



METAPHOR SURVEY: KEY NATIONAL FINDINGS



Project ID: 101132089

The survey was conducted online (Feb–April 2024), it gathered **582 responses** from **Bulgaria** (166), **Croatia** (100), **Germany** (102), **Serbia** (107), and **Spain** (107). Targeting youth aged 13–30, with age-group tailored questions, it ensured diversity in gender, education, and urban/rural backgrounds.

Please note that facts and figures marked with an **asterisk (*)** in the summary or analysis were identified through desk research based on national-level studies, which are detailed in the individual [national reports](#)

BULGARIA

Key Challenges:

- Rising anxiety/depression
- Substance abuse
- Fragmented mental health systems & symptoms-focused approaches

Prevalence rates:

- **64%** of the respondents (16-26 yrs) experience mental health issues (anxiety or depression)
- Only **31%** of respondents aged 16 to 26 have ever sought professional help for their mental health. When looking at all respondents aged 13 to 30, the figure drops even more, to **27,6%**. These are the lowest figures among the partner countries
- Highest EU rates of teen cigarette, cannabis & alcohol use*

Access barriers:

- Anxiety or shame (63%)*
- Not knowing where to seek help (17%)*
- Low rural access
- Fragmented care system

Recommendations:

- Combat stigma through public awareness campaigns
- Strengthen mental health education
- Expand and decentralize access to mental health services
- Foster peer and family support networks

CROATIA

Key Challenges:

- Rising self-harm/ suicide ideation rates
- Low school support and overwhelming academic pressure
- Lack of mental health education

Prevalence rates:

- **73%** of the respondents (16-26 yrs) experience mental health issues (anxiety or depression)
- **60,4%** of the respondents (16-30 yrs) perceive moderate to high stigma surrounding mental health issues. This is the 2nd highest figure among partner countries
- Over **25%** of 16-year-olds in Croatia report having thoughts of self-harm. Alarmingly, almost **1 in 10** have attempted suicide at least once*

Access barriers:

- Lack of mental health resources in their area (**49,7%** do not have proper access)
- Overburdened system, long waiting times
- Financial barriers / funding issues

Recommendations:

- Integrate mental health education in schools
- Increase the number of trained professionals in underserved areas
- Combat stigma through peer-led & public campaigns
- Increase public funding for youth mental health programs



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GERMANY

Key Challenges:

- Increased mental health issues post-COVID
- Intergenerational gap: Discomfort among youth to discuss mental health with adults, despite moderate openness among peers
- Inadequate mental health resources

Prevalence rates:

- **66%** of the respondents (16-26 yrs) experience mental health issues (anxiety or depression)
- **55,7%** of the respondents (16-30 yrs) perceive moderate to high stigma surrounding mental health issues

Access barriers:

- Shortage of mental health professionals
- Financial and insurance barriers
- Stigma: fewer opportunities if mental health issues are on medical records
- Bureaucracy

Recommendations:

- Address the shortage of therapists and long waiting times
- Ensure better access for publicly insured youth & simplify referral processes
- Promote intergenerational dialogue about mental health
- Improve digital literacy to address the mistrust towards digital tools for mental health

SERBIA

Key Challenges:

- Severe gaps in mental health education
- Culture of stigmatization and social judgment
- Lack of services outside urban areas

Prevalence rates:

- **41%** of the respondents (16-26 yrs) experience mental health issues (anxiety or depression)
- **56,7%** of the respondents (13-26 yrs) have personally experienced discrimination based on mental health, while **71%** of 16-30 year olds perceive moderate to high stigma surrounding mental health issues. These are the highest rates across partner countries
- Only **17,4%** have received any education about mental health at school, far below the other partner countries (40-75%)
- **62,7%** of respondents rarely or never talk about mental health with peers or family, which is the lowest across partner countries

Access barriers:

- Services outside urban areas are practically unreachable (**42%** no access)
- Stigma and fear of judgment
- No access to free or affordable counseling

Recommendations:

- Integrate comprehensive mental health education into the school system
- Launch nationwide anti-stigma campaigns
- Increase the number of specialized mental health professionals beyond urban areas
- Leverage technology to help decentralization



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SPAIN

Key Challenges:

- Persistent stigma
- Lack of comprehensive mental health education
- Limited access to mental health services and regional disparities
- Social media and academic pressures

Prevalence rates:

- **52%** of the respondents (16-26 yrs) experience mental health issues (anxiety or depression)
- **50,2%** of the respondents (16-30 yrs) perceive moderate to high stigma surrounding mental health issues

Access barriers:

- Cultural stigma surrounding mental health
- Financial barriers
- Shortage of mental health professionals
- Lack of awareness / information

Recommendations:

- Implement structured mental health education across all school levels
- Expand funding and infrastructure for mental health services
- Launch inclusive awareness campaigns & promote age-sensitive support strategies
- Encourage digital health engagement
- Foster community involvement and peer-led initiatives

Comparative Snapshot - A transnational perspective

- **Mental health matters:** Youth across all five countries increasingly recognize mental health as equally important as physical health.
- **Stigma remains a barrier:** Despite rising awareness, stigma continues to prevent young people from seeking help - especially in Bulgaria and Serbia.
- **Education is key:** All countries call for stronger school-based mental health education, yet access varies widely - with Serbia and Spain lagging.
- **Access gaps persist:** Whether due to geography, funding, or staffing, barriers to care are shared across contexts. Rural areas and underserved regions are particularly affected.
- **Digital tools show promise:** Participants support the use of telehealth and mental health apps, though digital literacy and trust must be improved.

What unites all partner countries?

Young people across Europe want early intervention, open conversations, and community-based support

Our shared goal:

Stronger, stigma-free, and youth-centered mental health systems - built together!