attività educative e/o lavorative? (puoi selezionare più opzioni)
21 risposte
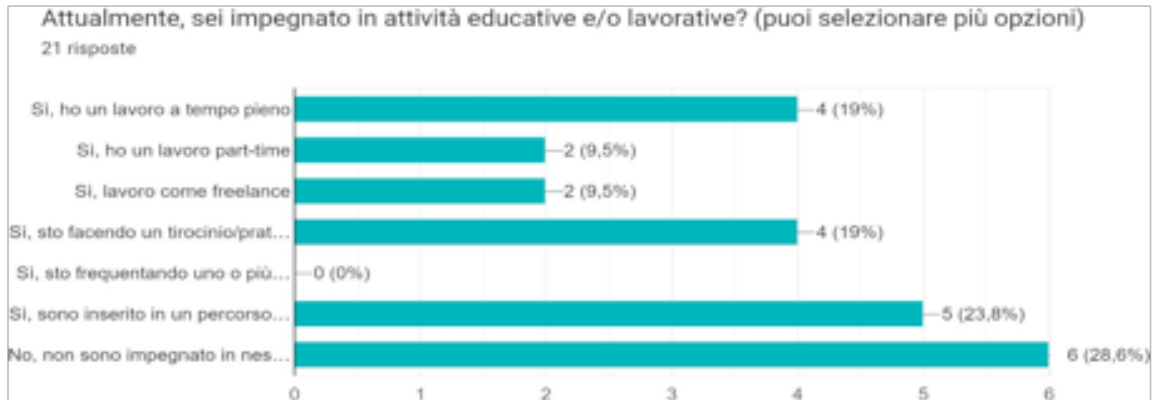
This is somewhat contrary to the situation as appearing from data in Germany, for example. Here, none of the respondents who obtained a diploma or university degree, is currently unemployed or NEET, as one might call it. Of the 3 respondents who answered with being NEET when asked about their current work status, 2 had completed secondary school and one finished high school. As one can read from the national report for Germany, there are particular mechanisms in force as structural barriers that not only keep young people excluded from the labour market as in the case of the early school-leavers. These barriers also primarily target those coming from a migrant's background, having Turkish or Arab parents etc.

Q5. Employment status // NEET

When looking at the total numbers of the study conducted in seven partner countries, we see that a total percentage of 19.6% is currently identifying as NEET - as neither in employment nor in education or training. This is 1 out of 5 respondents of the study.

Looking at the other categories we see 30.4% being currently employed. 17.4% are currently in education, that would include any kind of studies or university at the moment. Another 12.7 % are working as freelancers at the moment, which has to include making a living as an artist. In this case it could be hard to tell when someone is NEET or not. While they might be deeply engaged
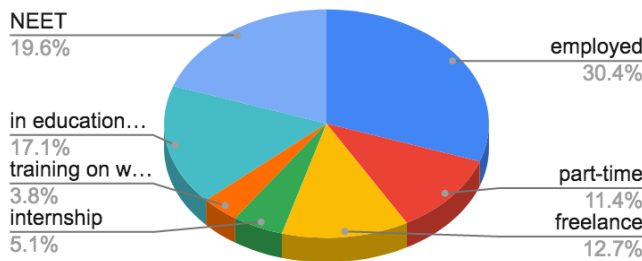
in artistic practice and research, artists clearly tend to have no secure employment nor steady career path.

11.4% are currently working part-time, 5.1% are doing an internship at the moment while another 3.8% are involved in some kind of training on working skills.

As the desk research has proven, numerous programs and initiatives already exist across Europe that specifically address the group of so-called NEETs. Here, education and training of often basic digital skills are offered, often in combination with an internship and involvement in concrete work experience and practical applications. This type of program and initiative includes, for example, *NEETs on Board* in Greece, integrated into the *EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation* (EASI). *NEETs on Board* includes the use of an e-game that basically informs young people about Youth Guarantee, the Blue Economy and the Social and Solidarity Economy sectors. Also an app is available that will help to find suitable job opportunities in the region. The LV8 project (www.lv8.eu) in Italy created an application, too, that can be used by young people between 18 and 29 to learn and develop digital skills in a playful manner, through the gamification of the education and learning process. Visual content creation, SEO and coding are part of this e-learning programme. We will see below and in the analysis that follows which digital activities are widespread and established among the respondents in our study - and which skills they lack and what they would like to learn in a possible training and qualification offering. The possibilities of e-learning, online courses and gamification of the learning process are likely to be important components of such training.

But first of all, what are the main digital activities that European youth today is involved in?

Work status

NEET 19.6%

in education… 17.1%
training on w… 3.8%
internship 5.1%

employed 30.4%

part-time 11.4%

freelance 12.7%

Q6. Digital activities

Almost 9 out of 10 of the participants in the study (87%) use both a desktop PC or laptop and a mobile device such as their smartphone or tablet to access the internet.

More than 90% of the respondents use the internet for private purposes. About two-thirds of the respondents also use it for work-related purposes, including job searches and training. Finally, more than half of the respondents said they use it in the context of training (studies) or at school.

In the subsequent part of the study, we asked the participants specifically what they had done on the internet recently, what their main activities were. The focus was on a series of digital skills and activities that can play a more or less central role in both private and professional usage behaviour. This list of individual activities is based on the most recent framework published by the EU in March 2022, Digital Competence Framework 2.0. According to this, the individual activities can be summarised in four superordinate categories, in

➔ Information
➔ Communication
➔ Creation of Content
➔ Problem Solving

The four top categories and related activities, ref. Digital Competence Framework 2.0

INFORMATION
● Saving files on a cloud storage space (e.g. Google Drive, Dropbox) ● Using a search engine (e.g. Google, Bing, Yahoo) ● Using different search engines ● Interacting with smart speakers (e.g. Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant) ● Browsing a portal for seeking a job or a training course ● Identifying information that turned out to be false or misleading

COMMUNICATION

- Sending/receiving emails
- Participating in social networks
- Setting up a chat group (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook)
- Telephoning/video calls over the internet
- Uploading self-created content to any website to be shared, e.g. a video
- Sharing content, e.g. pictures
- Sharing a music playlist with friends
- Giving a user rating online
- Creating a profile online
- Chatting with a bot or other AI
- Encountering so-called hate speech
- Conducting an online search with my own name
- Modifying user configurations (e.g. to restrict data tracking)

CREATION OF CONTENT

- Using a software to edit photos, video or audio files
- Creating a presentation or document integrating text, pictures and/or tables
- Programming / Coding
- Adding info about author, source and/or copyrights to content I shared online

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Purchasing online
- Selling online
- Using a translation app (e.g. Google Translator, DeepL)
- Installing software and/or apps
- Found a solution online recently when I was facing a technical problem
- Deleted an email that looked suspicious and might have contained malware

What respondents in Poland answered when asked which activities they performed recently.

POLAND Survey

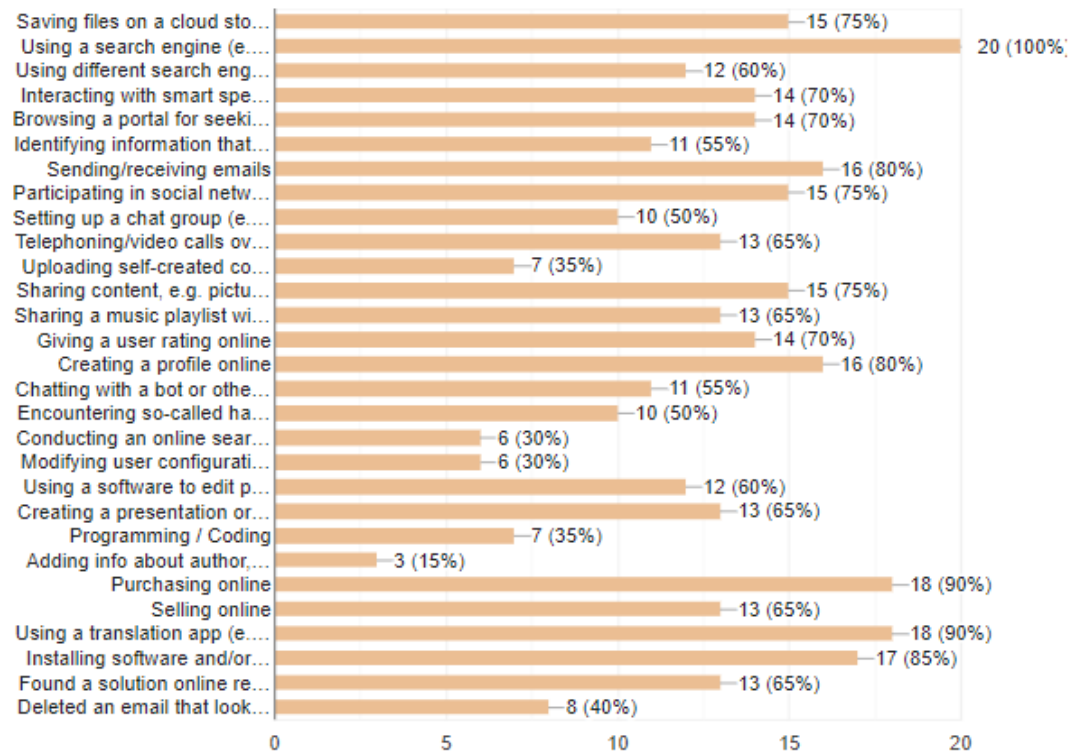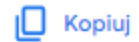Have you recently performed some of the following activities? Check all that apply.

20 odpowiedzi

Activity	Count (%)
Saving files on a cloud sto...	15 (75%)
Using a search engine (e....	20 (100%)
Using different search eng...	12 (60%)
Interacting with smart spe...	14 (70%)
Browsing a portal for seeki...	14 (70%)
Identifying information that...	11 (55%)
Sending/receiving emails	16 (80%)
Participating in social netw...	15 (75%)
Setting up a chat group (e....	10 (50%)
Telephoning/video calls ov...	13 (65%)
Uploading self-created co...	7 (35%)
Sharing content, e.g. pictu...	15 (75%)
Sharing a music playlist wi...	13 (65%)
Giving a user rating online	14 (70%)
Creating a profile online	16 (80%)
Chatting with a bot or othe...	11 (55%)
Encountering so-called ha...	10 (50%)
Conducting an online sear...	6 (30%)
Modifying user configurati...	6 (30%)
Using a software to edit p...	12 (60%)
Creating a presentation or...	13 (65%)
Programming / Coding	7 (35%)
Adding info about author,...	3 (15%)
Purchasing online	18 (90%)
Selling online	13 (65%)
Using a translation app (e....	18 (90%)
Installing software and/or...	17 (85%)
Found a solution online re...	13 (65%)
Deleted an email that look...	8 (40%)

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 10: Internet activity

POLAND Interviews

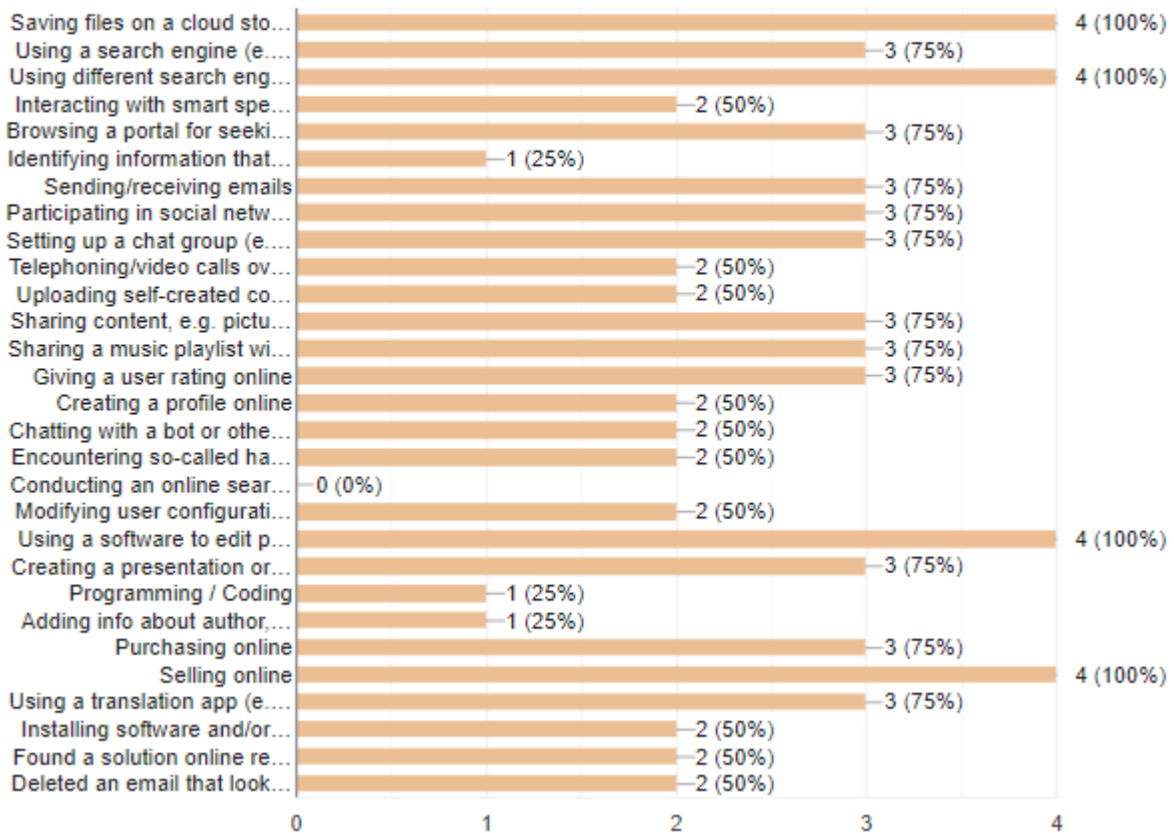
Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 25: Internet activities

What respondents from Greece answered when asked which activities they performed recently.
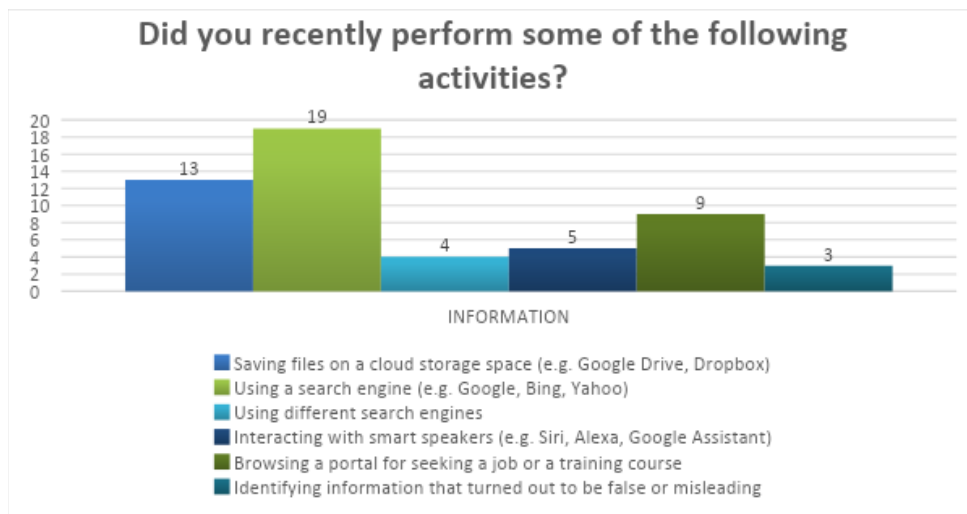

GREECE Survey
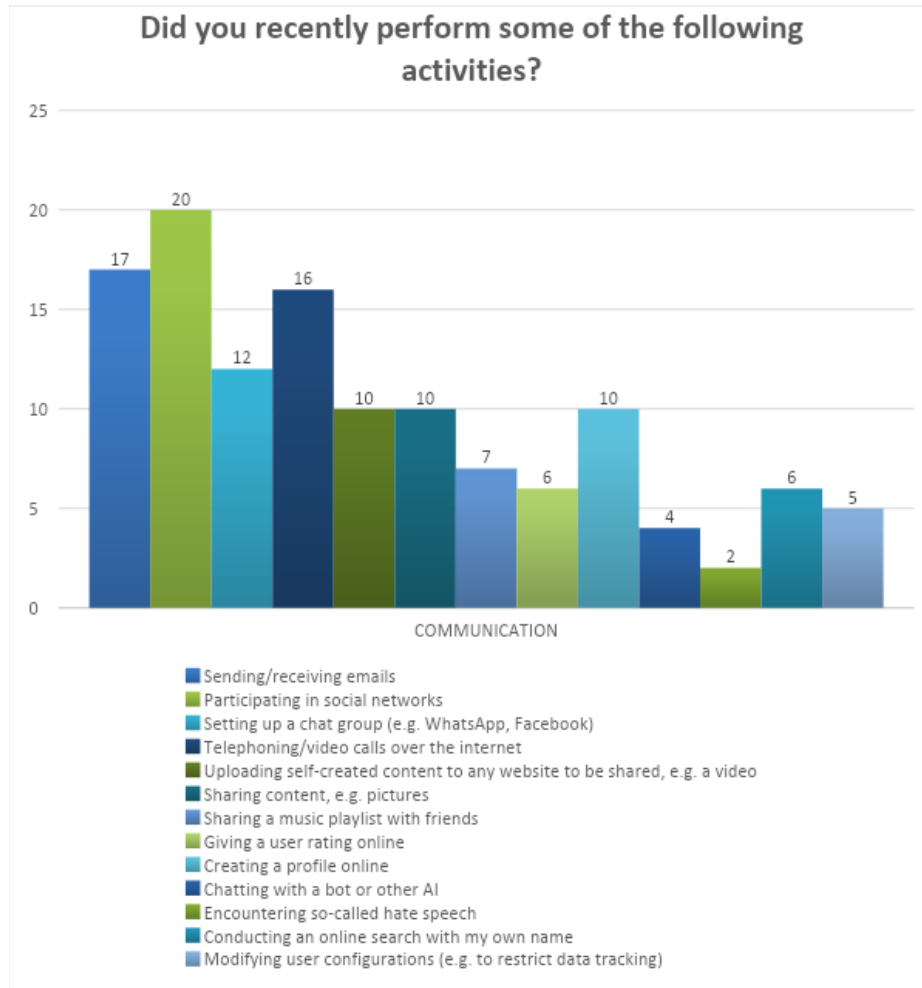

Figure 11: Online Activities – Information

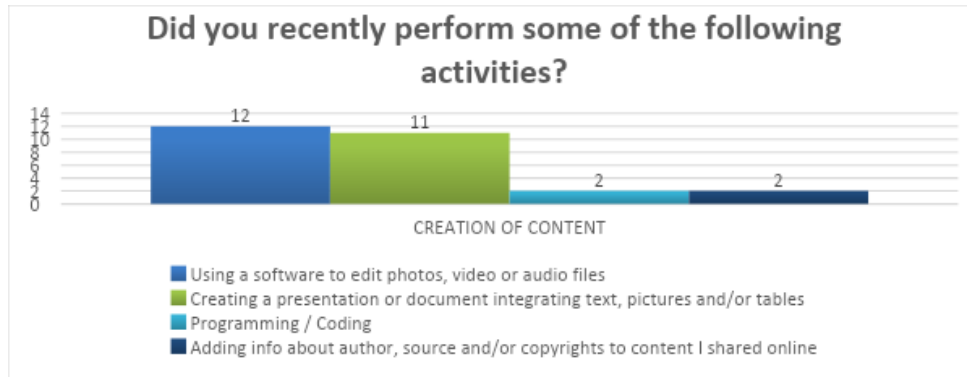*Figure 12: Online Activities – Communication*

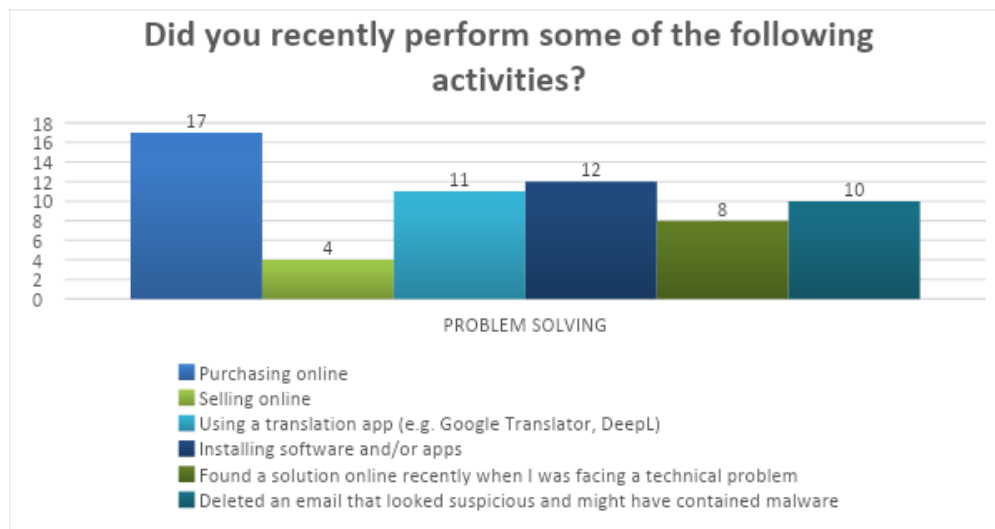*Figure 13: Online Activities – Creation of Content*

Figure 14: Online Activities – Problem Solving
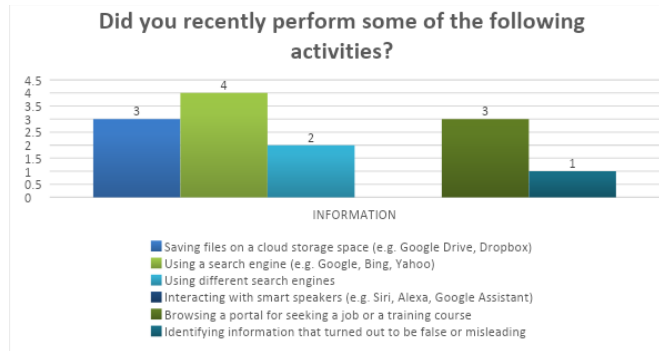
GREECE Interviews

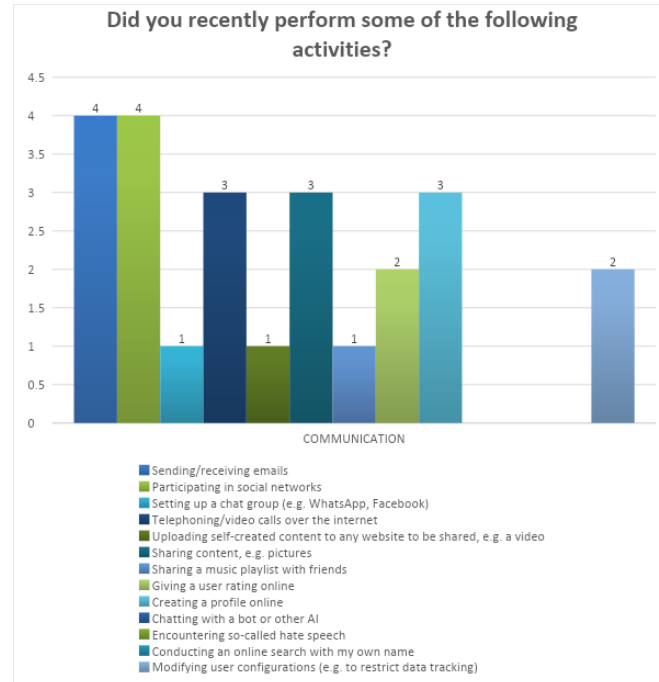*Figure 25: Online Activities – Information*
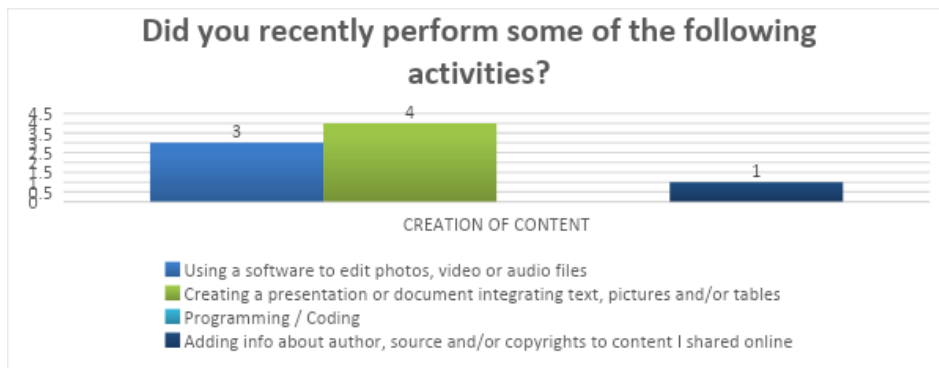

Figure 26: Online Activities – Communication

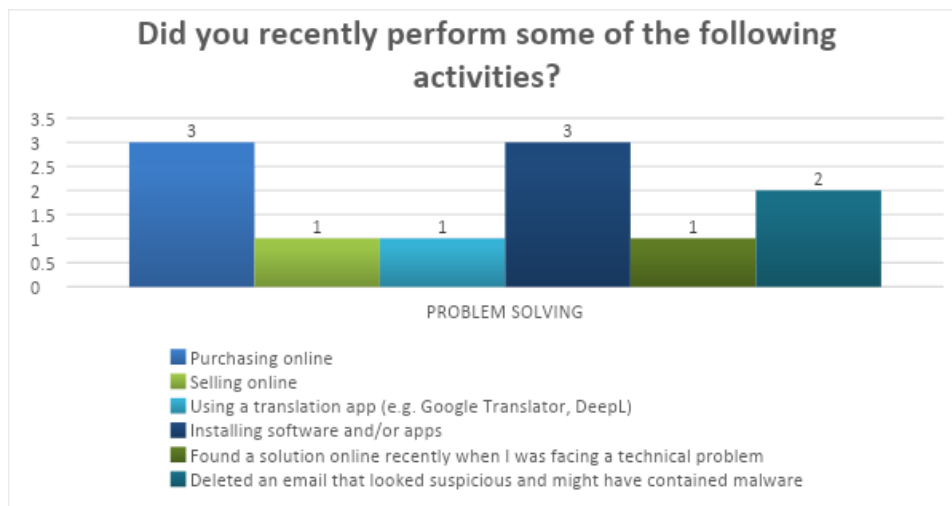*Figure 27: Online Activities – Creation of Content*

Figure 28: Online Activities – Problem Solving

Still, what respondents from Ireland answered when asked which activities they performed recently.

IRELAND SURVEY

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Saving files on a cloud storage space (e.g. Google Drive, Dropbox)	60.00%	12
Using a search engine (e.g. Google, Bing, Yahoo)	100.00%	20
Using different search engines	45.00%	9
Interacting with smart speakers (e.g. Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant)	75.00%	15
Browsing a portal for seeking a job or a training course	70.00%	14
Identifying information that turned out to be false or misleading	40.00%	8
Sending/receiving emails	95.00%	19
Participating in social networks	100.00%	20
Setting up a chat group (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook)	70.00%	14
Telephoning/video calls over the internet	95.00%	19
Uploading self-created content to any website to be shared, e.g. a video	35.00%	7
Sharing content, e.g. pictures	80.00%	16
Sharing a music playlist with friends	45.00%	9
Giving a user rating online	20.00%	4
Creating a profile online	25.00%	5
Chatting with a bot or other AI	5.00%	1
Encountering so-called hate speech	5.00%	1
Conducting an online search with my own name	5.00%	1
Modifying user configurations (e.g. to restrict data tracking)	10.00%	2
Using a software to edit photos, video or audio files	35.00%	7
Creating a presentation or document integrating text, pictures and/or tables	20.00%	4
Programming / Coding	10.00%	2
Adding info about author, source and/or copyrights to content I shared online	5.00%	1
Purchasing online	75.00%	15
Selling online	45.00%	9
Using a translation app (e.g. Google Translator, DeepL)	15.00%	3
Installing software and/or apps	25.00%	5
Found a solution online recently when I was facing a technical problem	30.00%	6
Deleted an email that looked suspicious and might have contained malware	40.00%	8
Total Respondents: 20		

As the tables and figures above indicate, being examples taken from the national reports of Ireland, Poland and Greece, there are similar patterns for what the internet is used for. When compiling all data for the digital activities performed by the respondents, we see that most are well accustomed to performing activities like using a search engine, emailing and participating in social networks and media. Here most also share content. Overall the respondents seem well familiar with a simple daily use of digital technology including online purchases and how to install a software or an app on one of their devices.

Q7. Digital at work

digital experience at work in %

no
36.9%

yes
63.1%
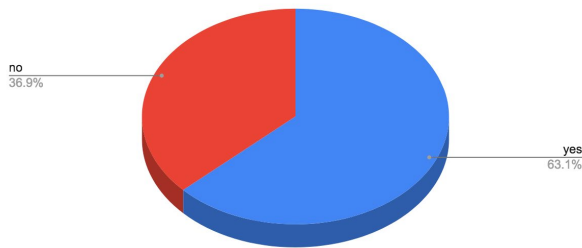
Almost two thirds of the respondents indicated that they already have some experience in using some of the digital tools at work (63.1%).

For the Italian context it is particularly interesting in the context of our project to underline that the use of social media in a workplace maintains a fairly high percentage (38.1%) and that they are therefore regarded as professional tools as well. Online storage, video calls, search engines result in fundamental tools in both the cases - in private as well as at work - and keep being identified as frequently made activities by respondents. It may be relevant to note that the creation and sharing of contents such as images and videos is mostly linked to the private use of the web rather than the professional one, that could be meaning people are not very engaged in promotional activities that imply a visual identity management. Latter argument could be said to be due to the fact that most organisations, in a work environment, will rely on specialized people and services, that is, on other professionals.

In the case of Greece, participants in the face-to-face interviews reported that not only would they use or had used various digital tools on a regular basis, but that this often did not cause them

too much difficulty - activities such as backing up files on cloud servers, email communication, but also promotion-related work such as social media networking or the use and editing of images for promotional purposes.

In the case of Poles, the use of search engines and communication via email and social media is also part of some work context experience, as is working with image editing programs.

In Cyprus, one of the interviewees stated that he produced his own videos for promotional purposes in the DIY style in order to create greater awareness for his own products and services.

Q8. Interest in training

Interest in training activity
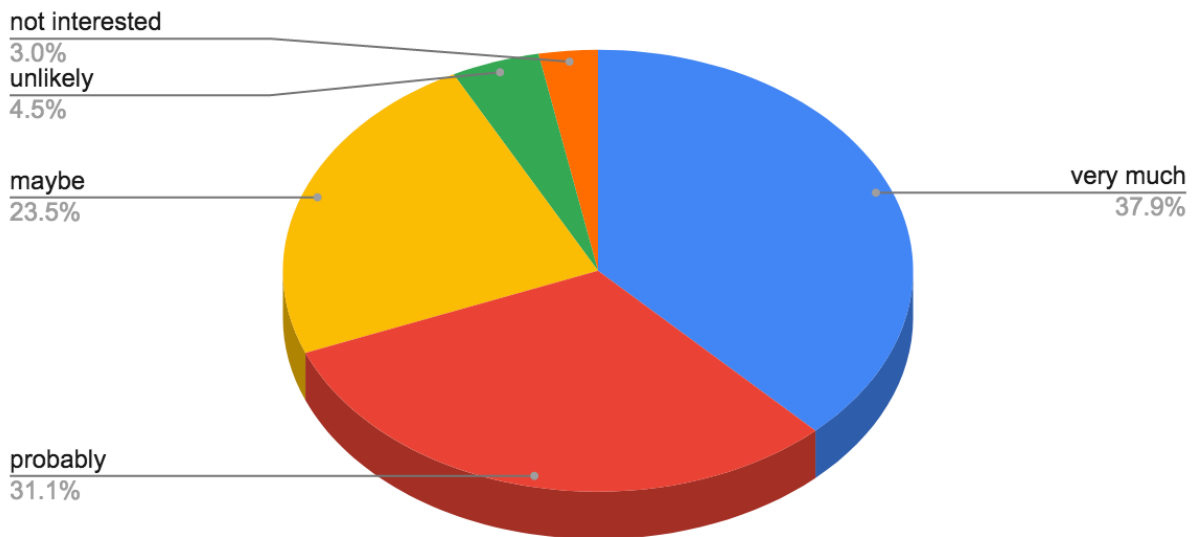
When asked about their interest in receiving training on digital and social media marketing skills, 37.9% of the respondents expressed *very much* interest. They might *probably* participate,

answered 31.1% of the respondents, while another 23.5% said *maybe*. Only 4.5% said it was unlikely or showed no interest in such kind of training (3%).

Q9. What would you like to learn?

Since more than two thirds of the respondents were interested or even very interested in a training, it is valuable to know what they expect from such a training and what they would like to learn. From a given list of options, it was possible to determine what the preferred contents of such training should be. Following their responses, a clear majority would like to learn how to build a website.

The total numbers of respondents who voted for...

Building up a YouTube channel	61
Live Streaming events on social media (e.g. via Twitch)	47
Promoting an Instagram account	66
Launching a TikTok campaign	33
Creating video content	73
Making a poster online	45
Photoshop images	67
Understanding copywriting requirements	50
Build a website (e.g. with WordPress)	91
Using and writing code	58
other: learning graphic design for logos	1
other: copyrights in internet	1

other: understanding excel	1
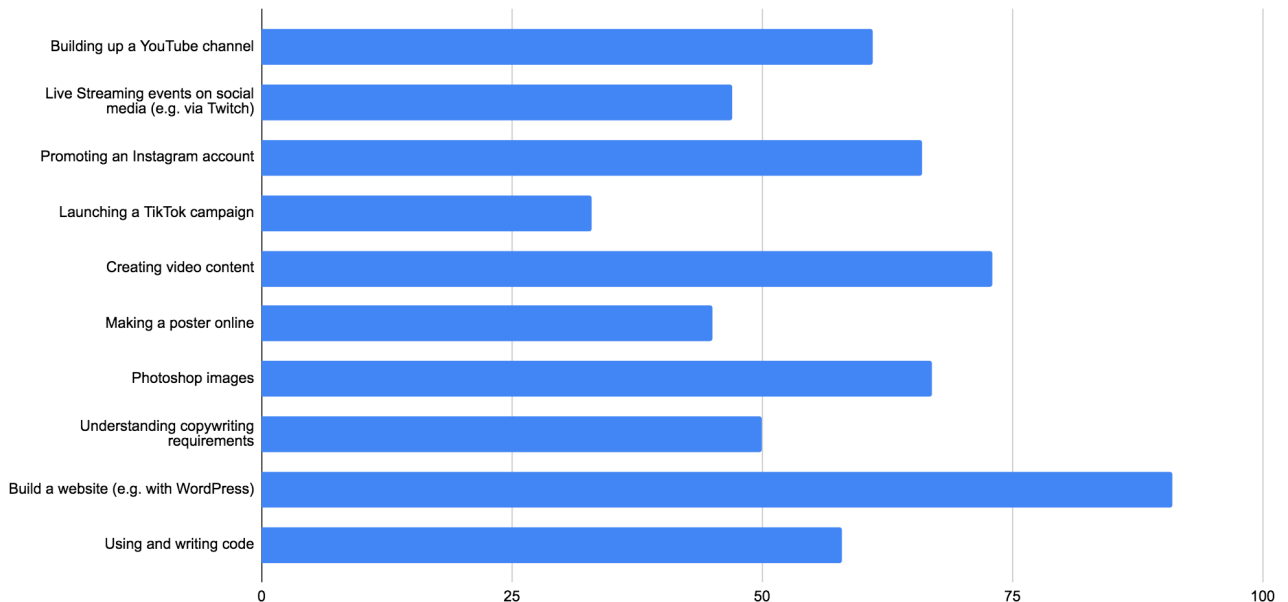
Many also favour training on how to do promotion via Instagram, plus, many respondents were interested in learning about the production of video content. Image editing with Photoshop was also mentioned quite often. Overall, skills for producing and editing visual content are highly rated among the respondents of our study. Finally, the interest of almost 60 respondents in learning about coding and basic programming skills should also be taken into consideration when developing the training modules for You.Stand.Out.
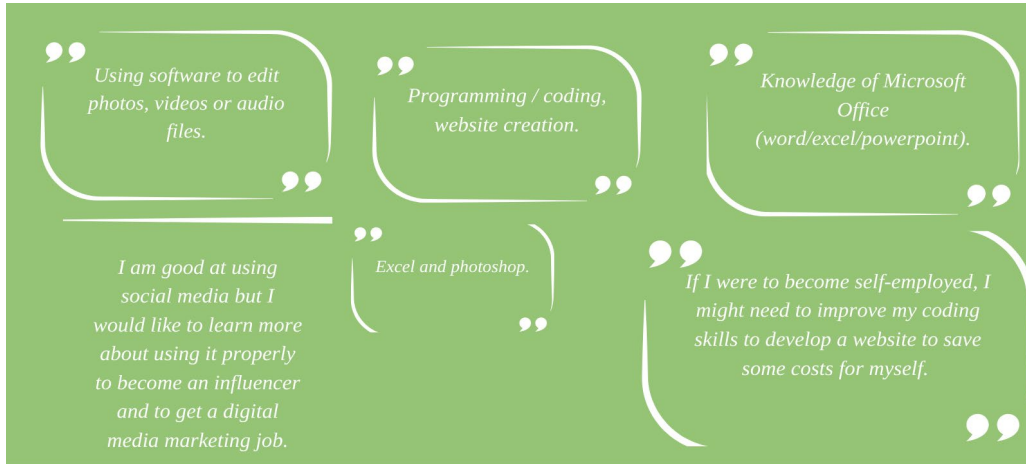
Besides the production of visual content, the question is where and how it can subsequently be distributed and marketed, especially on the various social media channels. In addition to the website already mentioned as a classic shop window, YouTube and Instagram in particular were mentioned more frequently than average. How these channels can be used and developed for promotion and social media marketing met also with broader interest among the respondents.

Where various digital contents circulate, the question of authors and copyrights arises as inevitably. As many as 50 respondents said they wanted to learn something about this. This should be taken into account when developing and offering a future training concept.

Finally, a collection of quotes given in response to the question of which digital skills the respondents would still lack in order to be better qualified for future work:

Use of graphic software and coding.

Coding and running social media accounts.

I want to use all programming languages.

I want to learn more about programming languages.

Video platforms like YouTube are important to know about.

Programming and code usage knowledge.

Digital skills people lack and would like to learn..

Digital skills people lack and would like to learn..

Using software to edit photos, videos or audio files.

Programming / coding, website creation.
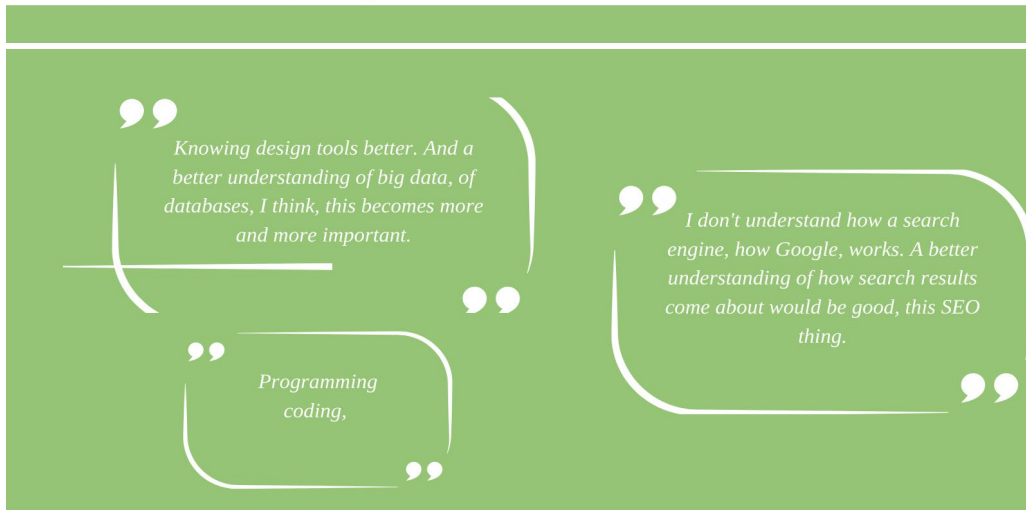
Knowledge of Microsoft Office (word/excel/powerpoint).

I am good at using social media but I would like to learn more about using it properly to become an influencer and to get a digital media marketing job.

Excel and photoshop.

If I were to become self-employed, I might need to improve my coding skills to develop a website to save some costs for myself.

Digital skills people lack and would like to learn..

Knowing design tools better. And a better understanding of big data, of databases, I think, this becomes more and more important.

I don't understand how a search engine, how Google, works. A better understanding of how search results come about would be good, this SEO thing.

Programming coding,

To sum up, digital competences are regarded as fundamental for the working environment by respondents. Based on their answers as to what arouses the most interest and what the respondents would like to learn, three categories can be established:

Technical skills: here, many participants follow the impression and experience that coding and website management are competences that are very appreciated and requested. Hardly any of them has ever deepened these topics, but gaining these competences might strongly improve their job opportunities. A technical skill that emerged as very useful as well is the knowledge of social media algorithms and how to study users flows and consequently schedule a posting plan.

Communication skills: respondents underlined the importance of being able to create and manage contact online, both with clients and collaborators. Besides, there is a strong interest in managing highly frequented channels and platforms such as YouTube or Instagram. So what is required is a knowledge of specific tools for different target groups, communication techniques, and approaches to create and manage a community.

Social media skills: As shown in the figures above, using social media and participating in social media is almost ubiquitous. It is a most common thing for nearly all participants. But when it comes to a correct and efficient, and also a safe use of social media, many respondents might lack knowledge of how to properly run and manage them. Finally, most of the participants share content through social media and networks. Consequently, the creation of contents – namely posts, pictures, videos, infographics etc – has to be regarded as one of the most important skills to acquire to be successful in the working environment.

Q10. Social Media representation of local rural areas

> *"When you now think of your local area, the community you live in, do you think it is well represented on social media? If YES, well represented … please give an example. If NO, not well represented … please give an example. What could help to represent your local area better on social media?"*

Social media representation of your local area

Do you think your area is well represented on social media?

don't know
26.2%

yes
31.7%

no
42.1%
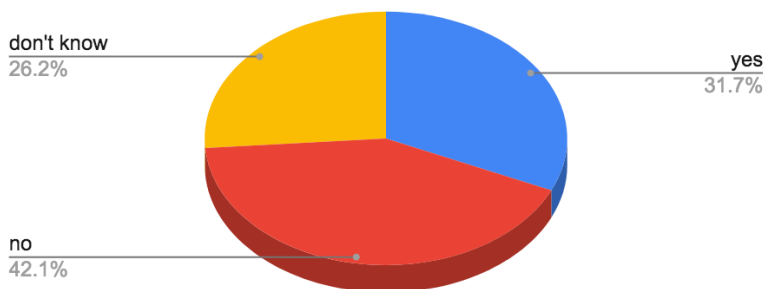
The You.Stand.Out project is focusing on social media marketing for the purpose of promoting local cultural heritage. Therefore, we asked the participants of our study about their relationship to their region, especially how they assess the (self-)representation of the respective region on social media - as successful or not, as good or not. In the face-to-face interviews, statements could also be obtained that further substantiated the answers.

Since three quarters of the respondents have a clear answer to this (42.1% rate the image of their region or social media appearances as 'not good', while 31.7% do), we were able to obtain some concrete examples and justifications via the interviews:

What is it that respondents who voted 'Yes' acknowledge in the Social Media activities and representation of the rural area they live in?

Social media representation of your local area

> *Sharing events through social media.*

> *Local news, notification of cultural events.*

> *We have a young mayor and social media, like the whole internet, it is important to him.*

> *Many tourists get attracted to the area where I live. But there are other places where very little is happening, too.*

> *It is a place for visitors and tourists, many people come for wellness and health related issues. This you can find well on the web.*

> *I found out something about my area when I had a visit from friends recently; social media helped me to discover that site.*

Social media representation of your local area

What did the interviewees criticize about how their local area is presented on social media?
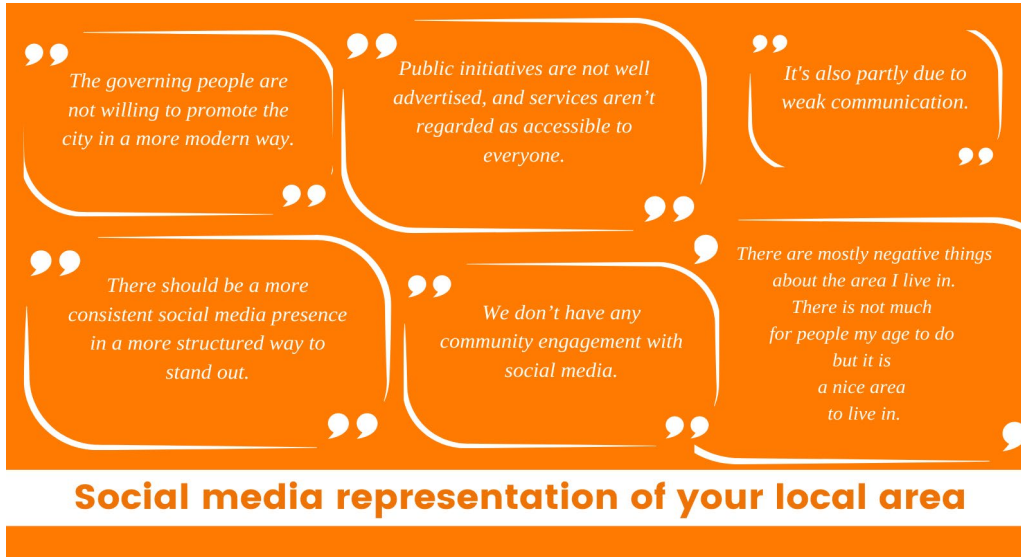
Social media representation of your local area

In the case of Cyprus, 75% of the interviewees believe that their local area is *not* well represented on social media. They stated the lack of websites, social media or of actively promoting the local area. This lack of online social media communication and marketing means that one is limited to local events mostly for promoting the area. Consequently, the outreach is limited to the local population and hardly any 'outsiders' will get to know about the events or their contents. Developing knowledge and skills for a digitally transforming world would clearly help these areas, especially when performed by young people, to open some windows of the world onto these areas and therefore creating an economic, social and cultural benefit from it. An important step towards this goal is the implementation of digital skills training and education in any educational programmes, especially in areas clearly affected by a lack of basic digital knowledge.

If, as mentioned above, there is a lack of basic skills and corresponding training in digital competencies, especially among the young population and particularly in rural areas, this clearly shows the great need for further qualification offerings, against the backdrop of the digital transformation of almost all areas of society and, above all, the world of work.

The governing people are not willing to promote the city in a more modern way.

Public initiatives are not well advertised, and services aren't regarded as accessible to everyone.

It's also partly due to weak communication.

There should be a more consistent social media presence in a more structured way to stand out.

We don't have any community engagement with social media.

There are mostly negative things about the area I live in. There is not much for people my age to do but it is a nice area to live in.

Social media representation of your local area

Further criticism articulated throughout the interviews:

For this reason, the various initiatives and examples from the field are valuable and absolutely to be welcomed, as they provide experience that can be built upon or trigger developments that would like to be continued.

These programs and examples of best practice in the national context include, for example, the *Citizen's Digital Academy*, an institution of the Greek government, available for free and accessible to all citizens who are interested in improving their digital competences. Here, more than 270 courses, including a variety of digital skills self-assessment tools are available on the platform. The educational content is offered free of charge and addresses different levels and learners, while also providing a special focus on labour market related skills and competences.

In contrast, programmes such as the *Webarts Academy*, with its social media courses in Cyprus, focus more specifically on digital marketing, as does the programme *Consulting Support, Training and Certification in the field of Digital Marketing for the unemployed up to 29 years old in small and medium enterprises in the Tourism sector*. The latter, by the Greek government and funded by the EU, aims to enhance the skills of 1.940 unemployed people up to 29 years of age in the

field of Digital Marketing in Tourism through professional consulting and vocational training services. So far this program has reached almost 2000 NEETs and promoted their education for digital marketing professionals.

What should be improved regarding the social media activities and ways of representation of the local area you live in?

Social media representation of your local area

What follows is a collection of ideas given by the interviewees when asked about what could help to improve the social media representations and image of their local area. One key factor that was hereby identified is the successful management of a visual identity:

> *The key factor is the **right management of visual identity**. A good management of the municipality's image on the web allowed them to reach a very large target, including young people and tourists. Initiatives, events and opportunities are clearly presented in a simple and direct way, using the municipality's official social media account as a catalyst, which people learned to take as point of reference for formal and informal info about such reality. This approach resulted very positively both for attracting tourists and for engaging local citizens in the valorization of their own town.*

Social media representation of your local area

> *More interesting tourist information.*

> *Creating social media specifically for the city itself.*

> *Creating social media accounts for the city*

> *Certain public services or platforms should come with guidelines or support services, in order to make everyone able to make efficient use of them.*

> *The creation of groups related to my area that will aim to highlight its unique characteristics and also be a point of exchange of ideas.*

> *Unified channels and/or pages, dedicated to a specific reality, like a neighborhood or a town, could induce people to follow social media.*

Social media representation of your local area

> *The access of all citizens to the internet and their education in the use of social media.*

> *Groups on social media that will make the topic we want known.*

> *I think there should be more about the shops and businesses and local charities. It is well known for its history but I don't see much about that on social media either.*

> *Up to date posts about what is happening in the community.*

> *I'm not a fan of social media, so I don't have the answer to this. I like print media, so posters in my community would help, information in the church newsletter too.*

> *Don't know if there is an Instagram account.. maybe have one?*

Social media representation of your local area

The local people should be more involved, more present. Like presenting the area themselves, telling about their live, what it is like here. Also the local shops or business should be more involved.

Not only emphasizing the river or other natural sites, but also featuring local businesses (culture, restaurants, sports).

Social media representation of your local area

Conclusion & Outlook

Today a lot of programmes have been established that aim to foster the digital literacy of an ever larger part of the population. This is based on the insight that technology is now part of almost every job and having even basic digital skills will open up significantly more employment opportunities, in particular for younger people. The You.Stand.Out project is one of a series of projects and initiatives that aim to combat youth unemployment and provide young people with career prospects and a self-determined future worth living by means of various vocational training and continuing education measures. In this context, the focus of You.Stand.Out is clearly on youth in rural regions, on offering young people in Europe opportunities for digital qualification, with an emphasis on social media marketing skills. After all, today's working world, whose far-reaching changes have been further intensified and accelerated not least by the pandemic, allows for an increasing decoupling of the place of work and the center of life - also and especially for rural regions.

At the same time, social inclusion is closely linked to social and socioeconomic participation in life in a region or city that represents one's center of life. The development of an increasingly dissolving attachment to the countryside and region, to forms of cultural origin and traditions, is often enough expressed in the phenomenon of a "rural exodus" that can be observed in many places. This development is fed not least by the feeling of a lack of future prospects, a lack of confidence that something can be built up 'locally'. This development, in turn, contrasts with another trend emanating from the big cities, according to which mostly well-educated urban milieus - a kind of digital elite - are exchanging the stress of the cities for the tranquility of the countryside - whereby an increasing number of programs, national, regional, but also supported by foundations and individual initiatives, bear witness to precisely this renewed change in the view of rural living spaces.

At the same time, it is hard to overestimate the importance of the digital transformation, i.e., digitization that encompasses all areas of society, for this reconsideration and upgrading of rural regions and living spaces. Only where a digital infrastructure functions reliably, where participation in working life is possible under the conditions of a digitized working world and

ecology in the 21st century, can the multiple potentials of a life in the countryside be realized for broad sections of the populations living there.

The Digital Rural Pioneers in Germany, for example, show how central and ultimately indispensable digital living and working spaces are, even in rural areas. Their bridging between urban and rural living environments, between the possibilities of networked and decelerated life, between tradition and technology are the important cornerstones of their initiative and other imitators. The awareness that bridges need to be built here between an accelerated, fully digitalized modern age and the milieus of rural regions, which tend to be more strongly rooted in local traditions and cultural customs, is certainly an important factor for the success of a sustainable and forward-looking coexistence. The creation of work opportunities 'on site' (which can no longer be separated from the growing possibilities of remote working), the creation of new jobs and the inclusion of broad sections of the population are prerequisites for prosperity and prosperity in which as many people as possible can participate. This idea of participation by as many as possible is reflected in programs such as the Digital Development Clubs in Poland as an expression of intergenerational solidarity. But it is certainly also part of the functioning implementation of an initiative like Dorfladen Plus in Germany that looks to enable all village stores to trade online and to link this meaningfully with their offline trade. In strongly rural regions the village store still represents something like the cultural center, where a significant part of social communication and interaction also takes place. At the same time, it has become completely normal for many residents to store via their mobile phones and online. For this, the development of a comprehensive online store that is as informative as it is aesthetically pleasing is elementary. This again requires a range of digital skills from website design and image editing to e-commerce development and online marketing - skills that should also be at the core of the yet to be developed e-learning program of You.Stand.Out. This can be deduced from the available results and analyses of the survey among NEETs, which was conducted in seven partner countries across Europe.

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