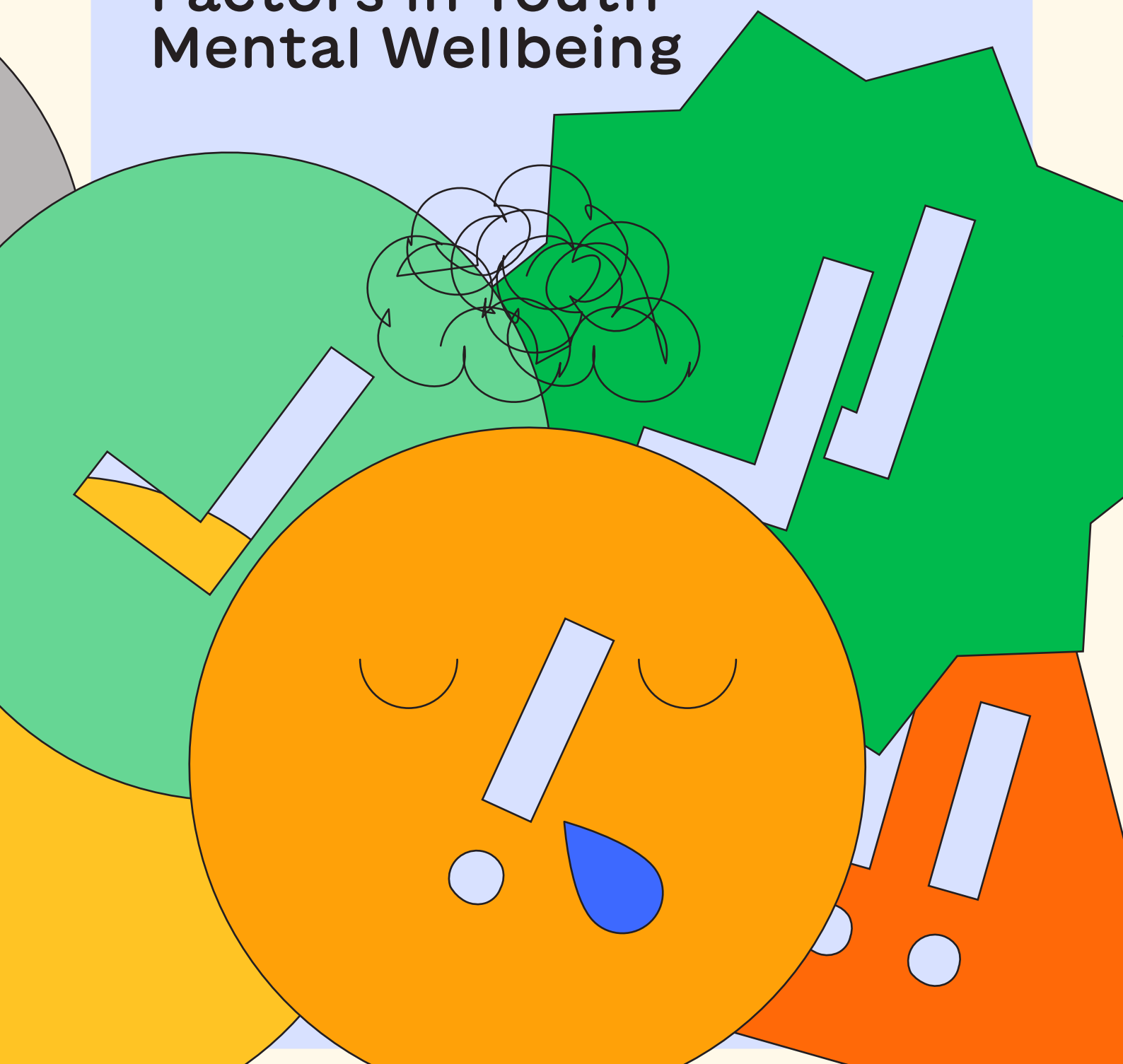


Youth Progress Index

Brussels, Belgium
October 2023

Exploring Social Factors in Youth Mental Wellbeing



Acknowledgements

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About the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. We represent over 100 youth organisations, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

About Social Progress Imperative

The Social Progress Imperative is a US-based nonprofit focused on redefining how the world measures success, putting the things that matter to people's lives at the top of the agenda. Established in 2012, the Social Progress Imperative strives to improve the lives of people around the world by fostering research and knowledge sharing on social progress and using data to catalyse action.

About Mental Health Europe

Mental Health Europe is the largest independent network organisation representing 100+ organisations and individuals active in the field of mental health and psychosocial disability in Europe, including people with lived experience, their supporters, professionals, service providers and human rights experts.

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Trigger warning: The contents of this paper contains mentions of gender-based violence, interpersonal violence, violence against minors, drug use and self-harm.

Structure of the Youth Progress Index

Basic Human Needs

Nutrition and Basic Medical care

- Infectious diseases
- Undernourishment
- Maternal mortality
- Child mortality
- Child stunting

Water and Sanitation

- Dissatisfaction with water quality
- Unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene
- Access to improved sanitation
- Access to improved water source

Shelter

- Dissatisfaction with housing affordability
- Household air pollution
- Usage of clean fuels and technology for cooking
- Access to electricity

Personal Safety

- Women not feeling safe to walk alone
- Money stolen
- Transportation related injuries
- Interpersonal violence
- Intimate partner violence

Foundations of Wellbeing

Access to basic Knowledge

- Women with no education
- Secondary school attainment
- Gender parity in secondary attainment
- Equal access to quality education
- Primary school enrollment

Access to Information and Communication

- Internet shutdown
- Access to online governance
- Internet users
- Mobile telephone subscriptions

Health & Wellness

- Depression
- Satisfaction with availability of quality healthcare
- Healthy life expectancy at 30
- Health problems preventing from activities
- Access to essential health services

Environmental Quality

- Lead exposure
- Outdoor air pollution
- Satisfaction with air quality
- Species protection
- Particulate matter pollution

Opportunity

Personal Rights

- Young members of parliament
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of expression
- Access to justice
- Freedom of religion
- Political rights

Personal Freedom & Choice

- Vulnerable employment
- Freedom over life choices
- Early marriage
- Young people not in education, employment or training
- Satisfied demand for contraception
- Perception of corruption

Inclusiveness

- Community safety net
- Openness towards immigrants
- Opportunity to make friends
- Acceptance of gays and lesbians
- Access to public services in urban and rural areas
- Discrimination and violence against minorities

Access to Advanced Education

- Women with advanced education
- Academic freedom
- Quality weighted universities
- Citable documents
- Expected years of tertiary schooling

153

Countries fully ranked

60

Social and Environmental Indicators

12

Years of Youth Progress mapped

The Youth Progress Index (YPI), produced biennially by the European Youth Forum in partnership with Social Progress Imperative, is the most comprehensive measurement of young people's wellbeing around the world. It examines essential aspects of youth wellbeing, such as access to sufficient food, housing, health services, opportunities to exercise socioeconomic and political rights, sense of inclusion, freedom from discrimination and the safeguarding of their future from environmental threats.

The third edition of the Youth Progress Index brings added value, inspiring young activists to embrace data for their advocacy. An interactive online dashboard allows for easy comparisons between countries and tracks progress over 12 years.

The Youth Progress Index fuels young people's impactful engagement.

Visit www.youthprogressindex.org

Executive Summary

Mental health is a crucial aspect of individual wellbeing. It plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and economic participation, making it an increasingly salient concern across the globe. In the European Union alone, prior to the pandemic, it was estimated that one in six people had a mental health issue; equivalent to around 84 million people.¹

The mental health effects of the pandemic have been particularly acute among young people, who often lack the resources to buffer social and economic shocks.² Their lives have been disrupted in profound ways, causing social isolation and increased anxiety.³ Consequently, the recognition of mental health as a critical concern for young individuals is gaining prominence.

However, the steep social gradients that expose certain social groups to higher risks of encountering mental health issues are often kept out of view. The report highlights the important connection between societal factors and mental wellbeing, emphasising the crucial role of inclusive social environments in promoting positive mental health outcomes.

In particular, the analysis demonstrates that providing opportunities for early education and ensuring equal access to education contributes to promoting better mental wellbeing among youth. It also proves the crucial need for young people to have freedom over life choices, indicating that greater autonomy in decision making influences mental wellbeing positively. As an example, higher levels of unemployment are associated with an increased mental health burden in terms of depression among youth. The report concludes by illustrating the different depression rates across the globe.

It is imperative to recognise the profound impact of mental health on youth and societal progress. Failure to prioritise mental health during this period has been shown to significantly impact overall wellbeing, relationships and future prospects as well as mental health outcomes throughout the life course.⁴

- 1 OECD/European Union (2018), Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels, https://doi.org/10.1787/health_glance_eur-2018-en.
- 2 Beyond lockdown Moxon, D, Bacalso, C, and Şerban, A (2021); Beyond the pandemic: The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe. Brussels. European Youth Forum.
- 3 G Gerry Mitchell, E. Murphy, S. Bojarcz, S. Cohen; Is an EU-wide approach to the mental health crisis necessary?, FEPS POLICY STUDY, 2023.
- 4 Schlack R, Peerenboom N, Neuperdt L, Junker S, Beyer AK; The effects of mental health problems in childhood and adolescence in young adults: Results of the KiGGS cohort. J Health Monit. 2021 Dec 8;6(4):3-19. doi: 10.25646/8863. PMID: 35146318; PMCID: PMC8734087.

Youth Progress Index: Different Factors Influencing Mental Wellbeing

There is a growing understanding that mental health is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, which means that it should not be looked at in isolation. As a result, the Youth Progress Index (YPI) has now added mental health indicators such as 'Depression' into its 2023 edition, to further continue incorporating indicators of mental *wellbeing* into its framework and to shed light on both risk and protective factors. These indicators include housing affordability, access to health services, rates for those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), satisfied demand for contraception, community safety net and the opportunity to make friends.

Indicator name	Definition	Why is it relevant for mental wellbeing?
Access to essential health services	Universal health coverage (UHC) measures the extent of coverage provided by healthcare services, including vaccinations, heart diseases, diabetes, kidney disease and the adverse effects of medical treatment.	UHC means that everyone has access to the healthcare they need without facing financial hardships or stigma.
Intimate partner violence	The percentage of women, aged 15 and older, who have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months.	Intimate partner violence can have severe detrimental effects on mental wellbeing. This indicator sheds light on the risk factors associated with violence and abuse, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the mental health consequences of such experiences.
Interpersonal violence	Rate of healthy years of life lost - Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) - due to interpersonal violence per 100,000 youth aged 15-34. Interpersonal violence is defined as death or disability from intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, from another person or group not including military or police forces.	Interpersonal violence is a significant risk factor for mental wellbeing, leading to trauma and psychological distress. This indicator helps inform prevention strategies and interventions to promote mental health and reduce the burden of related issues related to violence.

Health problems preventing from activities	The proportion of respondents, aged 15-29, answering 'yes' to the question, "Do you have any health problems that prevent you from doing any of the things people your age can do?'"	Health problems can significantly impact the mental wellbeing of young people by limiting their engagement in activities that would represent a determining factor for their physical and mental wellbeing.
Community safety net	The proportion of respondents, aged 15-29, answering 'yes' to the question, "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you, whenever you need them or not?'"	A strong community safety net is crucial for the mental wellbeing of young people, providing social support and protection during challenging times.
Opportunity to make friends	The proportion of respondents, aged 15-29, answering 'satisfied' to the question, "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the opportunities to meet people and make friends?'"	Social connections and friendships contribute to emotional support and a sense of belonging.
Discrimination and violence against minorities	Measurement of minority group grievances, including discrimination, powerlessness, ethnic violence, communal violence, sectarian violence and religious violence. It aims to assess the presence or absence of tensions and conflicts within a society based on these factors.	Discrimination and violence against minorities can profoundly impact the mental wellbeing of young people from marginalised communities.
Internet users	The estimated number of individuals who have accessed the internet within the last 12 months, expressed as a percentage of the total population.	Internet access is relevant for young people's mental wellbeing, as it represents access to information, social connections and mental health support resources.
Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)	This percentage indicates the proportion of youth, between the ages of 15 and 24 years, who are neither employed nor engaged in any form of education or training.	Young people not in education, employment or training may face social exclusion and disempowerment, impacting their mental wellbeing.

Freedom over life choices	The proportion of respondents, aged 15-29, answering 'satisfied' to the question, "In this country are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?'	Freedom over life choices is important for young people's mental wellbeing, as it empowers them to pursue paths aligned with their values and aspirations. This indicator sheds light on the degree of autonomy young individuals have, influencing their mental health outcomes and helping identify risk factors related to feelings of disempowerment and lack of control over life decisions.
Dissatisfaction with housing affordability	The proportion of respondents, aged 15-29, answering 'dissatisfied' to the question, "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing?"	Housing affordability affects the mental wellbeing of young people, as inadequate housing conditions can lead to stress and insecurity. This indicator highlights the importance of affordable and safe housing in promoting mental health outcomes, and can identify risk factors associated with housing-related stress.
Secondary school attainment	The proportion of respondents, aged 25 and over, with at least secondary education.	This indicator highlights the importance of education in promoting mental health, as it can act as a protective factor against various mental health issues associated with limited access to educational opportunities and resources.
Gender parity in secondary attainment	The deviation from gender parity (=1) in the attainment of secondary education between women and men.	Gender equity in education can positively impact social and psychological outcomes

Table 1 shows indicators of the YPI describing risk and protective factors for mental wellbeing.

Several other indicators classically referring to mental health were considered for inclusion in the framework, as listed in the table below. However, statistical analysis found that the indicator on depression rates was statistically aligned with other indicators in the Health and Wellness component of the YPI, as it aggregated relevant indicators. The indicators below have nevertheless been used for additional analyses throughout this report.

Indicators Considered for Mental wellbeing	Indicator Description
Anxiety (DALYs)	Rate of healthy years of life lost - Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) - due to experiences of intense fear and distress in combination with other psychological symptoms among individuals aged 15-34.
Drug Use (DALYs)	Rate of healthy years of life lost - Disability-Adjusted Life Years, (DALYs) - due to drug use among young people aged 15-34.
Severe Mental Problems (DALYs)	Rate of healthy years of life lost - Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) due to various mental conditions, including schizophrenia, anxiety, bipolar condition, autism spectrum and eating conditions, among individuals aged 15-34.
Self-Harm (DALYs)	Rate of healthy years of life - Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) - lost due to deliberate damage inflicted on oneself, leading to death or injury, among individuals aged 15-34.

Table 2 shows the additional mental health indicators used for the purpose of this report.

Mental Wellbeing and Social Inclusion

The study approaches mental health through a social determinants prism, shedding light on the systemic level of social and economic conditions that interact to determine both mental health incidence and outcome. By delving into these factors, the research seeks to demonstrate their relationship with the mental wellbeing of young individuals.

Social inclusion is both a process and an outcome. This goes beyond the narrow conception of inclusion or exclusion in the labour market, and is equally relevant to a number of subsystems with implications for social inclusion, including those linked to culture, leisure time, education and friendship groups.⁵ In a more practical sense, it refers to creating conditions that ensure that everyone - including young people - has equal opportunities to reach their full potential in life.

The report highlights the important connection between societal factors and mental wellbeing, emphasising the crucial role of inclusive social environments in promoting positive mental health outcomes. Highlighting this connection is crucial to understand the impact of both mental health risk factors (e.g., job insecurity) and protective factors (e.g., strong social supports).

The report, using the YPI framework and the additional datasets mentioned above, analyses the correlation between certain social inclusion determinants and depression at a global level. The results show a strong correlation between social inclusion and depression in young people.

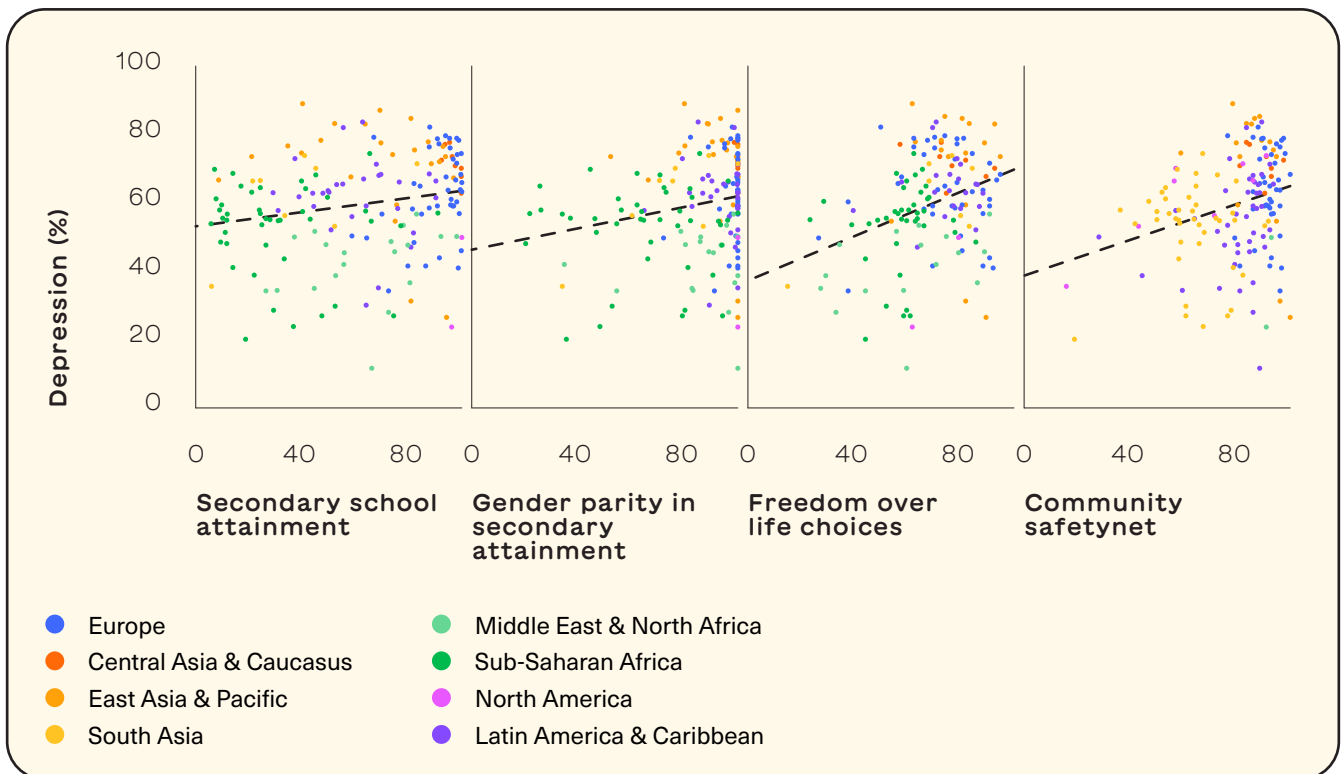


Figure 1 illustrates the correlation between 2022 results of depression rates and four indicators of the YPI representing protective factors (School attainment, Gender parity in school attainment, Freedom over life choices, Community safety net).

5 Cobigo, V. & Ouellette-Kuntz, H., Lysaght, R. Martin, L. (2012); Shifting our conceptualization of social inclusion. *Stigma Research and Action*. 2. 75-84. 10.5463/sra.v1i3.45.

In particular, access to knowledge can be associated with better mental health: scores for secondary school attainment,⁶ while gender parity in secondary school attainment⁷ is positively associated with better results in the depression indicator.

The findings suggest that providing opportunities for early education and ensuring equal access to education can contribute to promoting better mental wellbeing among youth. These results underscore the importance of educational and gender equality policies as crucial factors in supporting positive mental health outcomes for young individuals.

A noteworthy correlation can also be observed between freedom over life choices and depression rate. This indicates that greater autonomy in decision-making, for those to whom this option is available, positively influences mental wellbeing. The findings underscore the importance of enabling young people to make choices aligned with their interests and aspirations for mental health outcomes.

A relevant aspect of the freedom over life choices is the possibility to have greater control over time: time to engage in autonomous activity, free from external influence and control and in the company of those with whom we share strong social relations.⁸

For young people - who are disproportionately represented in insecure forms of work - feelings of uncertainty and instability have been shown to be particularly damaging to their capacity to obtain a sense of control and to determine what happens in their daily lives.⁹ In the EU alone, one in three young people in employment work on a temporary and/or fixed term contract, offering no guarantee in terms of either consistent wage or certainty in hours.¹⁰

Insufficient or sporadic compensation creates financial instability, hindering individuals from meeting essential expenses and planning for the future. These intercon-

nected risk factors significantly influence an individual's overall wellbeing, particularly for those young people embarking on their professional journey, leading to long-lasting consequences. This is particularly true for women who carry out a disproportionate amount of care work, both paid and unpaid.¹¹ Consequently, women are made to take up low-paid jobs, which are often part-time, casual and precarious, which offer few opportunities for advancement.¹²

Related to this, the external analysis reveals a positive relationship between unemployment and DALYs (the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health) attributed to depression among young people. This indicates that higher levels of unemployment are associated with an increased mental health burden in terms of depression among youth. The key causal pathways between this relation include financial strain, stigma, poverty and material deprivation.¹³ The findings emphasise the significance of addressing unemployment rates and creating quality employment opportunities for young individuals as a vital strategy in promoting their mental wellbeing. In this sense, quality encompasses measures that transition away from precariousness, including better regulation of working time, an end to zero-hour contracts, fair remuneration, quality in-work training and adequate space for workers to have a say in their work.¹⁴

It is of equal importance to point out that the association between unemployment and mental health burden is not necessarily straightforward. It is a relation cultivated by social context, dependent on, for example, the extent to which social protection affords an individual the capacity to meet their basic needs outside of employment.¹⁵

6 Population with at least some secondary education (% aged 25 and older).

7 The deviation from gender parity (=1) in the attainment of secondary education between women and men.

8 Coote, A, Harper, A, Stirling, A: The Case for a Four Day Week. United Kingdom: Polity Press, (2020). See also: Fernández-Trujillo, F Gastaldi, P (2022); Generation Austerity: When governments cut budgets, young people suffer, don't do it again. Brussels: European Youth Forum.

9 Irvine, A and Rose, N (2022); How Does Precarious Employment Affect Mental Health? A Scoping Review and Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Evidence from Western Economies, Work, Employment and Society.

10 Ghailani, D, Peña-Casas, R, Coster, S, Regazzoni, P (2021); Access to social protection for young people, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

11 EU Care Atlas, <https://feps-europe.eu/audiovisual/eu-care-atlas/>.

12 Ibid.

13 Irvine, A, Rose, N (2022); How Does Precarious Employment Affect Mental Health? A Scoping Review and Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Evidence from Western Economies, Work, Employment and Society.

14 Sanaullah, N; Future of Work and Youth, European Youth Forum.

15 ILO, (2022) Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022, Investing in transforming futures for young people.



Figure 2 illustrates the correlation between depression rates and unemployment rate (% of total labour force) using 2022 results.

Last, there is a positive correlation evident between community safety nets and depression rates, highlighting the importance of having a support system of relatives and friends during times of need. This finding suggests that when young individuals have a strong network of support to lean on, it assists in their overall mental wellbeing. It is crucial to establish nurturing environments that extend beyond the confines of home, formal education or employment.

Studies have shown that when individuals are active in their communities and have the opportunity to be involved in decision making, it positively impacts their mental health, regardless of their age. Additionally, community actors play a vital role in meeting the mental health

requirements of the population by offering timely and culturally sensitive initial support.¹⁶

The results emphasise the significance of fostering strong social connections and building robust community safety nets for young people, as they play a crucial role in promoting positive mental health outcomes.

In conclusion, fostering educational and gender-equality policies, securing quality employment conditions that provide a fair salary, better regulation on working time¹⁷ and providing adequate support systems can play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of social determinants on young people's mental health.

16 Mental Health Europe, Towards Mentally Healthy Communities Enabling Everybody to Thrive, 2023. <https://www.mhe-sme.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Policy-Recommendations-FINAL.pdf>

17 Sanaullah, N; Future of Work and Youth, European Youth Forum.

A global analysis on depression

While it is important to examine mental wellbeing in a holistic and comprehensive manner, analysing the prevalence of depression offers valuable insights into the global landscape of mental health. It is also important to notice the significant gaps in the available datasets at the regional and global level in the field of mental health and wellbeing. This is particularly important when considering a comprehensive approach that includes age-disaggregated data.

The same challenge persists when it comes to gender-disaggregated data and the representation of other minority groups. Indeed, improving data collection - and taking into consideration intersectionality - can shed light on the experiences and needs of young people who may experience multiple types of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion that could impact their mental health.

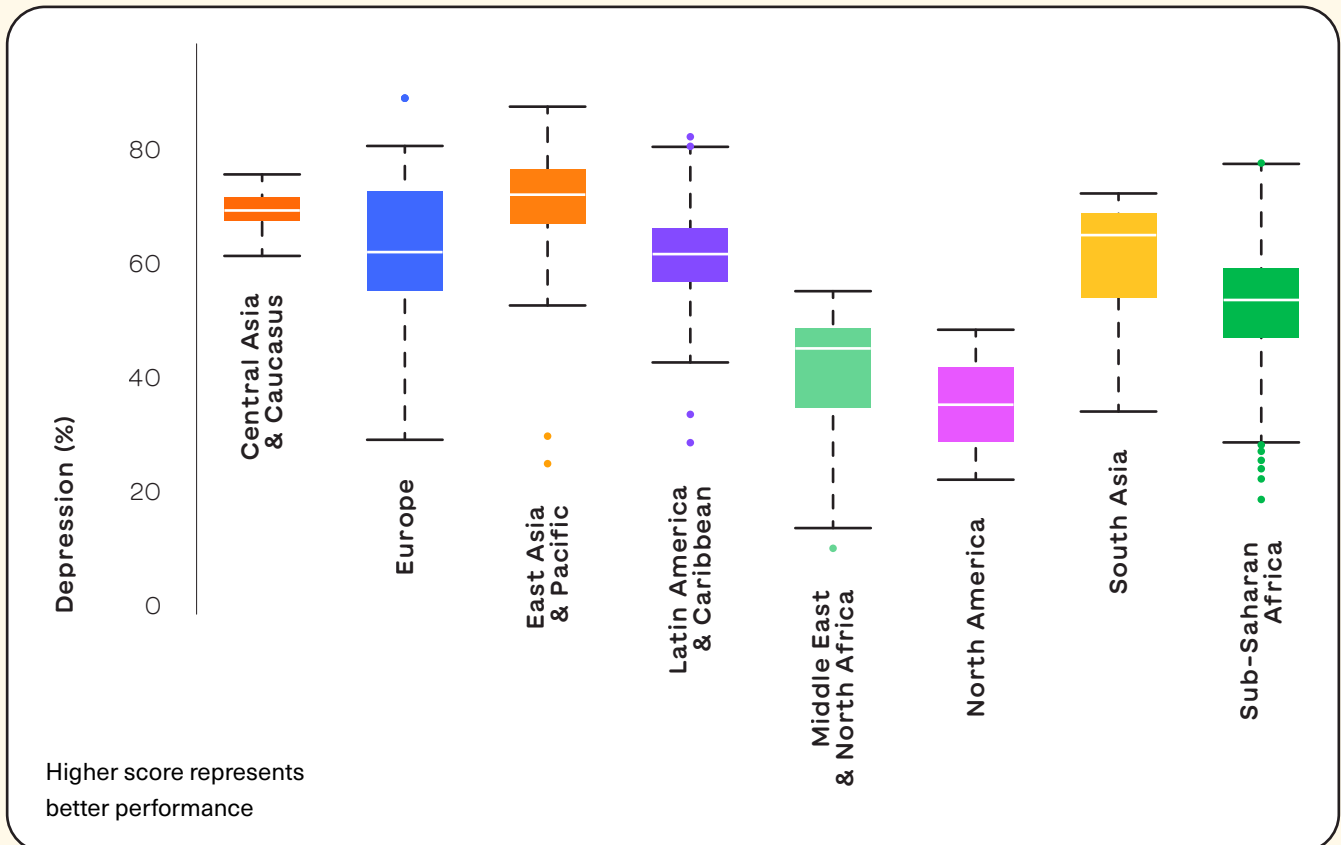


Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of depression rates per region in 2022. The dots represent countries in the region.

By analysing the scores for depression, disaggregated by region, a notable disparity among young individuals becomes evident, highlighting significant variations in the mental state of young people across different regions worldwide. In general, when it comes to depression, young people in the East Asia and Pacific region tend to fare better than those in other regions. The low scores in Australia (26.39) and New Zealand (31.21) stand out as notable exceptions.

European countries exhibit a wide range of scores, with Greece the lowest in the region (34.18). Conversely, North

America and the Middle East and North Africa region show comparatively poorer performances. In the Middle East and North Africa, the United Arab Emirates has the highest score (56.63), while the Occupied Palestinian Territory (11.55) is the worst performers globally. It is important to note that North America comprises solely the United States and Canada; and, while the United States exhibits a poor performance (23.58) in terms of depression among young people, in comparison Canada shows average levels (48.97).

It is also crucial to acknowledge that the assessment of mental health goes beyond the scope of depression alone. While depression scores serves as a significant indicator, a comprehensive measurement of mental wellbeing should also encompass other factors.

Some explanation for the regional patterns of depression among young people is offered by the analysis of scores disaggregated by the YPI tiers.

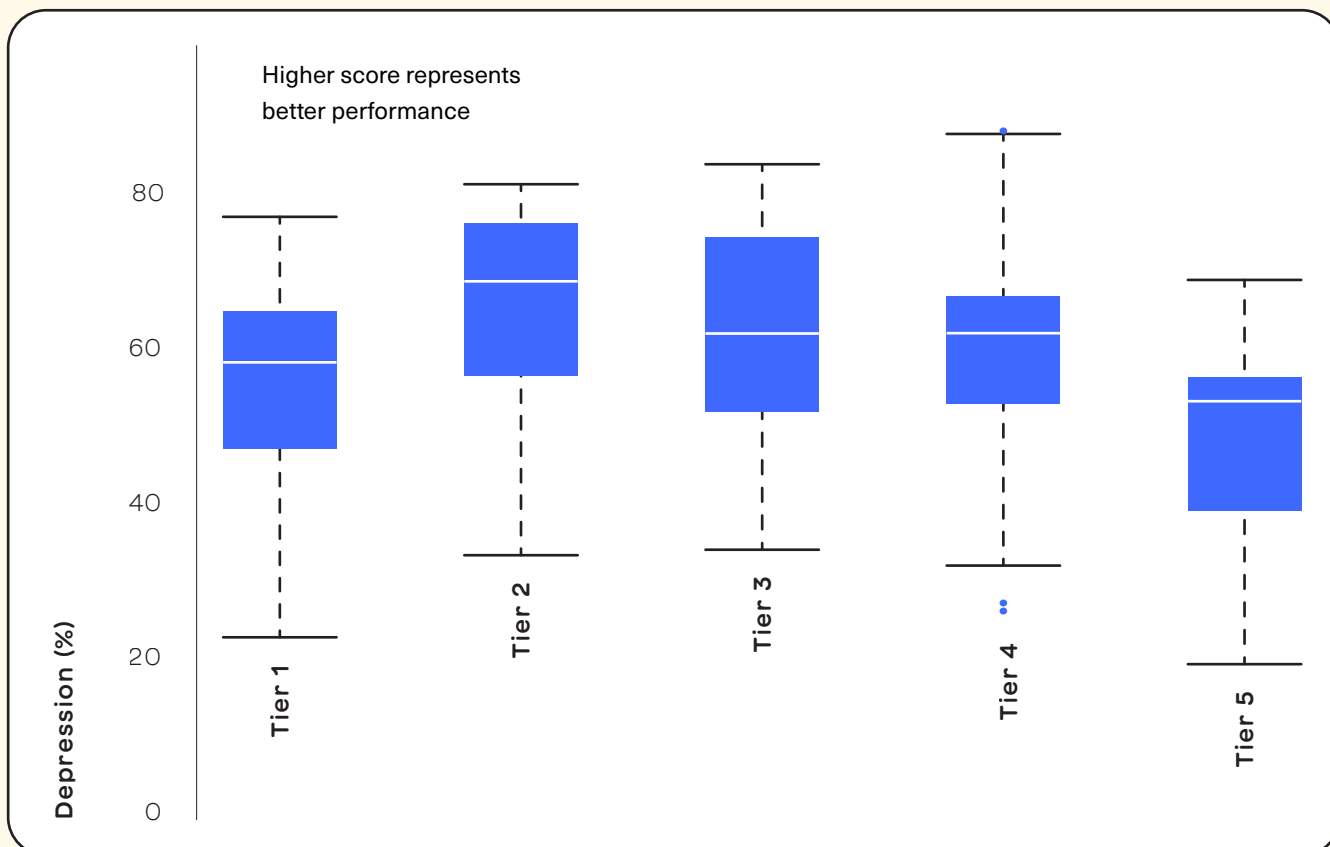


Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of depression rate per Tier of the YPI in 2022 (in Tier 1 the best countries performers, in Tier 5 the worst).

Tier 1 countries¹⁸ are the best absolute performers in youth progress, while tier 5 countries¹⁹ are the poorest performers. The lowest performances in terms of depression are observed in both Tier 5 and Tier 1 counties, suggesting the existence of vastly varying factors that are contributing to high levels of depression among young people. These factors may be attributed to differences in lifestyle or socioeconomic conditions.

Tier 1 countries do not fare much better in other indicators of mental wellbeing for young people, as depicted in

Figure 5 below. In terms of the median, Tier 1 countries stand out with the highest Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) attributed to anxiety, drug use, mental problems and self-harm. The data indicate a lower quality of mental health in those countries demonstrating higher overall youth progress. However, a conclusive assessment requires a more-comprehensive study. Therefore, this outcome points to the need for further investigation in order to better understand the intricate relationship between mental health and overall youth progress.

18 YPI Tier 1 (best absolute performers) in alphabetical order: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Republic of Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States. Refer to the dataset available on www.youthprogressindex.org for the full distribution in tiers.

19 YPI Tier 5 (lowest absolute performers) in alphabetical order: Afghanistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Djibouti, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Togo, Uganda. Refer to the dataset available on www.youthprogressindex.org for the full distribution in tiers.

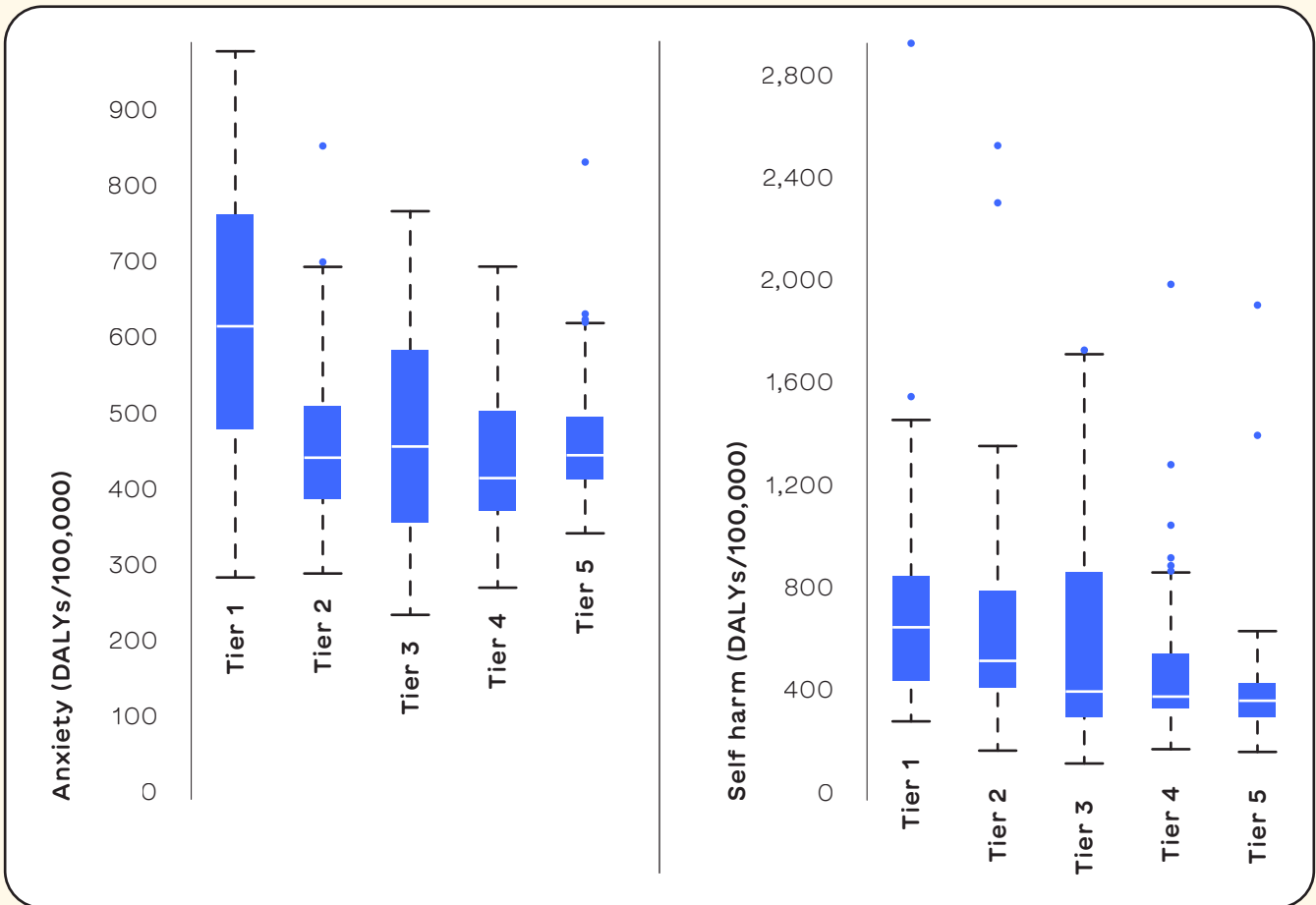
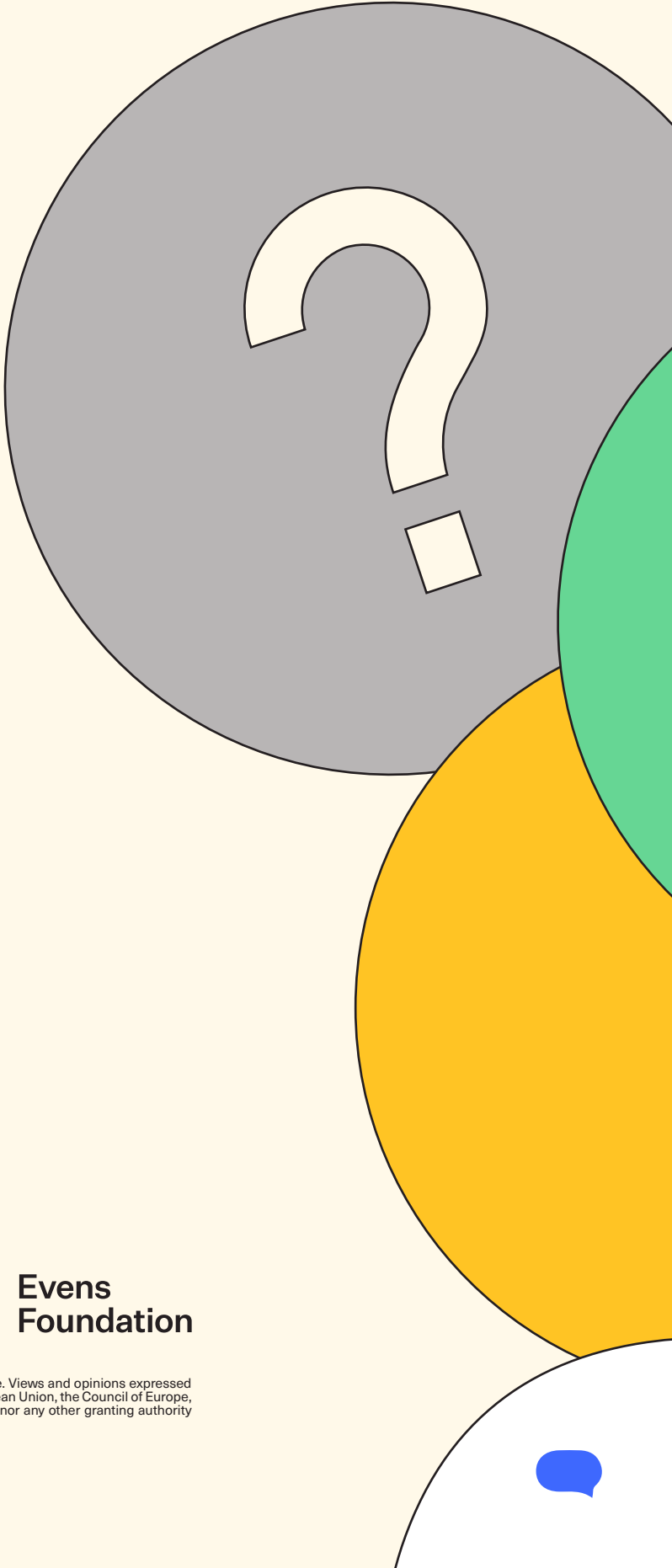


Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of Anxiety and Self Harm (DALYs) per YPI Tier in 2022.

These results should encourage policy-makers and civil society to gather more data to conduct comprehensive investigations to improve the mental health of young people globally.



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