
‘DECLINE THE GAP’

MAIN FINDINGS OF DATA COLLECTION ABOUT NEET POPULATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES:
CROATIA, HUNGARY, ITALY, AND SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Reduction of the level and mitigation of the effects of youth unemployment have a central role within the objectives of the European Union. According to the data of the EUROSTAT (2018) the ratio of the NEET people, with the only exception of Hungary, is higher in the partner countries than the European average. Generally, NEET people are characterized by a low level of education, living in poverty, and unfavorable behavioral patterns – primarily the lack of the necessary motivation - due to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

They are especially at risk of all forms of online bullying. Members of socially excluded, under-educated groups are more vulnerable than their better-off counterparts. Furthermore, online bullying is often accompanied by offline aggression and abuse.

NEET people, because of the lack of other types of regular activities spend more time in cyberspace and more frequently become the victims of bullying, trafficking, or sexual exploitation.

The main objective of the project is to prevent and to reduce the prevalence of bullying among NEET people by developing the toolbox of adult educators, trainers, social workers, and other service providers to make them able to identify the phenomenon, to support the actors of bullying, to re-shape the behavioral patterns of bullies and to activate the passive witnesses.

GOALS OF THE CURRENT ANALYSIS

The first phase of the project focused on systematic screening of the background information. Several studies were published on bullying but mainly from a psychological- and child protection perspective and far less knowledge was accumulated on the socio-economic factors which can be crucial considering NEET people.

Beyond a secondary analysis of available data and studies, to access primary information, we planned focus groups and questionnaire-based surveys among NEET people and experts helping NEET people.

The goal of the current analysis is to provide empirical background for further steps of the Decline the Gap project. The main issues covered by empirical data collections were the following:

- defining special subgroups of NEET people (if exist) according to bullying (*focus group, questionnaire, secondary analysis*),
- degree and extent of aggression, harassment, bullying (*secondary analysis, partly questionnaire*),
- the attitude of the environment toward bullying (conflict management) (*focus group, questionnaire*),
- interpretation of bullying, aggression, and harassment (*focus group, secondary analysis*),
- stress as a background factor and consequence (*secondary analysis - theory, questionnaire - situation*),
- the assertiveness of target groups (*focus group, questionnaire*),

- frequency and context of the phenomenon (*secondary analysis, partly questionnaire*),
- involvement of young people of different ages and genders (*secondary analysis, questionnaire*),
- assessment of available types of solutions against aggression (*focus group, questionnaire, secondary analysis*),
- attitudes towards institutional approaches (*questionnaire, partly focus group*),
- relationship between assertiveness and aggression (*focus group, questionnaire, partly secondary analysis*),
- Relationship between online and traditional bullying attitudes and the incidence of aggression (*questionnaire, partly secondary analysis*),
- victim support: facts, paths, techniques (*focus group, questionnaire, secondary analysis*),
- new interfaces, techniques in online bullying (*secondary analysis*),
- knowledge acquisition habits and resources (*questionnaire, secondary analysis*).

TARGET GROUPS OF THE DATA COLLECTION

During the data collection, we were targeting two groups: our primary target group is NEET people (affected or threatened by bullying), while our secondary target group consists of experts helping NEET people.

NEET YOUNG PEOPLE

The abbreviation NEET means nor in education nor employment. That is, the abbreviation NEET refers to young people who are not in employment, education, or training. Within the framework of the project, the interpretation of the concept is even narrower, we include young people aged 16-29 who did not choose their NEET status voluntarily, ie they did not voluntarily stay away from either education or the labor market. Our target group is young people with the following characteristics:

- those raised in poor, sometimes multi-generational, unemployed families, and/or
- living in poor conditions, and/or
- young people with low school performance, and/or
- out of state care, and/or
- those who became parents at a young age,
- or are forced to care for a family member at a young age; and/or
- have a low level of education and/or
- have finished their studies permanently after their compulsory school age; and/or
- are unskilled or have a vocational qualification that is difficult to use in the labor market.

These NEETs are, due to their situation, the most exposed to the dangers of impoverishment and social exclusion. They are generally frustrated in the education system, their patterns of socialization do not support and sometimes discourage social mobility through learning, and therefore are not available to formal forms of education, including traditional adult education. Often, school failures have led to a loss of motivation to learn, and often there is no example around them that shows them the benefits of learning.

HELPERS

In most countries, there is no separate institutional system that would support the social integration of NEET youth. That's why we've collected several professionals who can get in touch with NEET youth as helpers. They can be:

- child protection professionals, such as care workers, social workers, guardians, probation officers, etc.,
- the staff of guardianship authorities,
- social workers,
- health professionals: nurse, general practitioner, district nurse, specialists, etc.,
- teachers who can come into contact with young people outside of school, e.g. In nurseries, kindergartens, or with young parents in the target group in the Sure Start programs, Orphanages, etc.,
- labor market consultants (staff of the employment service, recruitment specialists),
- specialists of drug prevention and addiction treatment organizations (eg Blue Dots),
- the staff of NGOs supporting disadvantaged people,
- staff from youth counseling offices.

METHODOLOGY

FOCUS GROUPS

The main goal of the focus group research was to refine and verify the questionnaire results. These findings will also serve as the basis for shaping, and developing the contents and methodology of our project IOs.

In each country we planned to conduct two homogenous focus group research with members of the two target groups (the number of participants planned to be 6-8):

- **NEET youngsters:** as the topics connected to bullying can be sensitive, planned to recruit a relatively homogenous group of participants to maintain an open and supportive atmosphere during the focus groups. To achieve this goal, we planned to create a subgroup of NEET people having a high probability of being affected by bullying (either directly or indirectly) in each country and recruit participants from this subgroup. We planned to choose participants who do not know each other, to avoid micro-groups, that might have influenced group dynamics in the wrong way.
- **Experts and professionals helping NEET people:** to gain the most information we planned to recruit experts working with different subgroups of NEET people, in different regions of the country, in organizations with different backgrounds; we also recommended trying to maintain gender balance and age group heterogeneity in the recruited group.

Usually, focus groups are held in a large enough place for the groups with chairs and papers or other materials required for the activity. Because of the epidemic, we planned to organize focus groups online, if the technical background was available (for both the organizers and the participants). Thus, participants did not have to be in the same space but could join the group from different places. Young people may need support in this, they need to be provided with a safe place with an internet connection, but the content of the conversation also needs to be kept confidential.

We planned to record the focus groups, as it helps the analysis. According to our plans, the moderators of the focus groups would be:

- a moderator who was responsible for conducting the research and facilitated the consultation based on the interview guide, and
- an observer who helped the moderator in organizing the event. took notes during the focus group session, and helped to handle materials.

Two focus guides were developed for the two target groups, discussed in English, and translated to the local language of each country. The focus guide laid out the steps of the research with timing. The main points of the guides were the following:

- introduction,
- warm-up,
- choosing and discussing 2-3 predefined situations (in pairs then together) (NEET group),
- characterizing NEET subgroups (expert group),
- characterizing bullying among NEET people (expert groups),
- discussing possible forms of interventions,
- needs assessment for web portal helping NEET people involved in bullying and experts helping them.

Based on notes and records summaries were made in each country for each focus-group research.

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION

We planned an international questionnaire-based survey in the participating four countries. Both primary and secondary target groups are considered to be hard-to-reach populations from a methodological point of view (sampling frames are not available, target groups are relatively small compared to those groups including target groups that have sampling frame). Due to this specificity of the target groups, it was not feasible to plan a representative sample. Therefore, we tried to achieve a good cross-sectional sample through accessing as many experts as possible and through experts as diverse groups of NEET people as possible. We targeted at least 100 valid questionnaires to be filled in each participating country regardless of the target group.

We constructed separate questionnaires for NEET people and experts partially covering similar issues according to the goals defined in section 0. Questionnaires were planned and discussed in English and were translated to local languages based on the glossary of main concepts and discussion among partners.

SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

The main goal of collecting existing data was grounding and supplementing the focus group research and the survey and give a solid background for the planned project. Focuses of desktop research were on statistical data of the statistical offices of the countries, scientific researches in the countries, and reports of local professional organizations. All sources are planned to be listed, and an English summary is planned to be produced based on the sources. These data will be part of the local knowledge base that will be formed during the next phase of the project.

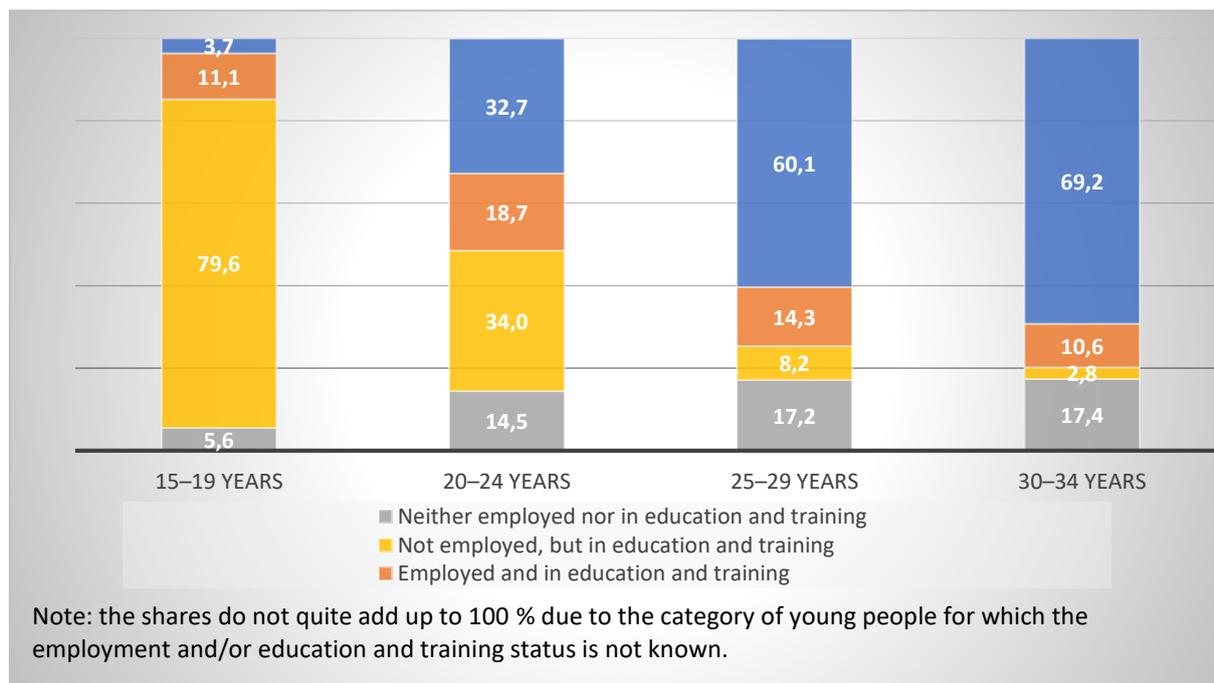
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEET POPULATION AND BULLYING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

In this analysis , we introduce the NEET population, focusing on the countries participating in the project. Furthermore, we introduce some basic data about bullying among young people. These data draw a rough picture of the target group of the current project and the situation related to bullying.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEET POPULATION

Characteristics of the NEET population will be introduced based on the data of Eurostat.

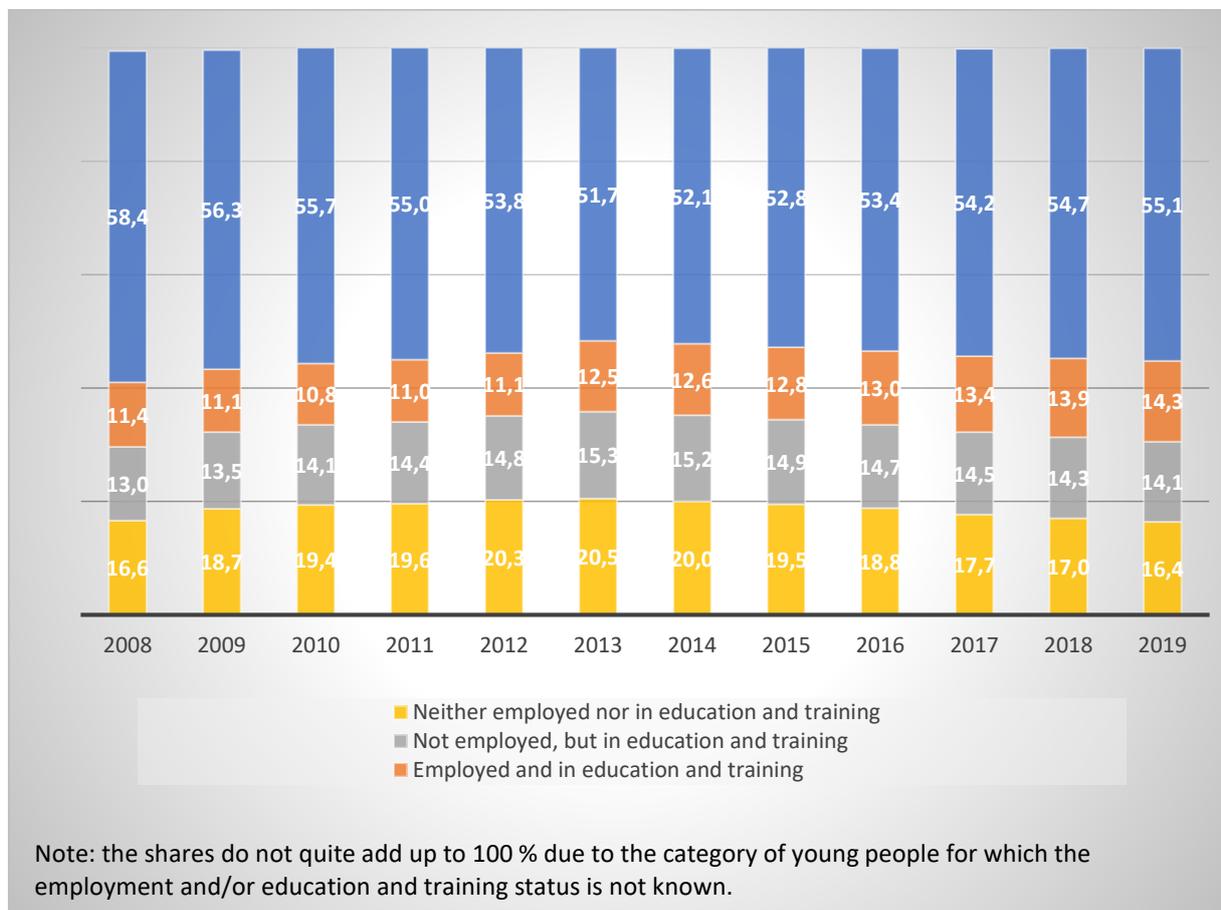
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEET POPULATION IN THE EU



1. Figure Employment, education and training status of young people, by age, EU, 2019 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_18 - modified)

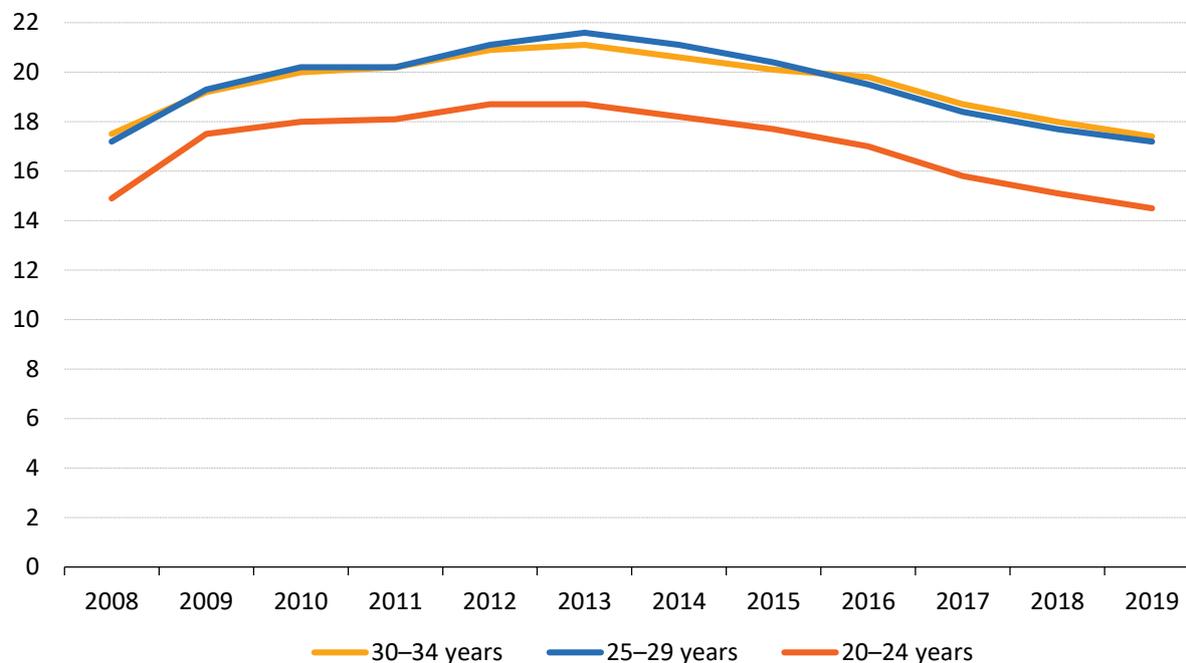
Figure 1 shows that the proportion of the NEET population (marked with orange) increases with age in the European Union. In the age group of 15-19 proportion of the NEET population is only 5.6 %. In the age group of 25-29 and 30-34, however, this proportion is as high as 17%.

The proportion of the NEET population didn't change a lot in the last decade (Figure 2). There has been some increase since the 2008 crisis. The ratio peaked at around 20% between 2012 and 2014. After 2014, a slow decline began when the economic crisis was over. The last available data in 2019, as in 2008, shows a rate of around 16%.



2. Figure Employment, education and training status of young people (aged 20–34), EU, 2008–19 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_18 - modified)

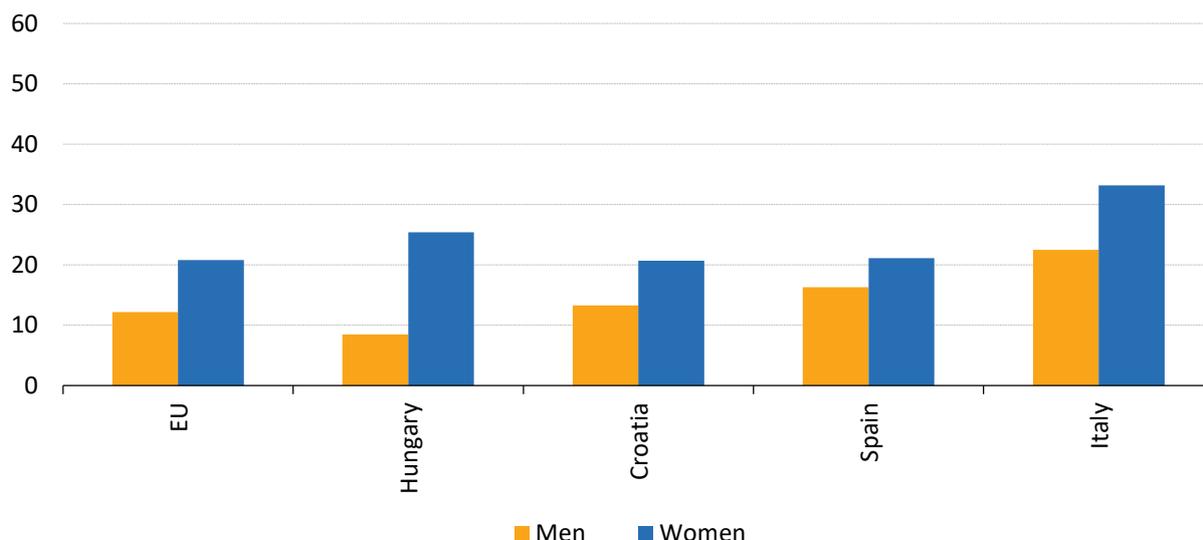
The pattern of changes was similar for the age group of 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 (Figure 2).



3. Figure Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, by age, EU, 2008-19 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_20 - modified)

NEET POPULATION IN CROATIA, HUNGARY, ITALY, AND SPAIN

In the following part, we will introduce some properties of the NEET population in the countries participating in the project.



Note: ranked on the average share for men and women (aged 20–34).

4. Figure Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex, 2019 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_20 - modified)

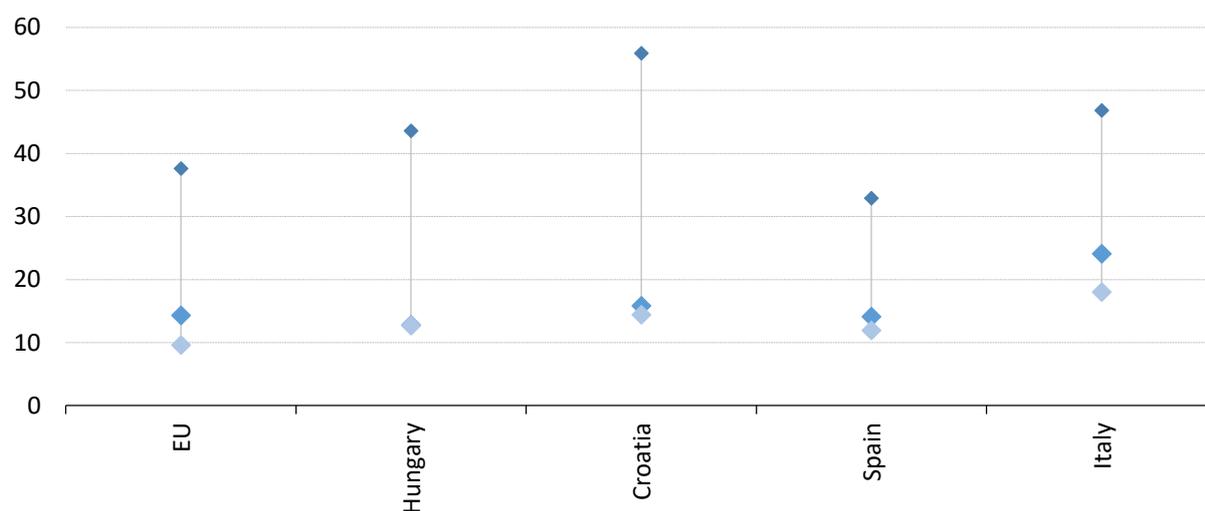
Figure 4 shows the proportion of NEET population among men and women in the four participating countries compared to the EU. The share of the NEET population is higher among women than among men. In the European Union, the proportion of the NEET population among women is 1.7 higher than among men. However, there are significant differences among the participating countries. The highest difference among men and women in Hungary: the proportion of NEET population is three times higher among women than among men. On the other hand, there is a much smaller difference in Spain: the proportion is only 1.3 times higher among women. In Spain and Italy, the difference remains below the EU average.

	Unemployed			Inactive		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
EU	5.9	6.3	5.5	10.5	5.9	15.3
Spain	11.1	11.2	11.0	7.6	5.1	10.1
Croatia	7.6	6.9	8.3	9.4	6.5	12.5
Italy	10.1	10.6	9.6	17.7	12.0	23.6

Hungary	3.5	4.0	3.0	13.2	4.5	22.4
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5. Figure Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and activity status, 2019 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_20 - modified)

Another important piece of data is the activity pattern of the NEET population. While NEET people are defined as not in work and not in education, there is a large difference between those who are looking for work (unemployed) and those who are not (inactive). Among the unemployed, the proportion of the NEET population is 5.9%, while it is 1.8 times higher among inactive people. However, among the latter, there is significant difference between men and women. Among inactive men, the proportion of the NEET population is similar to the proportion among unemployed people, but among inactive women, the proportion is 2.6 times higher. The pattern is largely similar in all of the participant countries, but the difference between the proportion of NEET population among inactive men and women is much harsher in Hungary.



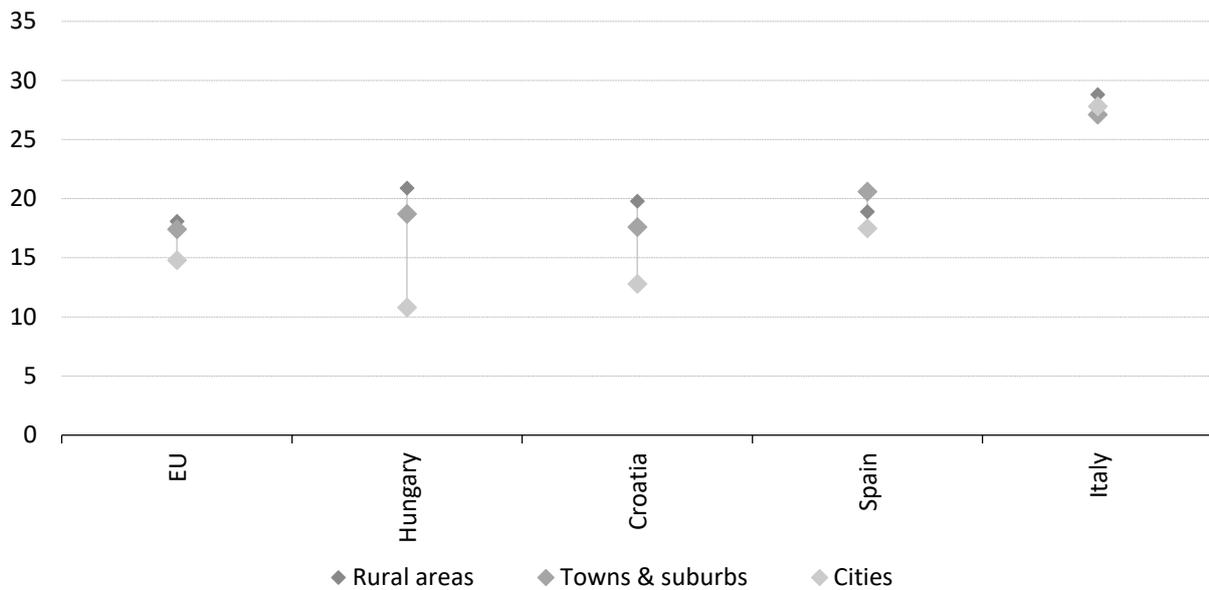
- ◆ Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 2011 levels 0–2)
- ◆ Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4)
- ◆ Tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5–8)

Note: Ranked on the overall NEET rate.

6. Figure Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2019 (Source: Eurostat; online data codes: edat_lfse_21 - modified)

There are large differences among the proportions of the NEET population according to the level of education. The largest proportion of the NEET population can be found among the group with a low level of education (ISCED 0-2) on the EU level. This statement is true also for all four countries studied, but the difference is smaller in Spain and Italy. The proportion of NEET population is about 4 times higher among the group with a low level of education than among the group with tertiary education on EU level, in Croatia and Hungary but only around 2.5 times higher in Italy and Spain.

The type of settlement seems to be less differentiating for the proportion of the NEET population. Somewhat more remarkable differences can be seen in Croatia and especially in Hungary.



Note: Ranked on the overall NEET rate.

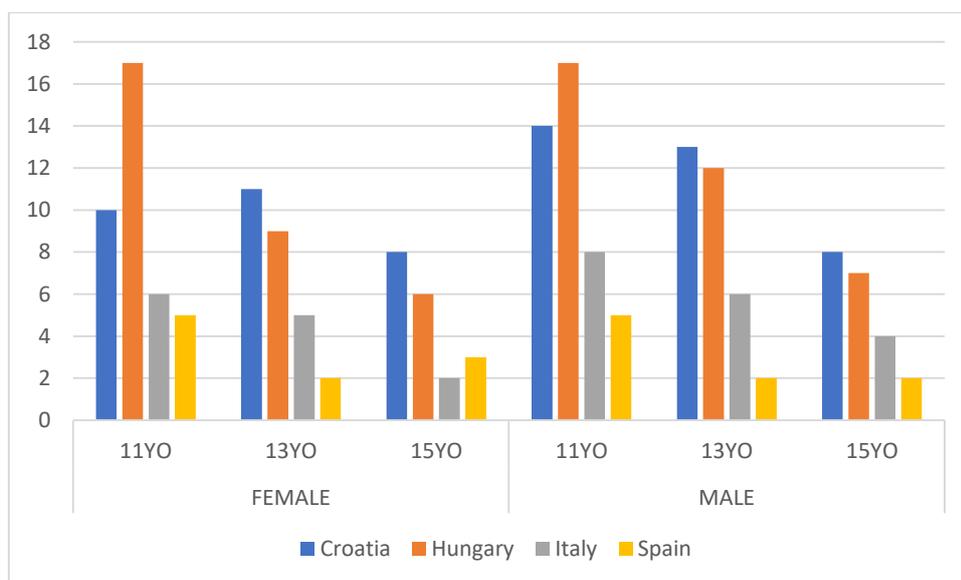
7. Figure Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by the degree of urbanization, 2019 (Source: Eurostat; online data code: edat_lfse_29)

BULLYING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Some characteristics of bullying among young people based on the available data were also analyzed. While the target population is defined with age boundaries of 16-29 years, international comparative data are not available for this specific age group and not available for the NEET population, specifically. We use for the current analysis the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children¹ (HBSC) data. HBSC is a recurring international research and data collection among 11, 13, and 15 years old students in 43 countries. Because of the lower age group and different situations (involved in education) data should be treated cautiously. Country differences may present cultural differences among countries. These differences can influence behavior in the target group of the current project as well.

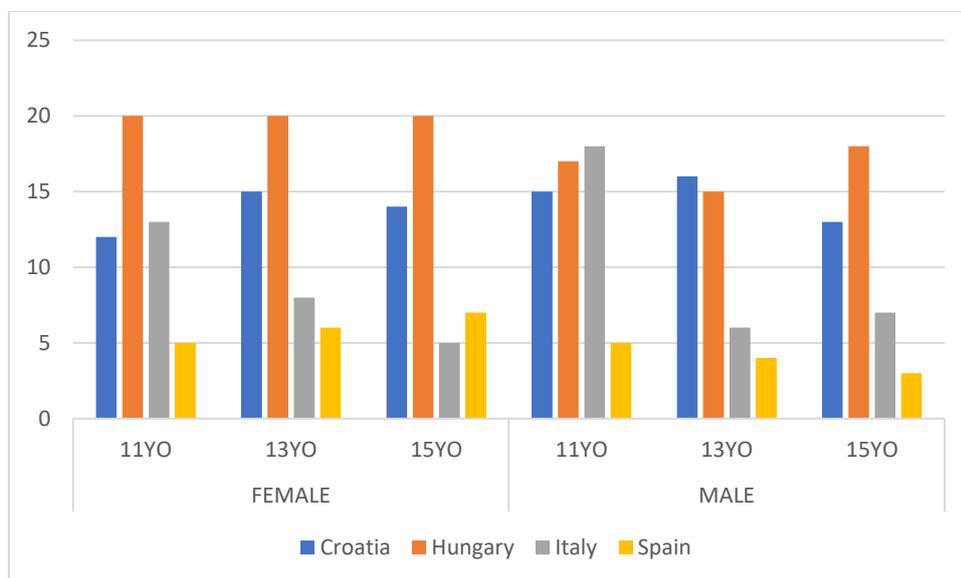
¹ Main findings: Inchley, J., Currie, D., Budisavljevic, S., Torsheim, T., Jåstad, A., Cosma, A., ... & Samdal, O. (2020). Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada. International report, 1. Data available: <https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/datasets/hbsc/#risk-behaviours-bullying> (last access: 06.15.2021.)

The main finding of the HBSC research on this field shows that boys bully and cyberbully others more frequently than girls, but members of both genders can be the victim of bullying with similar prevalence, and girls are more likely to be cyberbullied than boys. The proportion of bullying perpetration seems to show decreasing tendency (between 2014 and 2018), but the proportion of victims remained similar. It is also important to highlight in connection with our project, that family status seems to have a low influence on bullying or cyberbullying in general.



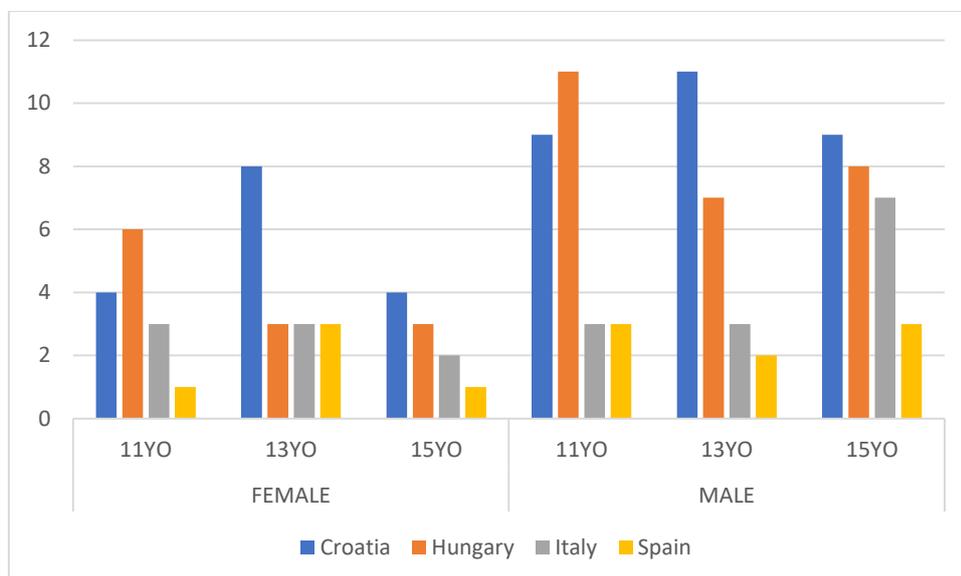
8. Figure Proportion of young people who have been bullied by others at least twice in the last couple of months (%) (Source: HBSC, 2018)

Specific data for the countries involved in the current project show large differences according to the proportion of victims of regular bullying (Figure 8). The most conspicuous result is the larger proportion in Croatia and Hungary compared to Spain and Italy that is present at all ages.



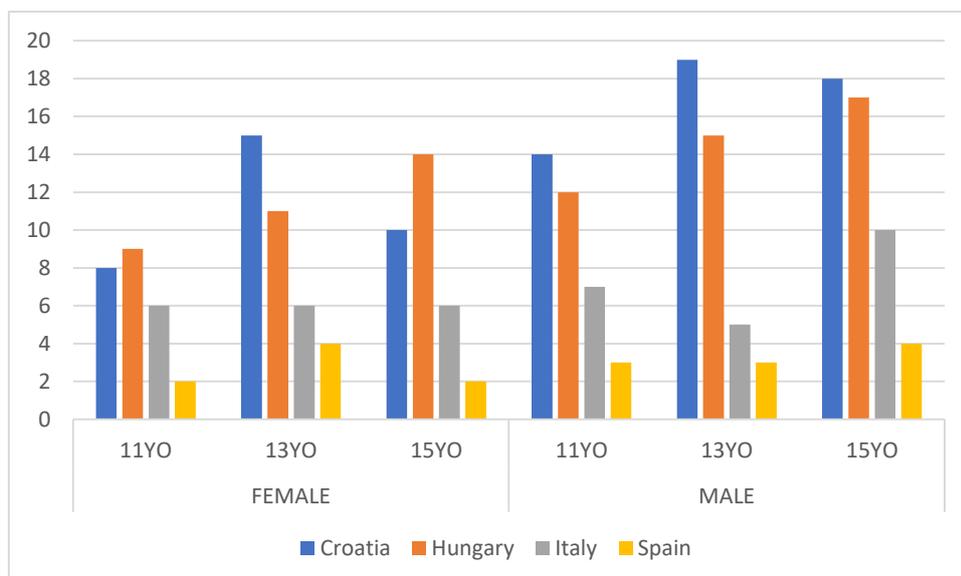
9. Figure Proportion of young people who have been cyberbullied by messages or by shared video or photo at least once in the last couple of months (%) (Source: HBSC, 2018)

These differences are present in cyberbullying as well. It is especially typical for 15-year-old students, which is more relevant according to our project. The proportion of cyberbullied children in this cohort is particularly high in Hungary (18-20%). The proportion of victims of cyberbullying tend to be less decreasing by age. In the 15 years old cohort the gender differences are not significant in the participating countries against the general trends mentioned earlier.



10. Figure Proportion of young people who have bullied others at least twice in the last couple of months (%) (Source: HBSC, 2018)

The proportion of perpetrators of bullying is lower in Spain than in the other three countries particularly in the cohort of 15 years old boys. Gender differences are pronounced in the oldest cohort: the proportion of perpetrators is much higher among boys. The proportion of perpetrators is similar to the proportion of victims among boys but lower among girls in the investigated countries.



11. Figure Proportion of young people who have cyberbullied others at least once in the last couple of months (%) (Source: HBSC, 2018)

Finally, the proportion of perpetrators of cyberbullying is higher in Hungary and Croatia and lower in Italy and Spain. Gender differences of perpetrators show a similar pattern in the case of cyberbullying than in the case of bullying.

FOCUS GROUPS

OBJECTIVES

Generally, NEET people are characterized by a low level of education, living in poverty, and unfavorable behavioral patterns – primarily the lack of the necessary motivation - due to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. We presumed they are especially at risk of all forms of bullying.

As an explorative phase, during the focus group discussions we intended to get a better understanding of subgroup-specific problems of NEET people, their experiences with bullying, institutionalized answers to bullying, and the opinion of both the NEET people and the experts helping NEET people on the instruments the project will provide to prevent and mitigate the harms of bullying.

During the data collection, two groups were targeted: NEET people (affected or threatened by bullying) and experts helping NEET people.

NEET-PEOPLE

METHODOLOGY

All partners where data collection was planned participated in the preparation of the guideline of the focus group discussion. Two focus groups (one with NEET people and another with experts) were conducted by each partner, except AKNOW. The participating organizations recruited and selected the participants and organized the event. Due to the pandemic situation, which raised significant difficulties even in the recruitment of the participants, the focus groups were organized either online or in hybrid form. Voice records were prepared about the discussions and short English summaries were written based on the topics given in the guideline. International ethical, as well as data protection standards, were properly applied.

At all the locations the schedule of the focus groups was the following:

- project presentation
- introduction- goals
- rules
- warm-up: presentations/ situations/experiences
- discussion
- wrap-up and conclusions.

The events lasted 90-120 minutes with the guidance of one or two moderators and the presence of an observer providing help during chat rooms, supporting the moderator, and taking notes about the discussion and the participants' comments.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPATING NEET PEOPLE

The focus group discussions took place in the 4 countries between December 2020 and March 2021. In Italy, young people were interviewed in person, in Hungary both online and in person, while the other partners organized the interviews online given the COVID epidemic.

The number of participants was as follows:

Spain	6 persons
Croatia	8 persons
Hungary	6 persons
Italy	9 persons
together	29 persons

Altogether 29, 16-29 years old NEET people (11 males and 18 females) participated in the focus group discussions. The majority of them have basic or secondary education. Their composition showed different reasons that led to the NEET status: lack of housing, early childbirth, some form of addiction, disability, abuse in childhood, low school performance as a consequence of which being unskilled or have a vocational qualification that is difficult to use in the labor market.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT TO THE VICTIMS

The first topic of the focus group discussion concentrated on the ways bullying was handled by the participants or by their acquaintance(s). We were interested in what did or would they do if they or their friend or a person they know would-be victims? We also wanted to gain information on whom to contact in a situation like this.

Some prepared typical bullying situations were outlined and some of them were selected as the basis of the discussion. The participants formed groups, got some time for the discussion.

Some of the NEET people *did not/would not do anything* because according to them it would have any sense or because they did not know what to do or did not want to make the situation public (family, friends, schoolmates, etc.).

Another, a smaller group of the participants would *step out from the situation* (changing the group of friends, ran away from the abusive relative, etc.)

Only one person would try to talk to the perpetrator explaining the harm caused, while according to some others it is unlikely that any rational argument and a calm conversation would work, a *verbal threat* is the only way to get to change.

The majority of the NEET people would *help* or would *ask for help*. Some of them would use their informal network, someone they trust (a friend, a family member, an elderly person, a third party connected to the perpetrator, etc.). Others mentioned experts (psychologist, doctor, some NGO), institutions (headmaster or psychologist), and authorities (police, or just competent authorities).

Some participants referred to the importance of strengthening the psychological resilience of people endangered by some form of abuse and the emotional support to the victims of abuse.

Three participants mentioned that people should *avoid* these kinds of situations.

However, even if they would ask for help, they have negative experiences and doubt the system. At the school, the situation either becomes worse, or nothing happens. The authorities, including the police, do not serve justice „because the system is sluggish and does not protect the victim from the perpetrator” or rejects the case.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PREVENTION

The vast majority of the participants spoke about the importance of education. Formal and informal forms of education should be about online activities and dangers, behavioral patterns, the roles of various institutions, experts, families, and other people in the environment, and education in diversity.

Also, the participants told, that it is important to prevent bullying by showing facts, concrete examples, long term impact of these kinds of activities. Specific informal education should be targeted to the perpetrators on the consequences of bullying.

However institutionalized, structural changes and legal measures are also necessary. Changes that promote the acceptance of human diversity and respecting human rights. In this and in providing help to the victims, civil society organizations may have an important role. Somebody mentioned, that in the case of cyberbullying deactivation of the offenders' social media accounts may also be a measure to stop the bully in their activity.

The organization of self-help groups from the victims can be also a useful measure to mitigate the psychological harms.

PORTAL

A specific portal should provide all the necessary *information* on where to ask for help, how and where to report bullying. Short presentation videos (police, NGO, etc.) could explain briefly what they do and how they can help. Basic information on the legal framework also should be provided.

The webpage could include presentations, brochures, online books, a blog where experts publish some articles about bullying.

Online individual *counseling* and group sessions with a psychologist would be a useful functionality of the portal.

Several people mentioned the importance of peer support. *Online support groups* should be organized by chat applications that allow anonymous communication between the victims of bullying. A forum also could be useful to have contact with other bullied people to feel less alone.

HELPERS

METHODOLOGY

At all the locations the schedule of the focus groups was the following:

- project presentation
- introduction- goals
- rules
- warm-up: presentations/ situations/experiences
- discussion
- wrap-up and conclusions.

The events lasted 60-120 minutes with the guidance of one or two moderators and the presence of an observer providing help during chat rooms, supporting the moderator, and taking notes about the discussion and the participants' comments.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPATING HELPERS (EXPERTS)

In most countries, there is no independent institutional system that would support the social integration of NEET youth. That's why we've put together all the professionals who can get in touch with them as helpers. They can be:

- child protection professionals, such as care workers, social workers, guardians, probation officers, etc.,
- the staff of guardianship authorities,
- social workers,
- health professionals: nurse, general practitioner, district nurse, specialists, etc.,

- teachers, teachers who can come into contact with young people outside of school, e.g. In kindergartens, or with young parents in the target group in the Sure Start Orphanages, or nurseries, kindergartens, etc.,
- labor market consultants (staff of the employment service, recruitment specialists),
- specialists of drug prevention and addiction treatment organizations (eg Blue Dots),
- the staff of NGOs supporting disadvantaged people,
- staff from youth counseling offices.

29 helpers (11 males, 18 females) among them social workers, psychologists, professionals working in the employment service, youth workers, people working with disabled persons, heads of social services, and NGOs working with vulnerable people participated in the focus group discussions.

SUBGROUPS OF NEETS

The experts constructed different typologies to identify the subgroups and characteristic features of NEET people.

According to the first typology, there are *voluntary* (good family economic status no looking for a job or no studying) and *forced* NEET people (educational failures, lack of work, etc.). Both groups can be in this status *temporarily* (graduates looking for their first job)/ or in the *long term* (disadvantaged groups, like disabled people, migrants, people with low educations, people with low self-esteem, victims of bullying, people living in a difficult family situation, etc.).

The second group of experts identified two subgroups of NEET people: the *active and passive* subgroups based on their job search commitment. Active are those who are registered with the employment office, seek and/or receive help regarding employment and/or training programs. Passives are those who are not necessarily registered anywhere and either don't actively try to change their status or they are unreachable.

The third categorization differentiated three subgroups of NEET people. *NEETs with disabilities* are facing double discrimination while searching for a job since these persons are lacking the professional qualifications necessary for the job they are applying for and have the double chance to be excluded from any job opportunity due to their disability. The group of *NEETs facing family responsibilities* includes those who are not seeking work or are not available to start a new job because they are caring for children or incapacitated adults or have other less specific family responsibilities. Young people in this group are a mix of the vulnerable and non-vulnerable; some are not able to participate in the labor market because they cannot afford to pay for care for their child or adult family member, while others voluntarily withdraw from the labor market or education to take up family responsibilities. *Drop outers/discouraged NEETs* are those young people who have stopped looking for work because they believe that there are no job opportunities

for them. They are mostly vulnerable young people at high risk of social exclusion who are very likely to experience poor employment outcomes throughout their working lives and are at high risk of lifelong disengagement.

However, there were serious doubts concerning the categorization as some NEET people are hit by multiple disadvantages as single parents (facing economic and social obstacles), young people in alternative care, people with disabilities, migrant young people, and members of minority groups.

According to the opinion of the Hungarian experts not the outcome, the NEET status, but the life situations leading to this status have the utmost importance. However typical groups are among others, young mothers suffering abuse in the family sometimes involved in sex work; young men who dropped out of education and are without any qualification; young people with special educational needs or with a disability; young people who in their childhood suffered from psychological or behavioral problems and the educational system is unable to cope with their problematic behavior; young people with some form(s) of addiction; young people leaving residential care; children of families that are backward in their socialization multi-generationally; victims of abuse.

TYPICAL REASONS AND FORMS OF BULLYING

The targets of bullying can be *individuals* (due to their physical appearance, envy, leadership, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) or *whole groups* who are different (migrants, race, religion, political ideas, etc.) The experts presume it is very difficult to link a particular type of violence to a particular NEET group. However parental behavior (pressure, misunderstanding, domestic violence, etc.) and stigma (within the family and/or local community and society in general) increase the probability of becoming a victim or a perpetrator and what is more having a NEET status. These were also recognized as potential triggers and risk factors contributing to young people acquiring the NEET status.

The school setting is an important location for experiencing bullying especially for those who have no strong interpersonal relations and are psychologically weaker (e.g. low self-esteem; depression, emotional problems, behavioral disorders, psychosomatic problems, phobias; anger). They do not share these negative experiences with their families, they blame themselves for what is happening and they live with the constant feeling that they will be teased, that they will be laughed at.

Typical forms of bullying are the following:

- exclusion from social activities
- spreading rumors or lies
- sharing embarrassing photos or videos
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND FORMS OF PREVENTION

All the participants agreed, prevention is the most effective form to encumber any form of bullying. Similarly to the NEET people, the professionals also emphasized the importance of different forms of education both for the NEET people and the helpers working with them. This education should cover self-awareness development, awareness-raising activities, and the learning of different social skills e.g. to dare to ask for help, communication skills, ways of conflict resolution, etc. The helpers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognize the symptoms and should dare to intervene based on mutual trust.

Not only the formal organizations and institutions but the civil society and self-help groups have an important role in these activities.

The application of a holistic approach is also important including education, support, treatment, and work with the family members. Better intersectoral cooperation including the schools, the health care system, the courts, the police, and the civil society would be also needed.

PORTAL

Although there is already a large number of platforms related to various topics for working with young people and to different forms of bullying, however, a portal specifically targeting the group of NEET people and their helpers is missing. Due to the specific status of NEET people, some content encouraging them to break through this status would be useful.

The most important functions of the portal could be:

NEET people

- information on where to ask for help (addresses, telephone numbers, etc.),
- tools to facilitate the reporting of abuse (e.g. in the form of a flow chart - your obligations, your opportunities, your rights),
- information on the legal framework,
- examples of good practices,
- sometimes it is difficult for a person to recognize that they belong to the NEET group, as well as if they are experiencing bullying, and what type specifically. This website could help with guidelines and information on how to better understand and recognize if it is relevant for them.
- education for perpetrators: acceptance of differences, empathy, knowledge of others, and mutual understanding,
- education for victims: self-esteem, social skills, emotional training,

- challenging exercises (crossroads, options to be chosen, labyrinth, etc.),
- the content must be tailored to their specific culture and media use,
- provision of video materials,
- possibility for role-playing,
- the creation of peer support groups,
- Q&As how to face bullies or online coaching sessions service,
- testimonies of NEET people that have overcome their encountered difficulties (related to bullying; job search; depression),
- success stories of NEETs',
- inspirational talks (similar to TEDx talks) related to the right to fail, to give up, to restart,
- career and psychological counseling sessions.

Helpers

- several examples, case studies,
- challenging exercises (crossroads, options to be chosen, labyrinth, etc.),
- description of the typical routes and problems: what are the responsibilities of the different actors, how to reach the relevant institutions, what to advise for the service users.

CONCLUSION

The NEET status and the occurrence of bullying are mutually reinforcing, therefore it is right to handle bullying as a distinct topic in working with NEET people, both on an individual and professional level.

There is a need for education programs about (cyber)bullying targeting both the NEET people and their helpers (the experts working with NEET people). It is especially important because of the lack of sufficient knowledge on basic human and employee rights. Strong emphasis should be put on what both the NEET people and the helpers can do, who can they contact for help, and what the procedures look like.

The planned portal should be practice-oriented, interactive, and tailor-made to the culture of NEET people. It would be vitally important that the content of the portal would be prepared in intersectoral cooperation.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY RESEARCH

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLES

The main characteristics of both samples (NEET sample and expert sample) are summarized in this subsection. The sampling and data collection procedure was more difficult than it was

foreseen due to the COVID situation. Many NGOs might work with limited capacities therefore it was harder to contact both experts and NEET people through experts. The proportion of sample size across countries becomes uneven: a larger sample was achieved in Croatia while in other countries the sample size remained relatively low. These differences do not bias our analysis as we are using cross-country comparisons. Later results will show that in Croatia unaffected by bullying NEET people tended to participate in higher numbers than in other countries (we did not exclude from our target population those who were not affected by bullying as they also have valuable information about bullying from the perspective of the external observers.

		Country							
		Croatia		Hungary		Italy		Spain	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Age	Under 16	0	0,0%	1	2,2%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
	16-18	15	3,6%	19	42,2%	9	26,5%	8	17,4%
	19-23	180	43,5%	8	17,8%	8	23,5%	29	63,0%
	24-29	219	52,9%	15	33,3%	15	44,1%	5	10,9%
	Over 30	0	0,0%	2	4,4%	2	5,9%	4	8,7%
Gender	Other	2	,6%	1	2,8%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
	Man	58	17,7%	9	25,0%	9	28,1%	6	15,0%
	Woman	255	77,7%	24	66,7%	18	56,3%	14	35,0%
	I'd rather not say	13	4,0%	2	5,6%	5	15,6%	20	50,0%
Where do you live?	Large city	97	29,6%	25	69,4%	11	34,4%	22	55,0%
	Town or suburb	75	22,9%	11	30,6%	14	43,8%	4	10,0%
	Village	156	47,6%	0	0,0%	7	21,9%	14	35,0%
Total sample size*		414		45		34		51	

12. Figure Main characteristics of NEET sample

*In the row of Total sample size the number can be larger than the sum of frequencies due to item non-response.

The composition of the NEET sample was somewhat different across countries according to age, gender, and type of settlement where respondents were living, however, these differences might be attributed to the small sample size. In Italy and Croatia respondents tend to be older than in the other two countries. The gender distribution mirrors the properties of the NEET population (a larger proportion of women than men). There was a large group of respondents in Spain who did not declare their gender that could be a sign of fear of recognizability. The distribution of type of settlements where respondents live showed also differences: the sample in Croatia tended to be more rural, in Italy more suburban, while in Hungary and Spain more urban. These differences in the sample population should be considered during the interpretation of cross-country differences.

		Country							
		Croatia		Hungary		Italy		Spain	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Do you work with NEETs age of 16-29	Yes	36	90,0%	39	72,2%	50	98,0%	43	84,3%
	No	4	10,0%	15	27,8%	1	2,0%	8	15,7%
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
How many NEETs do you work with?		62,7	61,9	15,9	19,6	11,8	10,5	27,8	25,1

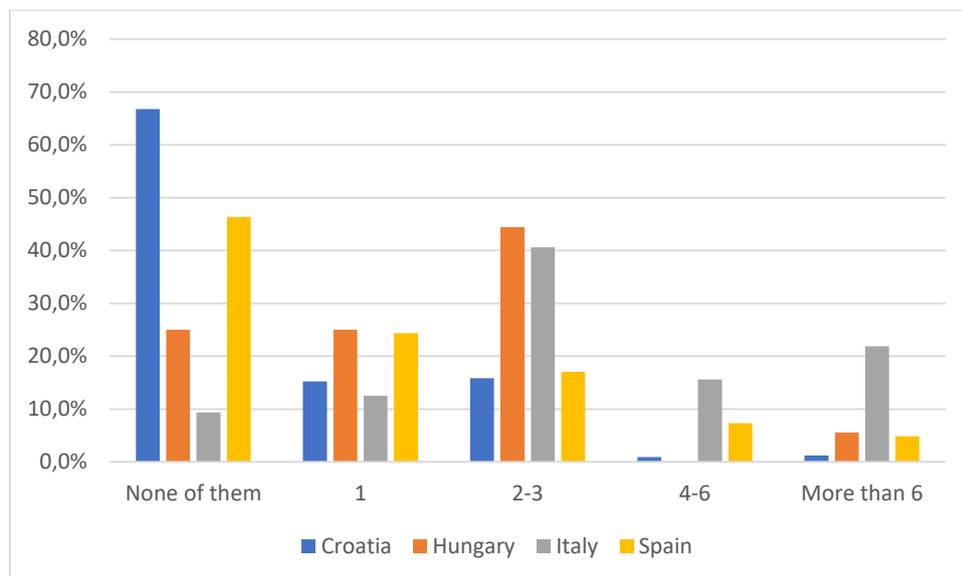
13. Figure Main characteristics of the expert sample

The only main characteristic we mention here about experts is the number of NEET people they work with. It is important information because in most of the cases experts work with a larger group partially consisting of NEET people as well. The average number of NEET people with whom experts work was the smallest in Italy (around 10), this amount was somewhat larger in Hungary (around 15), considerably larger in Spain (around 25), and the largest in Croatia (over 60). However, it is worth mentioning that the large average number of NEET people, experts work with in Croatia paired with a large standard deviation that shows a much more uneven distribution of NEET people per expert than in the other three countries. It also can be considered that even in Italy the answers are based on a relatively large amount of experience, not just sporadic impressions.

Both in the case of the NEET- and expert samples, some respondents were not fit to the definition of our target group (age mismatch as an example in case of NEET sample or not working with any NEET people in case of experts). These respondents couldn't continue their questionnaire, therefore their responses are not included in the further analysis.

NEET YOUTHS

In the following subsection results of the data collection among NEET people will be summarized.



14. Figure Number of friends and buddies are often insulted, pecked, joked, or excommunicated by others by country

PERCEPTION OF BULLYING BY NEET PEOPLE

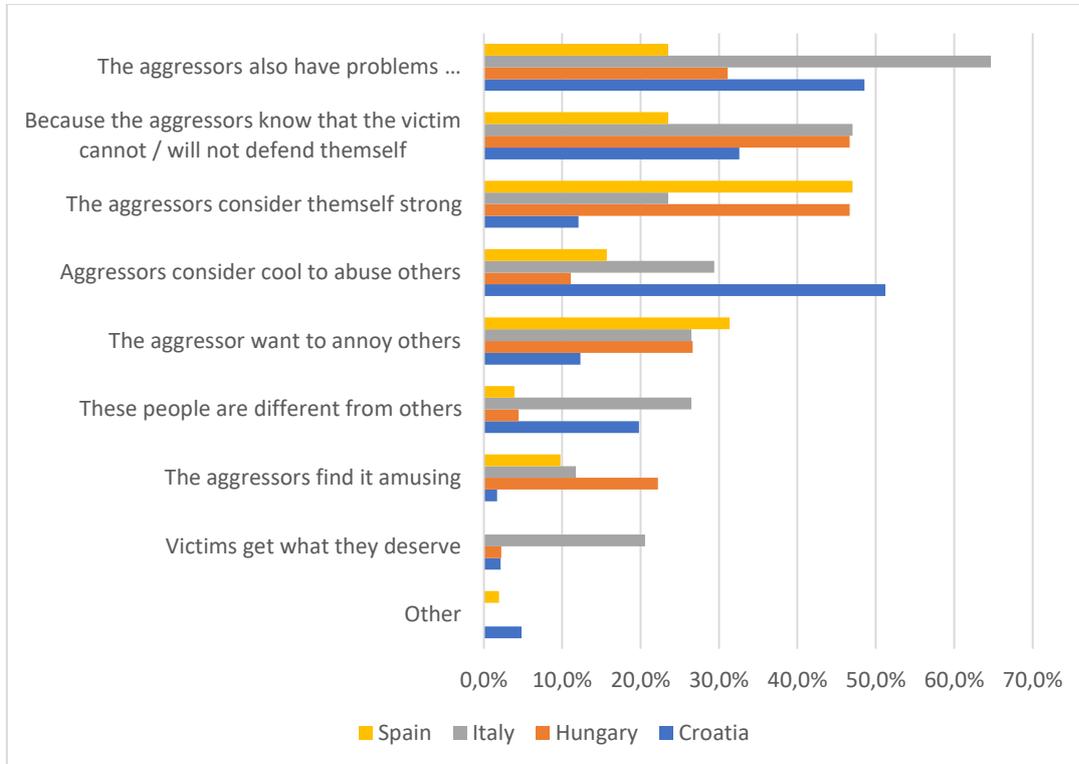
According to figure 3, the conclusion could be drawn that the less affected country by bullying is Croatia, however as we mentioned before it could be a result of self-selection differences. On the other hand, it should be noted that in Italy there are a large group of respondents (over 20%) who perceived humiliation in the case of 6 or more buddies that is an alarming sign.

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Average
Someone laughed while talking	63,7%	86,1%	96,9%	62,2%	77,2%
Someone spread rumors, lies about someone else	75,6%	75,0%	100,0%	53,7%	76,1%
Someone humiliated someone else in front of their peers	75,3%	77,8%	84,4%	41,5%	69,7%
Someone was intentionally left out of something to hurt	54,6%	65,7%	84,4%	58,5%	65,8%
Someone was pushed	58,2%	54,3%	78,1%	36,6%	56,8%
Someone was forced to do something they didn't want	49,1%	58,3%	84,4%	27,5%	54,8%

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Average
They posted on the net instead of someone or sent a message on their behalf	45,1%	47,2%	90,6%	24,4%	51,8%
Someone hit someone	40,9%	52,8%	65,6%	32,5%	47,9%
Someone was caught or touched in a way they didn't like	40,5%	52,8%	78,1%	15,0%	46,6%
Someone's money or food, or anything else was taken away	26,5%	44,4%	84,4%	24,4%	44,9%
A video of someone was posted on the net that puts them to shame	27,7%	30,6%	87,5%	14,6%	40,1%

15. Figure Forms of humiliation by country (perceived at least once a month) (in the order according to cross-country average)

The main forms of humiliation and bullying seem to be similar across countries: leaving out, laughing at, lying about, humiliating in front of peers, or spreading rumors about someone are the most common forms of bullying regardless of country. More intrusive, or aggressive forms of humiliation seem to be less frequent in general. However, there are quite large differences between countries in how much less frequent these latter forms are. In the case of Spain, more rude forms of bullying are much less frequent however in the case of Italy differences in frequencies are much less remarkable. This latter phenomenon might be in connection with the larger frequency of bullying in Italy as well. In the two remaining countries, the differences are smaller in the occurrence of different forms of aggression than in the case of Spain but more pronounced than in the case of Italy.

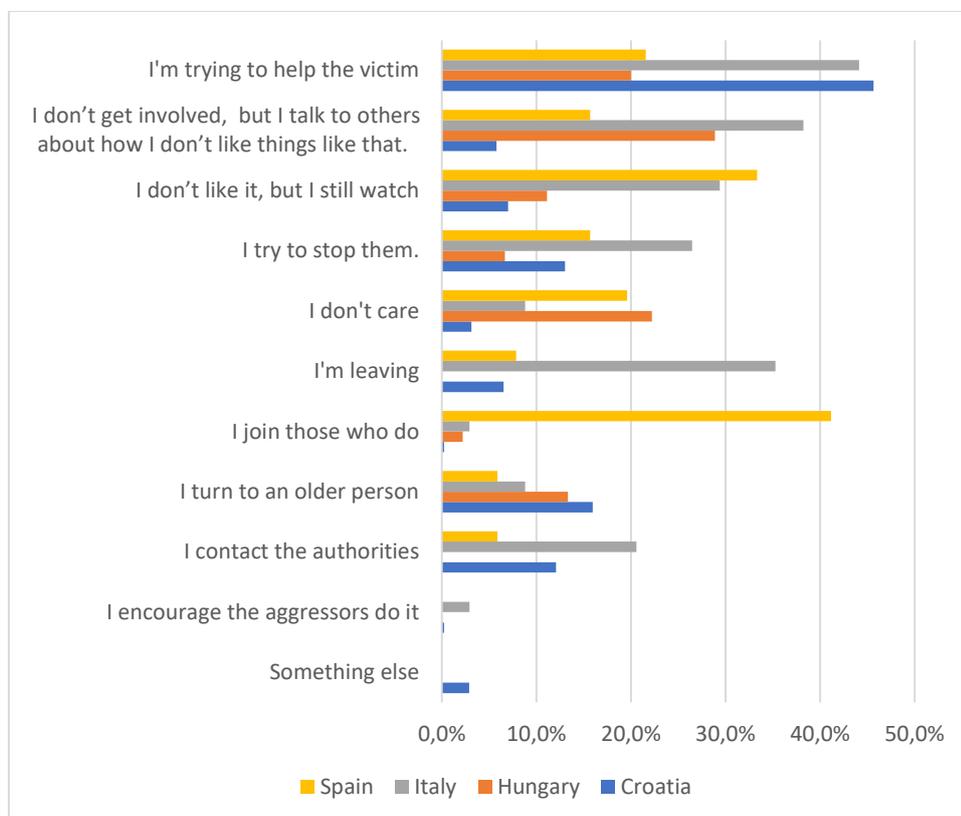


16. Figure Reasons of bullying attributed by peers by countries (in the order according to cross-country average)

The main reason for bullying attributed by NEET people for the aggressor seems to be different across countries, however, there is a consensus in the avoidance of blaming the victim. In Italy and Croatian peers seem to attribute large importance to the problems of the aggressor that can be either exculpatory in nature or empathic reasoning with the inclusion of circumstances in the reason of aggression. The helplessness of the victim is another important factor in Italy and Hungary while physical strength can be considered important in Spain and Hungary. The most important attributed reason in Croatia is that the aggressor considers bullying a cool thing that can be translated as a culture of bullying or a specific group atmosphere or norm. While blaming victims is the least important attributed reason for aggression. The case of Italy should be emphasized where 20% of the respondents tended to choose this reason (with or without other reasons).

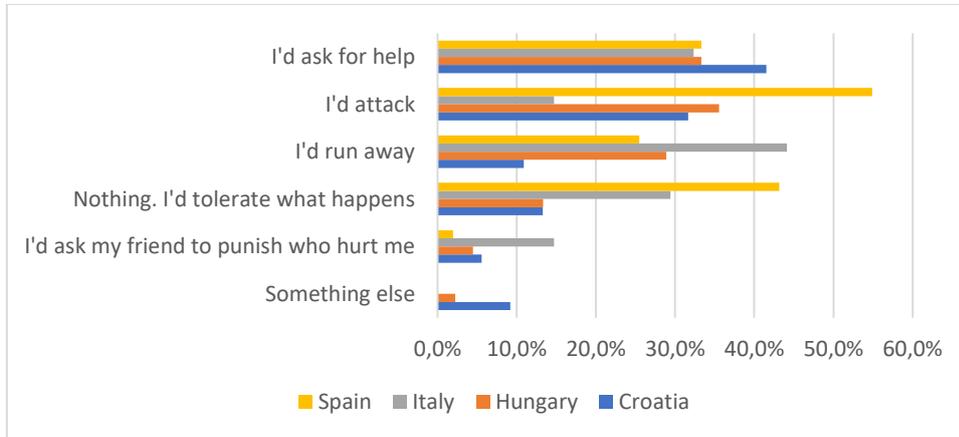
REACTION TO BULLYING BY NEET PEOPLE

The typical reaction to bullying among peers is the active help in the case of Italy and Croatia while passivity seems to be the most frequent reaction in Hungary and joining the aggressor in Spain with a large proportion of passivity. Turning to other parties such as an older person or authorities are a less common reaction in all the participating countries that underline the importance of including peer groups in solving bullying.



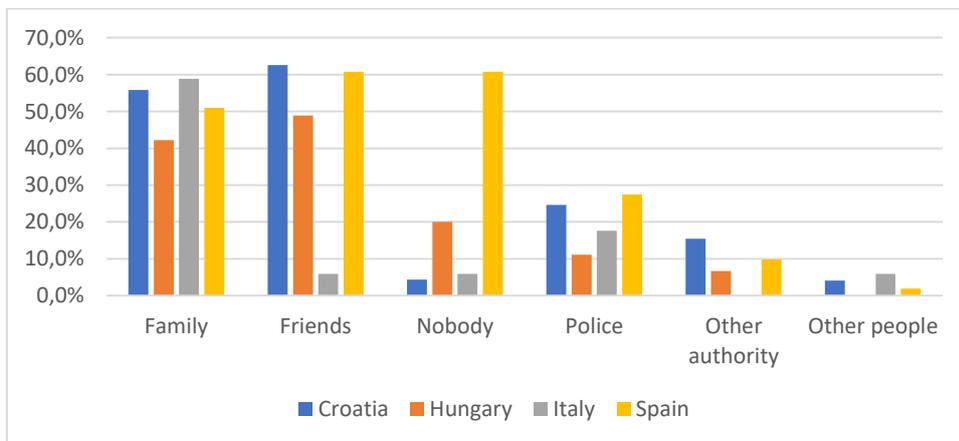
17. Figure Typical reactions of peers to bullying by countries (in the order according to cross-country average)

On the other hand, the reaction to be bullied seemed to be different from the hetero reactions. There is a consensus among countries in the very common reaction (asking for help) and the rare reaction (asking a friend to punish the aggressor). However, there are large differences among countries in the importance of other reactions. Attacking back is the most important reaction in Spain and Hungary accompanied by passivity in Spain. Escaping from the situation is the most common reaction in Italy with a large proportion of those who would passively accept aggression. In the case of Croatia, the most common reaction is asking for help, followed by attacking back.



18. Figure Typical reactions of NEET people if they were bullied

There is a consensus among countries who can be (family, friends) or who can't be (police or other authority) effective help in these situations. Some important cross-country differences should be noticed: friends are missing as helpers in Italy, while a large proportion of helplessness ('nobody can help') can be found in Spain.



19. Figure Source of possible help in case of bullying

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES OF AGGRESSOR ACCORDING TO NEET PEOPLE

The typical attributes of the aggressor are similar in some points across countries: a man, that the victim knows, with a lower level of education, who is older than the victim (based on country averages). However, there are differences among countries. People living alone seem to be extremely dangerous in Spain according to the attribution of respondents. Anyone can be an aggressor according to a non-negligible proportion of respondents in Croatia and Hungary and gender is less specific in Italy (difference only 10 percentage points).

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Average
Men	30,4%	48,9%	41,2%	54,9%	43,9%
People the victim knows	33,3%	20,0%	26,5%	54,9%	33,7%
People with a lower level of education	26,6%	13,3%	26,5%	35,3%	25,4%
People older than the victim	21,0%	15,6%	17,6%	41,2%	23,8%
People the victim does not know	9,4%	13,3%	32,4%	27,5%	20,6%
Anyone	39,9%	26,7%	14,7%	0,0%	20,3%
Women	10,9%	11,1%	29,4%	29,4%	20,2%
People living alone	3,9%	0,0%	17,6%	58,8%	20,1%
People living in cities (densely populated areas)	14,0%	17,8%	23,5%	15,7%	17,8%
People with higher levels of education	8,2%	6,7%	26,5%	15,7%	14,3%
People living in cities and suburbs	7,5%	0,0%	26,5%	19,6%	13,4%
People living in a large family	4,3%	11,1%	20,6%	15,7%	12,9%
People living in rural areas (sparsely populated areas)	4,8%	0,0%	20,6%	17,6%	10,8%
People younger than the victim	3,6%	6,7%	14,7%	15,7%	10,2%

20. Figure Who is the typical aggressor in case of bullying? (as a percentage of mentions)

ATTITUDES TOWARDS BULLYING AMONG NEET PEOPLE

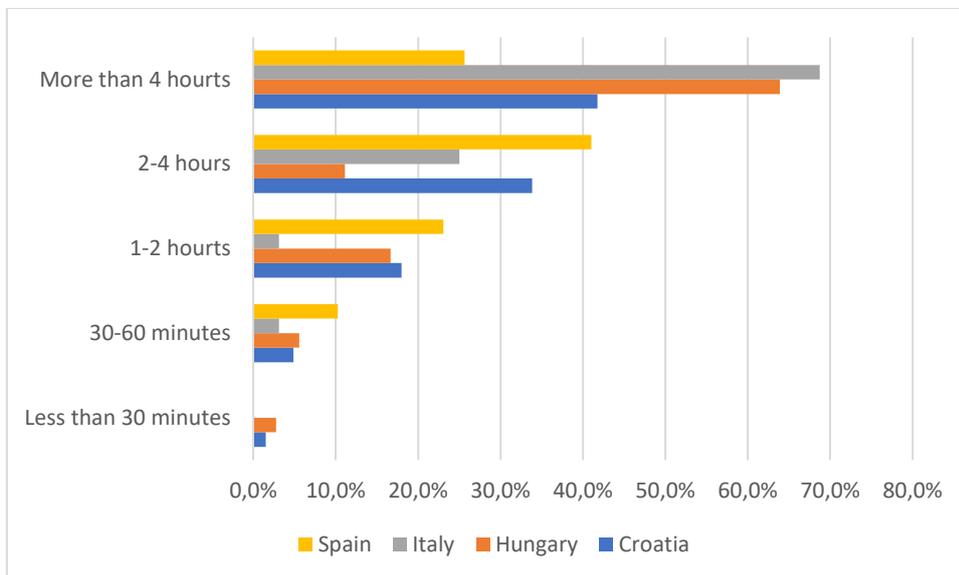
Finally, the attitudes toward bullying seem to be healthy among NEET people regardless of countries: bullying hurts victims, it is a silly thing, joining the aggressor should be avoided, helping or asking for help in these cases is important and the opposite reactions and behaviors are to be avoided. However as we have seen in the previous answers in connection with certain situations, these answers might be due to external expectations rather than real internalizations and the patterns are more complicated country by country.

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Average
If someone is hurt, he or she will be sad	78,6	59,2	81,2	53,8	68,2
Hurting others is a silly thing	77,6	74,1	50,0	55,0	64,2
It's not right to join those who hurt others, even if I find it funny	47,5	54,3	54,2	45,0	50,2
It is right and good to make friends with someone who has been hurt	62,8	24,1	68,7	23,1	44,7
External help should be called if someone is hurt	65,8	35,2	41,7	30,0	43,2
Some people deserve to be hurt	-50,4	-25,9	-29,0	-43,6	-37,2
It's not such a bad thing to laugh at those who are hurt	-79,5	-59,3	-41,7	-25,0	-51,4
If someone is hurt, they can only blame themselves	-58,9	-57,4	-35,5	-70,0	-55,5
Hurt others can be funny	-78,7	-44,8	-47,9	-52,1	-55,9
It's cool to make fun of someone again and again	-85,4	-63,0	-62,2	-59,0	-67,4

21. Figure Attitudes towards bullying among NEET youths (-100 fully disagree +100 fully agree, recalculated from 4 point scale)

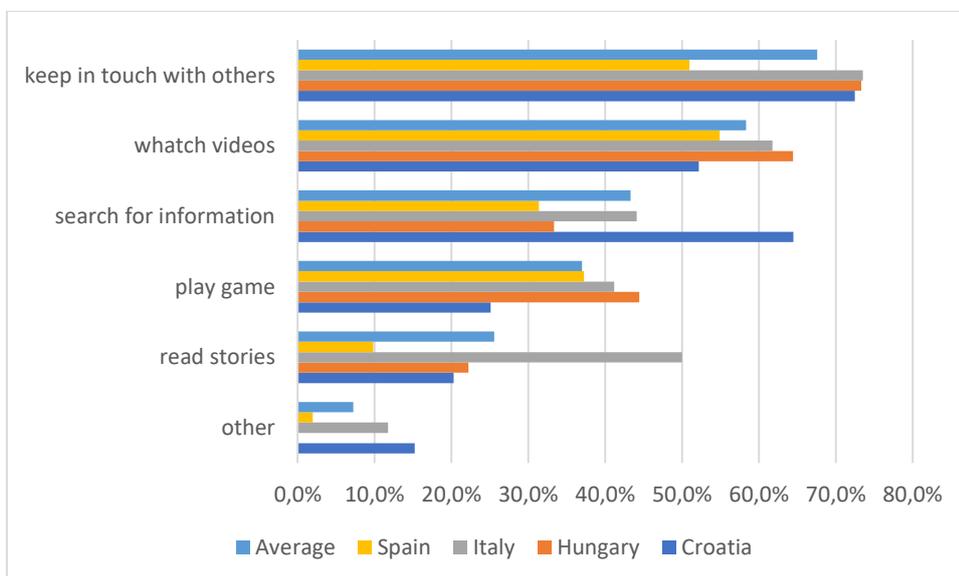
INTERNET USAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG NEET PEOPLE

The following part of the analysis of data collection among NEET people is about their internet and social media usage. This part has importance in planning the further activities of the project including dissemination and planned online activities.



22. Figure Internet usage (hours per day)

NEET people seem to be very active on the internet. Most of them are online at least for 4 hours except for respondents in Spain where online activity is somewhat lower (the modal answer was 2-4 hours).



23. Figure Goals of using internet among NEET people

In most cases, respondents use the internet for communicating with others or watching videos. Searching for information has special importance in Croatia while reading stories is quite important in Italy. Other forms of usage are not very common (under or around 10%).

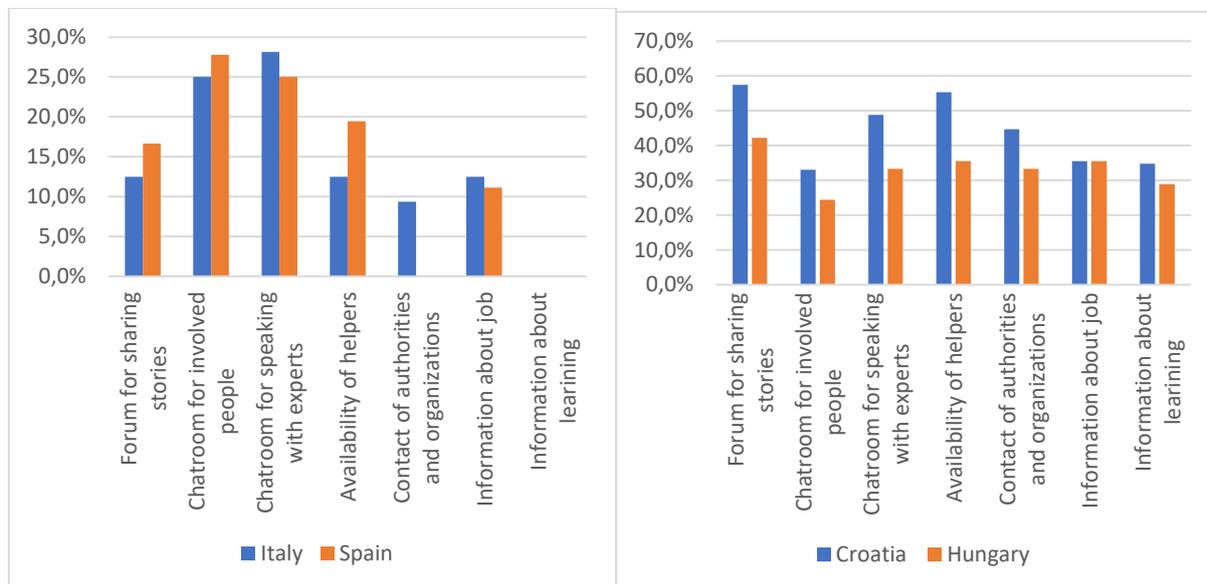
	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain
Instagram	62,1%	46,7%	85,3%	64,7%
Facebook	56,0%	33,3%	61,8%	25,5%
Tiktok	20,3%	46,7%	61,8%	31,4%
Twitter	4,3%	4,4%	8,8%	23,5%
Reddit	3,6%	0,0%	2,9%	0,0%
Youtube	68,6%	55,6%	70,6%	58,8%
Other	10,4%	0,0%	8,8%	3,9%

24. Figure Social media usage among NEET people (as a percentage of mentions)

Differences across countries in the usage of social media is a well-known phenomenon, however there can be differences in age or social groups as well. On the other hand, social media in accessing a youth group has a crucial role. Therefore it was very important to have an insight into the social media usage of our primary target group. We have found that in three out of four countries (except Hungary) three media dominate: mainly Instagram and Youtube and in the case of Italy and Croatia Facebook. The picture is a bit different in Hungary (however the sample is very small): Youtube has the largest audience, then Instagram and Tiktok, but the share of these social media is only around 50%.

FUNCTIONS OF A PORTAL HELPING NEET PEOPLE INVOLVED IN BULLYING

In the last part of the analysis of the NEET sample, we introduce what the target group suggests as functions for a portal helping NEET people involved in bullying.



25. Figure Suggested functions for a web portal helping NEET people involved in bullying (in case of Italy and Spain single choice, in case of Croatia and Hungary multiple choice)

In Italy and Spain, partners decided to use single-choice question, while in Croatia and Hungary multiple-choice question was used. This difference makes comparison difficult, but findings have their country-specific importance for planning the next phases of the project.

In Italy and Spain, the most prominent functions suggested by the respondent were chatrooms for involved people and those where possible to chat with experts. Furthermore, the availability of experts and forums for sharing stories about bullying has some importance. In Croatia forum for sharing stories about bullying and functions easing contact with experts seem to be the most important.

EXPERTS

In the following section, we discuss the viewpoint of experts based on their responses.

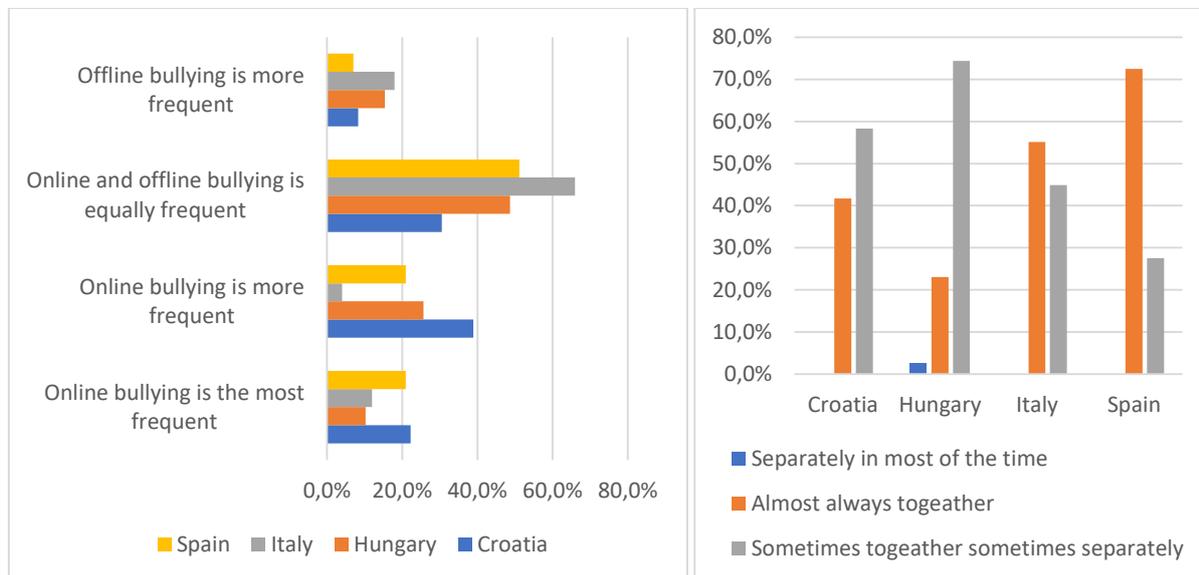
FREQUENCY, FORMS, AND REASON OF BULLYING ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

There are significant cross-country differences in the perceived frequency of bullying among the clients of experts. We have found the highest frequency in Italy (around 5). The picture was more diverse in Hungary and Spain (less than 1 to 5 depending on form). The perceived frequency of bullying among clients of an expert in Croatia was the smallest (under one on average) and seemed invariable.

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain
Someone laughed while talking	.72	4.96	5.65	4.00
Someone spread rumors, lies about someone else	.92	4.78	5.60	1.70
Someone was intentionally left out of something to hurt	.51	3.91	5.47	3.07
Someone humiliated someone else in front of their peers	.85	4.58	5.90	1.35
Someone was pushed	.74	3.50	5.59	.41
Someone was forced to do something they didn't want	.67	3.25	5.65	.43
Someone's money or food, or anything else was taken away	.54	2.67	5.64	1.12
Someone was caught or touched in a way they didn't like	.26	3.41	5.70	.30
Someone hit someone	.42	2.91	5.55	.31
They posted on the net instead of someone or sent a message on their behalf	.35	2.55	5.60	.38
A video of someone was posted on the net that puts them to shame	.28	1.74	5.24	.60

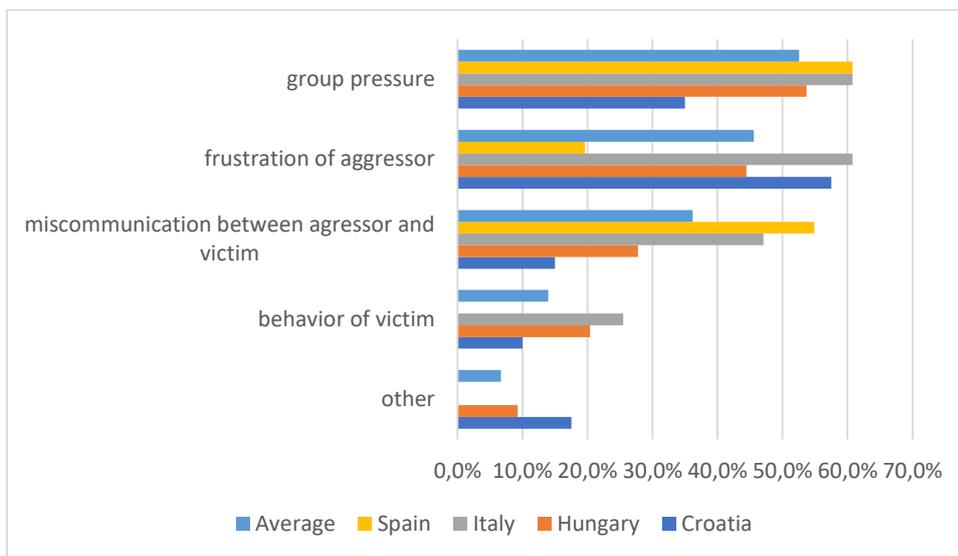
26. Figure Average number of clients involved in a form of humiliation perceived by experts by countries

Differences in the frequency of different forms of bullying were only remarkable in Hungary and Spain. Less harmful forms of bullying were more frequent in both countries. Physical harassment and provocations affecting properties were less frequent.



27. Figure Frequency and relation of offline and online bullying according to experts by countries

Online bullying has specific importance in our project. The current COVID situation enhances its prominence as well. To measure this issue, we formulated questions about the frequency and relation of offline and online bullying. Most experts perceive online and offline bullying as equally frequent. The modal answer in Croatia, however, suggests an increased frequency of online bullying. There is a consensus among experts across countries that online and offline bullying are at least partially connected. The majority of experts in Italy and especially in Spain suggest that the two forms of bullying almost always occur together. In Croatia and Hungary majority of experts believe that the two forms can be independent as well.

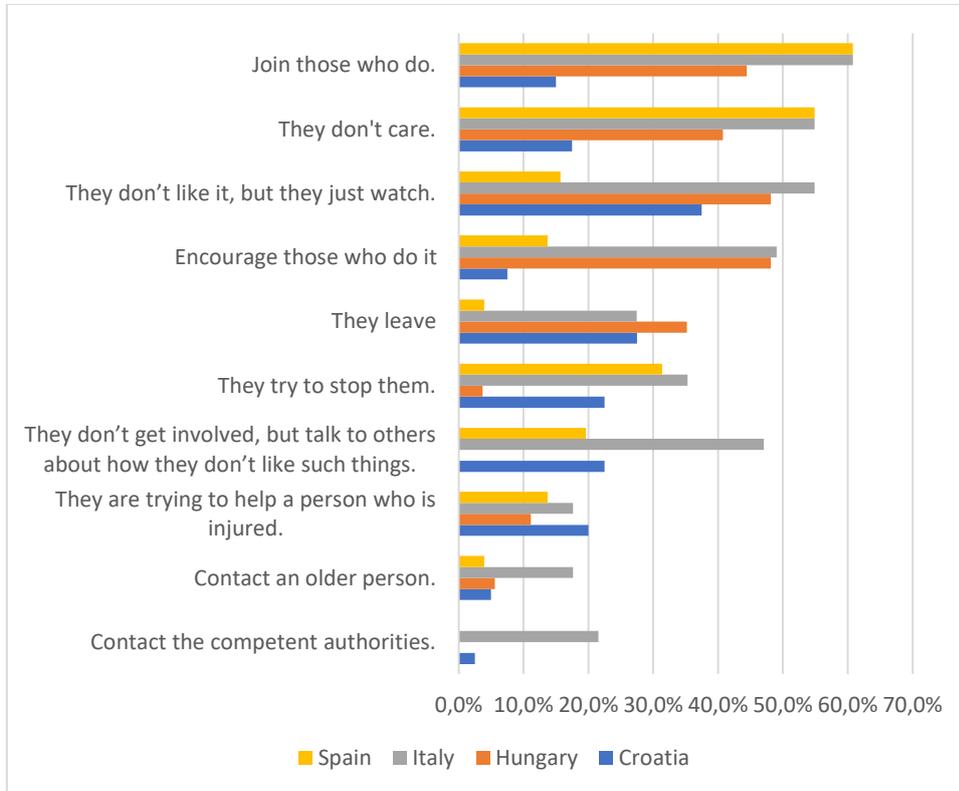


28. Figure Attributed reason of bullying according to experts by countries (as a percentage of mentions)

Experts shared the opinion on what is the most prominent reason for bullying and what can be the least important. The majority of experts suggested group pressure as the most prominent source of bullying. The only exception was Croatia. In this country, most of the experts thought that the frustration of the aggressor is the most important reason for bullying. Consensually, the least important reason for bullying was the behavior of the victim. Communication problems seemed to be important in Spain due to the answers of the Spanish experts. Frustration seemed to be important in Italy as well.

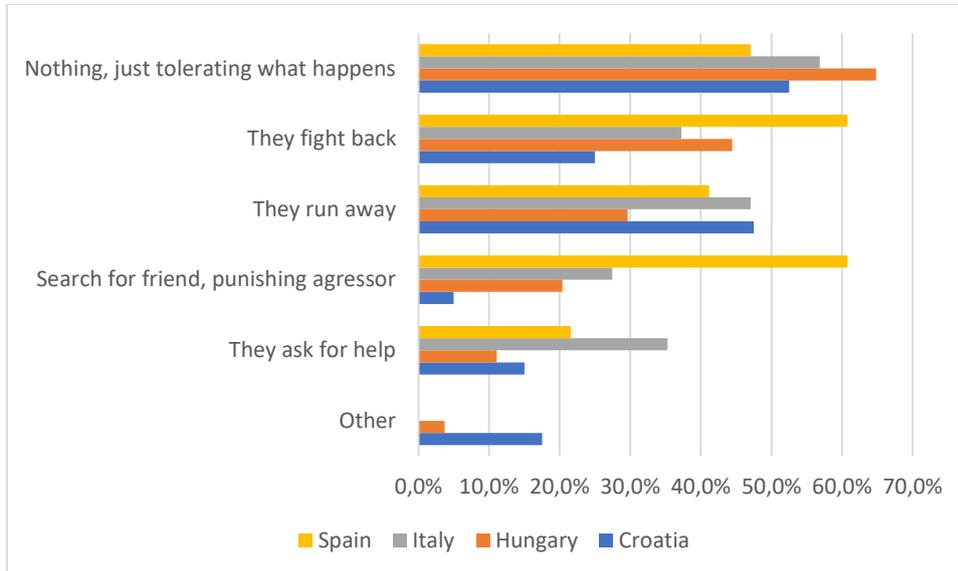
REACTIONS TO BULLYING ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

The perceived or attributed reaction to bullying among peers according to experts tends to be similar across countries except for Croatia. In the three countries (Hungary, Italy, and Spain) the most commonly mentioned forms of reactions are passivity ('peers don't care') and joining to aggressivity. Further rejective but passive ('peers don't like but just watch') or aggressive ('peers encourage those who do it') reactions are mentioned in large frequency in Hungary and Italy. The vast majority of experts doesn't mention helpful behavior or involvement of a third party such as an older person or a competent authority. The largest proportion of Croatian experts mentioned passive rejection and leaving the situation, but in the third place, they mentioned active intervention of peers ('try to stop them') although in small proportion.



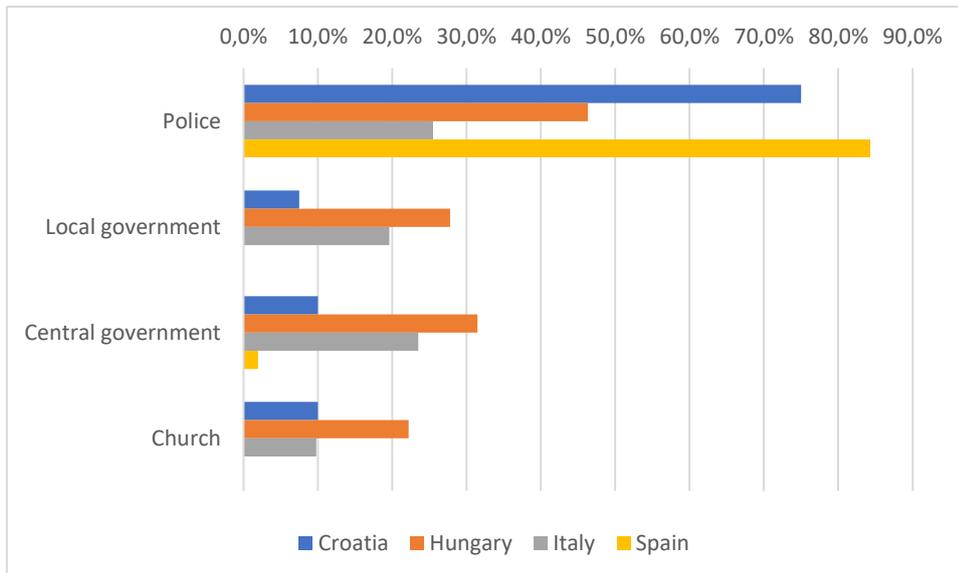
29. Figure Typical reaction of peers to bullying according to experts by countries (as a percentage of mentions)

Most experts mentioned passivity, aggressivity, or escaping as a usual reaction of the victim in all of the countries. There were minor differences across countries according to the answers of the experts. Passivity was the most frequently attributed behavior in Croatia, Hungary, and Italy, while Spanish experts mentioned aggressive reaction in the highest proportion (either fight back or search for the help of a friend for punishment). Asking for help is not a common reaction according to the answers of experts except for Italy.



30. Figure Typical reaction to bullying by the victim according to experts by countries (as a percentage of mentions)

Experts were asked about whose responsibility should be to stop bullying NEET people. The proportion of mentioning police was very large in Croatia and Spain, and quite large in Hungary, while in Italy mentions were evenly distributed among police, local- and central governments. The church was mentioned least frequently in this context regardless of country.



31. Figure Responsibility for treatment of bullying NEET people according to experts by countries (as a percentage of mentions)

FUNCTIONS OF A PORTAL FOR EXPERTS HELPING NEET PEOPLE INVOLVED IN BULLYING

Suggested content for a portal addressing experts helping NEET people are very different across countries according to responding experts.

	Croatia	Hungary	Italy	Spain
Contact details of support organizations	82,5%	72,2%	27,5%	29,4%
Scientific articles on bullying	30,0%	40,7%	13,7%	5,9%
Manuals on management of bullying	62,5%	42,6%	31,4%	80,4%
Playful education for young people on how to deal with bullying situations	45,0%	64,8%	51,0%	7,8%
Case discussion forum for registered professionals	45,0%	61,1%	58,8%	11,8%
Collection of best practices	42,5%	64,8%	43,1%	25,5%
Other	10,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%

32. Figure Suggested content for a portal helping NEET people involved in bullying and experts helping them (as a percentage of mentions)

Most experts suggest contact details of support organizations and manuals about dealing with bullying in Croatia, but the proportion of all other content is at or over 30%. Most Hungarian experts mentioned contact details of support organizations, game-based educational content for NEET people, collection of best practices, and forum for case discussion, but remaining content was mentioned over 40%. Case discussion forum seemed to be the most important for the Italian experts besides playful education content for NEET people and collection of best practices. Other content was less frequently mentioned by Italian experts. Spanish experts are interested in manuals about dealing with bullying only (80% mentioning). They are much less interested in other content.

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