



PIONEERING YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICES  
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

# Youth information needs in the Western Balkans

**Focus group** analysis



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# Abstract

*The primary objective of YinfoPioneers project is to set the basis to develop and expand youth information and counselling services for young people in the Western Balkans. This goal can be achieved by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the specific information requirements of young people and actively involving them in the process of (co)-creating youth information and counselling services. By doing so, youth workers can effectively determine the optimal design and structure of these services in their context.*

Youth Information and Counselling services (YIC) play a vital role in promoting the overall well-being and empowerment of young individuals during their transition into adulthood. The primary goal of YIC services is to empower young people by equipping them with accurate and reliable information, assisting them in making informed decisions, and supporting their personal and social development. **Designing a successful YIC service hinges on understanding and addressing the needs and expectations of the target group**, which comprises individuals aged 15 to 29. To develop YIC services that truly meet the needs of young people, the project consortium led by ERYICA, in collaboration with Åbo Akademi University, conducted a study on the information-seeking behavior of young individuals in four Western Balkan countries. The aim was to **design or co-design the YIC service in a manner that aligns with young people's information needs and their information seeking behavior**.

To accomplish the study's objective, **five focus group interviews** were conducted in **four different countries**: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. A total of **34 young people** from these countries, aged between 15 and 29, participated in in-depth discussions on various aspects, including their knowledge and awareness of YIC services, their information needs, challenges encountered while seeking information, preferences in using YIC services, and factors that could motivate them to use such services more frequently.

Analysis of the data gathered from the focus group interviews revealed that young people require information across a wide range of areas. The most commonly requested areas were

**employment, education, and health**. However, despite their eagerness to obtain information, young people face several significant challenges. These most important challenges were **limited access to reliable information sources**, information overload without proper categorisation, and encountering outdated or false information when searching for information in different areas.

Young people exhibited a preference for **both physical and online sources of information**. They often begin their search by conducting a Google search to gain a general understanding of the topic. However, for more precise and reliable information, they turn to trusted individuals such as youth professionals, family members, or friends. While young people appreciate information presented in multiple formats, they particularly value **text-based information, for sensitive matters**, that allows them to focus while reading. Additionally, visual aids, such as **educational videos, enhancing their understanding**, were highly appreciated.

YIC services can play a crucial role in the lives of young people by providing them with the **information they need** and helping them make informed decisions. To ensure the relevance of these services, it is essential to disseminate content through appropriate channels and actively **promote awareness** among young people. **Collaboration with schools, parents, youth organisations, youth centres**, governmental bodies, and educational institutions creates sustainable connections with young individuals and enhances their awareness regarding the YIC services.

Efforts should be made to improve the awareness and accessibility of YIC services for young people in rural areas and

those with disabilities, aiming to reduce discrimination. The study's findings suggest several solutions to increase awareness and accessibility in rural areas, such as using info vans or implementing joint programs. Additionally, the development of an interactive webpage and mobile application can prove highly effective in reaching and serving this target group.

Furthermore, empowering young people by **enhancing their information and media literacy skills** is of utmost importance. This entails equipping them with the ability to seek information from reliable sources and critically evaluate information before using it. To provide excellent services, youth

workers should possess qualities such as youthfulness, experience, patience, and professionalism, enabling them to effectively engage with young individuals from diverse backgrounds. They also need to be careful about young people's **privacy and confidentiality and the creation of a safe space.**

Given the rapid and ever-changing information and technological landscape, regular monitoring and study of youth information-seeking behavior are necessary. This will enable youth information and counselling services to stay relevant and important to young people, ensuring their continued effectiveness and impact.

# Definition of Youth Information and Counselling

Youth Information and Counselling (YIC) **refers to a range of services and resources specifically designed to meet the needs of young people.** It aims to provide young individuals with accurate, relevant, and reliable information on various topics that are important to their lives (Fedotoff and Pietilä, 2011). The main idea in the provision of services is to provide access to information and counselling services for all young people in the community. The goal is to **ensure the equality of access to information for all young people, regardless of their living situation, or their backgrounds**, for example, ethnic background, gender, or social category, educational background and so on. In addition, special needs of disadvantaged groups of young people, such as people who are living in rural areas or people with disabilities should be included too (European Youth Information

Charter, 2018).

These services should be easily accessible through channels and in formats that young people prefer. In addition, the available information should be primarily based on young people's information needs, therefore, a wide range of resources and guidance related to different areas, such as education, employment, health, personal development, legal rights, social issues, and leisure activities should be covered by YIC services. These services can be provided through different mediums such as websites, hotlines, face-to-face counselling, online chats, social media platforms, and physical centres.

It is also important that the services are free of charge and that information is given in a way that respects young people's privacy and autonomy. Young and professional counsellors or trained youth information workers should be available to address concerns related to different issues, such as mental health, relationships, career choices, personal development, and other areas affecting the well-being of young individuals. YIC services should also be properly connected to other services and professionals to ensure quality youth information, cooperation, and effective referral systems. According to the focus groups, young people feel more understood when youth workers are close to their ages, hence the importance of ensuring peer-to-peer youth information systems.

Youth information and counselling services across Europe are guided by the [European Youth Information Charter](#) (2018), which offers a set of professional principles and guidelines for youth information and counselling work. The Charter contains 30 principles grouped in nine pillars, which define the different elements that characterise quality services (Independent, Accessible, Inclusive, Needs based, Empowering, Participative, Ethical, Professional, and Proactive).

# The YinfoPioneers Project

Under the coordination ERYICA, the consortium is composed of six civil society organisations operating in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Slovenia, as well as a public body in Spain (Catalan Youth Agency). The **YinfoPioneers project** initiated in 2022, and its duration is two years. The essential aim of this project is to promote the access of young people in the Western Balkan countries involved to quality youth information and counselling services by:

- Building the capacity of organisations working with young people outside formal learning;
- Promoting non-formal learning activities in the Western Balkans with the aim of ensuring access of all young people (including those fewer opportunities) to youth information services;
- Supporting the development of youth information work in the Western Balkans by training and resourcing youth workers on the provision of youth information to young people and boosting its recognition and quality; and
- Contributing to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) and the Youth Goals, namely Youth Goal 4 (Information and Constructive dialogue).

Several partners are involved in this project from different countries:

Partners organisations of the project	Country
ERYICA (Coordinator)	Luxembourg
ORC Tuzla	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEREBRA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Forum MNE	Montenegro
Poraka Nova	North Macedonia
Youth Voice Network Organisation	Albania
Drustvo Studentski Kulturni Center	Slovenia
Agència Catalana de la Joventut	Spain



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Our society is characterised by its complexity and the abundance of possibilities and choices it offers. This can be overwhelming, especially for younger generations who often require guidance and support to navigate through the available options and utilize them effectively. Without such assistance, many individuals may struggle to fully capitalise on the opportunities presented to them. Additionally, as young people seek to establish their independence and explore new roles, they often distance themselves from adults, including their parents, which can inadvertently remove them from valuable advice and support during this critical stage of development (Amato and Afifi, 2006). It is crucial, therefore, to provide adequate guidance and support in a manner that resonates with young people's preferences, such as in their preferred language and format (Faché, 2012). **Youth Information and Counselling (YIC) services play a vital role in offering the necessary support and guidance to empower young individuals to make informed decisions and take charge of their lives**, particularly when they encounter unique challenges and issues (Karim et al., 2021).

Furthermore, young people often experience heightened levels of stress and anxiety due to the need to make significant life decisions and find their path forward (Gulliver et al., 2010). YIC services should provide a safe and confidential space for young people to express their concerns, receive emotional support, and access appropriate resources. Early intervention and support can help prevent further escalation of problems and promote overall well-being.

Given that young people face diverse challenges and require different forms of support and guidance, YIC service providers must ensure that their services align with the needs and expectations of their target users (DesYIgn project, 2019). This alignment enhances the usability and effectiveness of YIC services among young people. Therefore, prior to establishing a YIC service, it is essential to conduct thorough needs assessments, which involve investigating young people's awareness of available services, their information needs, challenges in the information-seeking process, expectations of a YIC service, motivations for utilising such a service, and other factors that may influence their engagement. Bridging the gap between research and practice in this area is of utmost importance (Agosto, 2019). Comprehensive needs assessments, which can be conducted through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or other methods, play a crucial role in understanding the targeted youth population's specific information and counselling needs.

This report is part of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project *YinfoPioneers - Pioneering youth information services in the Western Balkans*, coordinated by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). The project aims to lay the foundation for the development and expansion of YIC services in the Western Balkans, and this report presents the findings from an information and counselling needs assessment conducted through five focus group interviews with young people in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

The overarching motivation behind the project is the recognition that while some specialised information services exist in the Western Balkans, there are no national structures in place for generalist youth information services that ensure universal access to

quality information and counselling for young people. Young individuals, especially those facing fewer opportunities or residing in remote areas, face significant information gaps regarding essential aspects of their daily lives, including healthcare, participation, mobility, education, employment, special support, protection, and more. The project therefore aims to promote the integration of the right of young people to information in national youth strategies.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

The main goal of this study was to **broaden the knowledge and understanding regarding youth information-seeking behavior** and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of youth information services **according to young people's needs** and expectations in Western Balkan countries.

To meet the aim of the study, five focus group interviews were conducted locally, using the participants' native language, and subsequently translated into English for broader dissemination to help project partners to understand how young people prefer to seek, collect, and use information on a daily base, and to find out how a youth information and counselling service could be established, modified or improved to better match the information needs of young people.

The outcomes and findings of these focus groups will be compiled to support the project partners in the development of YIC services in their respective countries and to be disseminated to local, regional, and national decision-makers. The intention is for these results to serve as a valuable guide and advocacy tool, highlighting the identified needs and challenges faced by young people in the region and advocating for necessary actions and support to address those needs effectively.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology section briefly explains the main reasons supporting use of focus group interviews as a method of collecting data in this study and how these focus group interviews were designed and conducted.

## 3-1 The focus group method and material

Qualitative study methods often led to the discovery of greater details of human behavior in comparison to quantitative study methods. This study applies a focus group interview method to collect data from young people regarding their information seeking behavior in their daily life. Focus group interviews refer to “a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being ‘focused’ on a given topic” (Rabiee, 2004). Participants in the focus group interview are selected on the criteria that they would have something to share on the topic, they are within the specific age range, have similar socio-characteristics, and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and discussing with each other on the predetermined topic (Richardson and Rabiee, 2001).

Focus group interviews often make it possible to collect deeper and richer information and it gathers individuals from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, which enriches the data collected. It helps researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the range of opinions and experiences. In addition, peer influence, group dynamic and the social interaction of people in the group facilitate sharing ideas for participants (Doody et al., 2013).

This project aims to collect rich and deep data from young people in the age range of 15 to 29 years old regarding their information seeking behavior. Age range and topic is clear. In addition, the intimacy of being in a group can help young people to be inspired and express their ideas, thoughts, and feeling better. Another reason to support using focus group interviews for this study was the limited period of time for the whole project. Since focus groups interviews enabled us to generate large amounts of data in a relatively short time span, the findings could be used to precede quantitative procedures (Rabiee, 2004). Aside from all the reasons supporting focus group interviews, this method was cost-effective too. Therefore, this study has conducted five focus group interviews among young people in four different countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

## 3-2 The design of the focus group interview

The focus group sessions were conducted collaboratively by partners from various Western Balkans countries, with the design of the sessions developed by a researcher from Åbo Akademi University in Finland, in cooperation with ERYICA (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency). The primary objective of this research was to identify the information needs, preferences, and aspirations of young people in the Western Balkan countries participating in the project.

To collect data on young people’s perception of youth information and counselling services,

their everyday information-seeking behavior, and the possible development of the service to help reach out to more young people, the unified theory objective of acceptance and use of technology was used, along with another three appropriate constructs, which were: Awareness, Access, and Information Need Fulfilment. The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) is a technology acceptance model formulated by Venkatesh aims to explain user intentions to use an information system and subsequent usage behavior (Venkatesh et. al. 2003). The project partners endeavour to promote the YIC services and expand their reach and will engage young people to co-design the service in the later phases of the project, therefore these constructs were added. This theory has been used in several studies, for example Lwoga et al. (2017) have used this theory to test existing UTAUT variables and potentially identify additional variables impacting student information seeking behavior.

One major reason to use UTAUT theory is the large transformation of information seeking to virtual processes (DesYIgn project, 2019). However, this study will consider both virtual and physical information seeking behavior. The focus groups included seven main questions and 20 sub-questions regarding **Awareness, Information Needs fulfilment, Access, Performance Expectancy, Evaluation, Effort Expectancy, and Hedonic motivations.**

Participants were mainly recruited through convenience sampling methods. The study was promoted for young people in each country, then interested and eligible people were selected to participate. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and participants had a right to leave the study at any point they wished. Before starting the focus group interview, participants received oral and written explanations about the study, including its aim, data collection process, and details about their data security and privacy.

The five interview sessions took around 1.5 hours each and allowed all the participants to contribute with their own views and thoughts about the topic. Data was collected in the participants’ mother tongue in each country in an audio format. The *YinfoPioneers* partner organisations transcribed and translated data into English language. Data were analysed thematically, and findings from focus groups are in the following sections. This report includes background information of participants from four Western Balkan countries.

A total of 34 young people from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia participated in the interviews. The respondent group had 23 females and 11 males. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 29 with an average age of 19. In more details, 18 were 15 to 19 years old, 14 were 20 to 24, and only two were 25 to 29. While 24 of them were students, six were unemployed, and four of the participants were employed in full-time or part-time occupations. Out of respondents, 16 were from a small city or the countryside, 11 were from a large city, and seven a medium-sized city. Participants had different marital statuses, while 24 were single, seven preferred not to say, two were in a relationship and only one was married. More details in *Table 1*.



Table 1: Background information

Type of information	Categories	Subcategories	N
<b>Age</b>	15 – 19		18
	20 – 24		14
	25 – 29		2
<b>Gender</b>	Female		23
	Male		11
	Don't want to specify		0
	Other		0
<b>Country of residence</b>	Albania		6
	Bosnia and Herzegovina_1		8
	Bosnia and Herzegovina_2		8
	Montenegro		6
	North Macedonia		6
<b>Country of origin</b>	Albania		6
	Bosnia and Herzegovina_1		8
	Bosnia and Herzegovina_2		8
	Montenegro		6
	North Macedonia		5
	Serbia		1
<b>Education (highest degree)</b>	Primary education		6
	Secondary education		0
	High school		23
	Bachelor's degree		5
	Master's degree		0
	Higher than Master's degree		0
<b>Living Area</b>	Countryside / Small town		16
	Medium sized city		7
	Large city		11
<b>Occupation</b>	Only student		24
	Employed	Content creator	1
		Entrepreneur	1
		Employed in a company	1
		Health mediator	1
	Unemployed		6

<b>Income range</b>	None		23
	Under 100 Euros		2
	Between 100-200 Euros		1
	Above 200 Euros		5
	Under 500 Euros		1
	500-1000 Euros		1
	Above 1000 Euros		0
	Prefer not to say		1
<b>Marital status</b>	Single		24
	Married		1
	In a relationship		2
	Prefer not to say		7

In the following sections, there is the overall analysis, all focus group interview results together, to give a collected view, and in the end, the individual focus group results are presented per focus group.

## 4. RESULTS

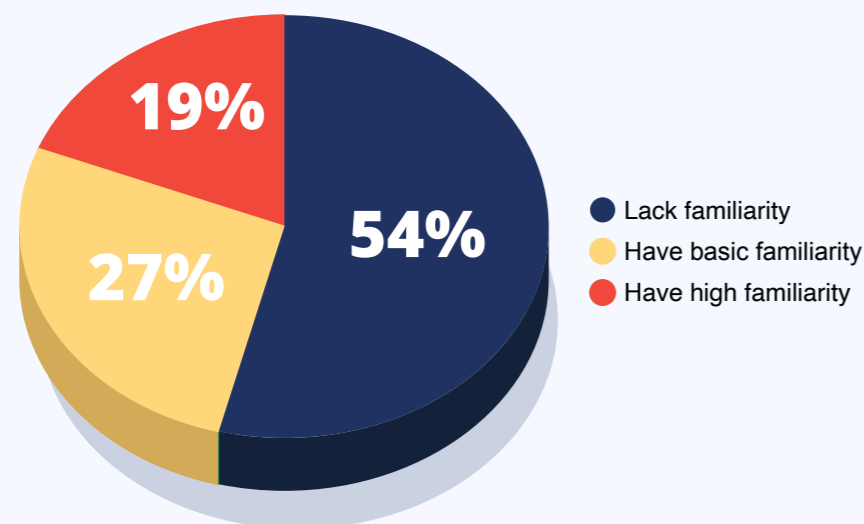
In this section, participants' answers from all five focus groups are analysed and divided into seven different sub-sections.

### 4-1 Awareness

In this study, the concept of awareness pertains to the level of knowledge among young people in Western Balkan countries regarding YIC services. The aim was to understand if the focus group participants knew about such services, why they exist, what their utilities are, if they already know about the service and if so, how did they know, and so on. The questions that moderated the discussion were:

- i. How many participants in this focus group study were aware of YIC services.
- ii. What they knew about these services.
- iii. What kind of support services they had already used.
- iv. What solutions are suggested by participants to tackle these challenges.

There are different levels of familiarity with YIC services. While most of the focus group participants, **54% lack familiarity** with YIC services, about a quarter, **27% have basic familiarity** and the rest, **19%, have high familiarity**.



However, the level of familiarity with YIC services varied across different countries. Specifically, **participants from rural areas and small towns in each country demonstrated a lower level of awareness** regarding the existence of YIC services and were less clear about the

range of services they offer.

The young people who were aware of the service came to know about it mostly from **their personal network (e.g., friends or family), school, media, or working experience in one YIC service in their country** (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina 1). Next mentioned sources were **virtual groups, such as Viber groups** (e.g., Montenegro). This virtual group is a platform for sharing information related to young people by authorities. Group members can find information and select it according to their needs.

The informed participants have experiences of using YIC services regarding:

- Using **non-formal learning techniques**, such theater learning method,
- Participating in **job-related services**, such as courses about jobs, promotion opportunities, CV clinics or LinkedIn profile design,
- Participating in **youth clubs, different workshops, and seminars**,
- Using **counselling services**,
- Obtaining information in **legal issues**,
- Obtaining information in **entertainment matters**, such as different local cultural events or international events.

While they knew it is a centre to help and guide young people, they also agreed these services do not exist properly in the participants' living areas or in the country that they live. Or the available services are not visible enough for them. So far **insufficient promotion methods have been used** to promote available services.

An interesting fact is that all participants with basic familiarity or those who were not familiar with YIC services were interested to know more about these services and have access to them and use their offer and support actively. When asked **how to make it more visible**, several **solutions** were suggested by the focus group participants:

- » One practical solution is to make a **connection and cooperation with different sectors**, such as municipalities, schools, faculties (their youth boards), and non-governmental organisations. It can be done by physical presence and visibility in those spaces to make it easier for young people to know about these services and use them. This indicates that cognitive authorities need some interconnection to build trust and confidence. It means, even though youth information and counselling services are perceived to be a reliable source of information by the youth, to raise awareness among most of them, affiliation and connection with other possible cognitive authorities could be effective in making the youth aware and encouraging them to use the service. The **role of schools and teachers is more highlighted** since the students apparently trust the experience and expertise of the teachers.
- » Second suggested solution is to promote the YIC services via **online platforms**, such as social media. The most trusted social media platforms are **Instagram and TikTok** for young people, especially **if young influencers promote these services** and their offer. It is important to know which social media platform should be used to reach out to a maximum number of young people in each country and persuade them about the usefulness of the YIC services. Several steps could be followed to

make sure about effectiveness of promotion via use of social media platforms:

1. Goal should be defined; what kind of information we are going to share.
2. Target audience should be identified. In the case of promoting YIC service, the audience are young people (15 - 29).
3. Select appropriate platforms: the social media platforms should align best with your target audience. According to this study, platforms like Instagram, TikTok are the best platforms. Viber and Facebook are in second place.
4. Find followers and enhance their number and try to stay on top of their news feeds.
5. Develop engaging content: create content that resonates with the youth and motivates them to interact, share, and participate. Using visual content, such as images, videos, and infographics, as they tend to perform well on social media should be considered.
6. Find the best time to post.
7. Balanced number of posts
8. Leverage influencers: collaborate with social media influencers who have a significant following among the youth.
9. Stay consistent: building a longer-term social media presence takes time and consistency. Maintain a regular posting schedule and ensure your content remains relevant and engaging.
10. Stay updated with the latest social media trends and adapt your strategy accordingly to keep up with the changing preferences of the youth.

In the case of using social media to promote YIC services, regularly track the performance of your social media efforts using analytics tools provided by the platforms. Monitor key metrics such as engagement, reach, follower growth, and website traffic. Analyse the data to identify trends and make informed decisions about content optimization and platform selection.

YIC services can be promoted via **different webpages on the Internet**. Some webpages are interesting for youth, YIC services can be promoted in those kinds of pages.

- » Third solution is sending **emails** to all students in different schools or universities all around the country. This is a solution to share information in a fair way to all the students, as long as everyone has an active email account. YIC services can send emails several times a year to all students and remind them of the available support services or send them critical information. This solution requires strong partnership with the educational institutions. However, it does not address young people who are not in education.
- » Fourth solution is to promote YIC service via traditional methods, such as using **flyers, posters, or participating in local events**. YIC service could have a booth in different local and cultural events usually attended by young people to promote

themselves and introduce their services to young people.

- » Fifth solution is to promote YIC services on **TV or radio**. Although young people do not watch TV or listen to the radio, their parents do. Thus, promoting the services on TV and via radio stations might be considered too.
- » **Peer-to-peer youth information and outreach (word of mouth)** is also a very important channel to promote YIC. Word of mouth is very useful, seeing **successful results of other young people using the service**, motivates and persuades other young people to get to know YIC services and use their services.
- » Consider the role **of parents**. Parents should be informed about the usefulness of YIC services. This informing process can be done with the help of schools. The role of parents becomes more critical in the case of rural youth or young people with disabilities. In addition, in some cultures, parents have a very strong role in their youngsters' life. Parents can encourage their children to use YIC services.

An important fact is that these **promotion activities should be done frequently and via multiple channels** to increase visibility and interest in an effective way.

Before defining any promotional strategy, each country should make sure that there are **available YIC services in each city** close to the city centre, in places where everyone can easily access, and online.

Main findings	Recommended action
Inadequate awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Connection and cooperation with different sectors</b>, such as municipalities, schools, faculties (their youth boards), and non-governmental organisations.</li> <li>» Promote via <b>social media, mostly Instagram and TikTok</b>. Promote with the help of well-known influencers. Follow the strategy.</li> <li>» Promotion via webpages.</li> <li>» <b>Send bulk emails</b> to students.</li> <li>» Use traditional promotion methods, such as <b>flyers or posters</b>.</li> <li>» <b>Promote the YIC services in different events</b>.</li> <li>» <b>Share success stories</b>.</li> <li>» <b>Inform parents</b> regarding the usefulness of YIC services.</li> </ul>

## 4-2 Information needs fulfilment

Young people with **different backgrounds** participated in this study and they had **different information needs** and faced **various challenges** in their information seeking process. This section discusses the most relevant information areas for young people, what other topics they would like to have at youth information and counselling services, how they want to collect information from the service and what challenges they face in the process. The questions were:

- i. What type of information that participants would like or need to receive from YIC service.
- ii. What challenges participants have faced while seeking information.
- iii. What solutions could be used to tackle the mentioned challenges.

### ➡ Type of required information

Different types of information are required by the focus group participants. They wished YIC services to provide them with information related to:

- » Both **formal and non-formal education** considering aspects such as scholarships, enrolment in college or university, mobility abroad, etc. In total, information related to higher education is very effective in young people's lives.
- » **Employment opportunities**, career counselling, internships, and volunteering.

**Education and employment related information were the most important domains that all the focus group participants from four countries were interested to have access to.**

- » **Health-related information**, both physical health and mental health. Young people today face numerous stressors that can have detrimental effects on both their physical and mental well-being. It is crucial to enhance their understanding of health issues as it empowers them to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This knowledge is especially vital for young individuals hailing from low-income families, those residing in rural areas, and those with disabilities.

Around 70 percent of focus group participants in all countries with exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) were interested to receive health-related information.

- » **Events**, including local cultural events or international events (15%).
- » **Personal development or independence**, such as how to be prepared for their future, renting a place, etc (13%). Personal development and independence are of utmost importance as they enable individuals to cultivate their skills, broaden their horizons, and confidently navigate life's challenges, fostering self-growth and fulfillment.
- » **Entertainment and leisure activities**, such as concerts, different parties for students (12%).
- » **Legal matters**: focus group participants are mostly interested to have information about labor law since they are trying to enter the job market. Also, legal issues regarding starting a business (10%).
- » **Traveling** inside their countries or abroad (4%).
- » Different **sport** fields, such as how to join different fields, news on different matches, etc (3%).
- » **Political issues**, democratic participation, and their role in their country or community (3%).

- » Different **organizations and their aims**. There are several organisations in each country, and they offer various services. Focus group participants were interested to know about the organisations, their aims, and the services they provide. This awareness will increase young people's knowledge and help them to use available services in their society (3%).
- » **Other information** such as economy, ecology, art, etc (3%).

All in all, most participants believe that **a successful and useful YIC service should cover all the important topics**. They believe that a YIC service should give them access to all necessary information categorized based on topics and areas of interest for young people, otherwise, it would not fully fit the purpose of a YIC service, and young people will not be interested in using the YIC service.

### ➡ Challenges of information seeking

However, focus group participants were interested in using a YIC service to seek different types of information, they faced several challenges in the information seeking process. Some of the challenges are external, while some others are internal, limiting young people's access to reliable and useful information on time. External challenges are more significant than internal ones.

#### External challenges

- » The first and main challenge for most focus group participants is lack of reliable information resources in their hometown or in their home country. More than 50 percent of focus group participants mentioned this issue. They stress the **lack of proper and reliable sources of information both online and offline**. For example, there are no physical centres or comprehensive online info portals.
- » Second important challenge for the focus group participant is **high availability of irrelevant, unreliable, incomplete, or misleading information**. Although many different sources try to be informative and provide valid information, there is high availability of irrelevant, unreliable, incomplete, or misleading information. This type of information is abundant and problematic, as it constitutes an obstacle to access the actual information that they require. The focus group participants highlighted the **information overload** they face, which might lead to **information avoidance or information fatigue**. These challenges are mentioned by 18 percent of the focus group participants.
- » Third challenge relates to **improper design of online info portal**, such as complexity of webpage or bad visibility, which makes it difficult to seek information and use it. For example, information is not categorised based on different topics, or is outdated, which is confusing or misleading for young people. It takes young people **too much time and energy to find the information they need**. And in some cases, it is impossible to find the information. About 9 percent of the focus group participants mentioned this challenge.
- » Fourth problem is **sharing information without any logic**. For example, focus group participants in some countries, such as Montenegro faced **unfair or**



**selective distribution of information.** They mentioned that in their country reliable information is only available for a specific group of people. For example, organisations inform only their relatives regarding employment opportunities. In this case most young people face misinformation or outdated information. In such cases, important information is hidden from a noticeable proportion of the society. About 6% of the focus group participants mentioned this challenge.

### Internal challenges

While external challenges are undoubtedly significant, it is important to recognise that focus group participants also grapple with internal obstacles that can hinder their information utilisation. Although internal challenges may be perceived as less pressing than external ones, addressing them is essential for empowering young people to fully leverage the available information resources and enhance their overall information usage.

- » The main and most significant internal challenge is related to **low levels of media and information literacy skills.** Information literacy refers to an ability to seek, evaluate, use, and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational, and educational goals (Tewell, 2015). And media literacy is “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (Livingstone, 2004). Some focus group participants mentioned that they never received any education on how to obtain and evaluate information. Some participants lack **competences and capacities to seek for information and identify reliable sources** and to evaluate the information in ways that are useful and appropriate to their needs. They mentioned that they do not trust themselves regarding evaluating different information sources. Approximately 21% of the focus group participants highlighted this challenge.
- » Another internal challenge only mentioned by 3% of participants is **lack of motivation to seek information.**

### ➡ Solutions to tackle information seeking challenges.

Plenty of internal and external challenges limit focus group participants to obtain and use necessary information. To overcome these information seeking challenges the focus group participants suggested several solutions:

- » There should be **a reliable and complete source of information providing clear and verified information on all the topics** that concern them. To facilitate young people’s information-seeking process, they need access to reliable sources, which provides them with verified and up-to-date information.
- » Available **information should be organised and categorised according to different topics**, which makes it easier for young people to seek information and use it. In addition, topic-based categories make it possible to have a quick information seeking process.
- » There should be **direct contact information**, such as hotline, phone numbers or email addresses to YIC services, as an easy way to obtain reliable information, which young people can rely on and ask their questions, especially in urgent situations.

- » There should be **guidance and support** on how to seek information and how to recognise reliable information from unreliable one.
- » Information should be equally available and accessible for everyone. As **information is key to access opportunities**, it is fair that all young people have the same chance to access reliable sources of information.
- » **Physical presence of a YIC office in educational institutions**, such as schools or universities increases young people’s awareness and access to these services.
- » There should be a **filtering system to remove unreliable information** and make it possible for young people to only access valid information. Youth information services should accomplish this filtering mission and provide information which does not require further verification.

Main Findings	Recommended action
Information is mostly required in <b>education, employment, and health</b> areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement activities should be planned according to the information needs trends.</li> </ul>
Information seeking challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of proper and reliable sources of information.</li> <li>• Sharing information without categorizing them.</li> <li>• High availability of irrelevant, unreliable, incomplete, or misleading information.</li> <li>• Sharing information without logic</li> <li>• Information overload.</li> <li>• Low level of media and information literacy skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create reliable sources of information.</li> <li>• Categorize information.</li> <li>• Share information in a fair way.</li> <li>• Keep information up to date.</li> <li>• Availability of a direct contact information, such as hotline.</li> <li>• Availability of proper support and guidance for young people, such as information or media literacy education.</li> </ul>

## 4-3 Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the **quality of being available when needed** (Zhang, 2014), is discussed from the viewpoint of focus group participants. This section discussed the **level of ease in accessing the service, both physical and virtual.** The discussion involved questions such as:

- ? What are young people’s preferences to have access to YIC services either physical or online.
- ? How to increase accessibility for vulnerable groups, for those who live in small villages, and for those with disabilities? These groups might face specific challenges in accessing both physical and online YIC services.



Young people express a desire for diverse sources of YIC services, encompassing both physical and online platforms. Given the sensitive nature of youth information and its profound impact on their present and future, it is essential to ensure its availability and accessibility in the formats that align with their preferences and desired modes of communication.

About **38%** of the focus group participants see the **advantages of online youth information if it is combined with offline services**. They mention that each source is suitable for specific types of needs, therefore their need for information can be met more probably when there is a possibility to have access to both online and offline YIC services. Some of the participants expressed their preference for accessing information online first and then attending a physical centre for more precise and individualized information. They believe that having access to both kinds of sources increases the possibility of obtaining timely and reliable information.

Approximately **37%**, prefer to have access to **only physical YIC services**. And they had a high level of **trust on information received directly from a physical centre**. These centres should be in city centres, close to municipalities, and visible for everyone. Several reasons supported willingness to have access to a physical YIC centre:

- » They believe that it is less confusing for them when they go to a place and ask for information in person. **A face-to-face meeting reduces misunderstanding and misinterpretation** and helps young people to find proper information and solve their problems.
- » A physical YIC service would give young people an opportunity to have **human interactions and a personal contact with a youth information worker** especially if the youth workers are young too. This would allow them to share their ideas and discuss them with other people and hear different new insights.
- » A physical YIC service would provide young people with the **opportunity to meet other young people** with similar interests, needs or concerns, leading to sharing ideas, social interactions, and higher chances of finding a good solution for their problem.
- » Some of the focus group participants believe that a physical YIC service can provide them with answers to their different questions faster.

On the other hand, some focus group participants, approximately **25%**, prefer to have access **only to online services**. Some young people are predominantly looking for information on the Internet via Google, so it is necessary to make youth information content available in **Google searches**. Further, social **media platforms** such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are important for sharing information and promoting the YIC services and communicating via instant messaging. **Videocall** and online discussion forums are options for having in-person discussion without movement. These options are good for people living in small towns or the countryside and for people who would like to have fewer human interactions. Online options could be useful for people with disabilities too. Several reasons support wishes to have access to online YIC services:

- » Online sources are **more in line with the current digitalized lifestyle**. It is much easier and faster to search for information on a digital platform. Since everything is developing very fast, it is more reasonable to use a source which supports fast and

easy access.

- » Preparing an online YIC service and establishing it is indeed more straightforward and has a clear potential **for reaching out to more young people**.
- » Online youth information establishment could be **more cost-effective** compared to a physical one to a certain extent, though organisations and funding bodies must consider that **an effective online youth information platform does require resources and investment to succeed**. Online does not always mean cheaper.
- » In case of having online services, young people from all around the country can have access to the YIC services (**countrywide accessibility**), though even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century access to high-speed internet is not yet a reality in all communities and geographies. In addition, digital platforms should also meet certain accessibility and universal access criteria to reach out to certain groups with special needs.
- » Seeking information online provides young people with **more privacy**. They do not need to interact with others and share their personal issues.
- » Online services are a proper way to meet the needs of introverted people, or those who are suffering from social anxiety.

### ➔ Accessibility in rural areas

It is difficult to establish a YIC service in rural areas. The population in some villages is very low and it is not cost-effective to establish physical centres in such small communities. Focus group participants suggested several options to facilitate access of youth in rural areas to YIC service and offer them the opportunity to benefit from them:

- » One option is to have a youth **info van** especially during special occasions, such as cultural events, when everyone is in the village, and they can use the van's service.
- » Another good option to help young people in rural areas to have access to information is to establish an **online service** and educate them how to seek for information and evaluate it in an online platform. The reach of YIC services could be significantly enhanced through the implementation of a **web-based platform or mobile application**, provided that young people in rural areas have access to a reliable network connection.
- » Another effective solution is to **establish YIC services in small cities**, making them easily accessible to young people residing in nearby villages. Promoting information about these centres can be achieved through word of mouth, leveraging the support of schools and teachers as key advocates.
- » Central YIC services in larger cities can collaborate on **joint programs** specifically designed for villages, effectively introducing YIC services to young people residing in those areas. Additionally, digital technologies provide valuable opportunities to establish personalised connections with young individuals in rural areas, such as offering online appointments and instant messaging capabilities, ensuring ongoing communication and support.
- » Several focus group participants emphasised the significance of **parental**

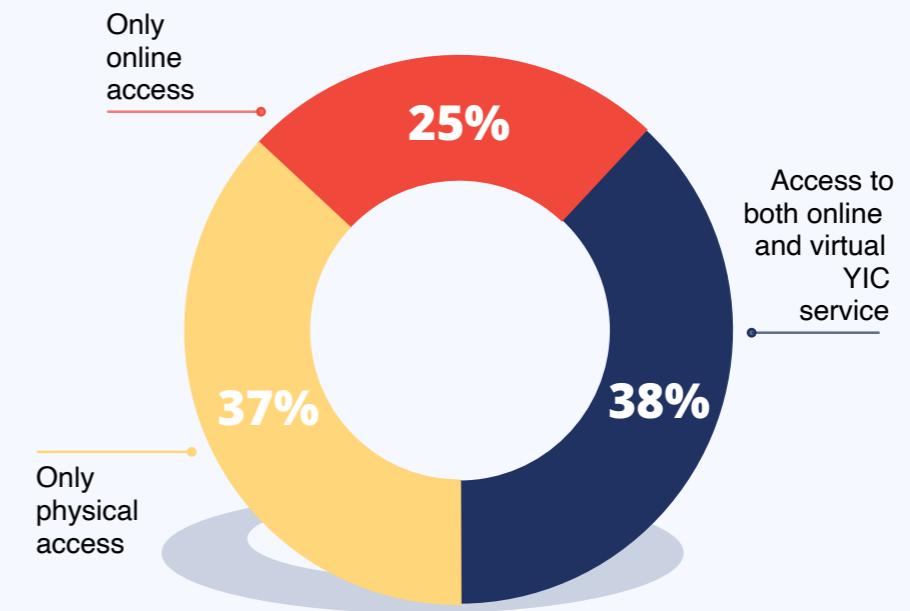
**involvement.** Parents can play a pivotal role in motivating and encouraging their children to utilise YIC services, particularly when they recognise the usefulness and benefits these services can provide. Moreover, young people residing in rural areas, in particular, require their parents' permission to travel to cities if they wish to access physical YIC services.

- » **Teachers** in rural areas can play a dual role by receiving training to serve as referral points to youth information providers, enabling the establishment of youth information services within schools and catering to the needs of young people residing in villages.
- » Implementing an **automated messaging system** can be a proactive approach to reaching out to all young individuals in the villages, providing them with relevant information about YIC services and highlighting their benefits.

### ➔ Accessibility for disabled people

To increase awareness, accessibility, and usability of YIC services among young people with disabilities, several methods are suggested by the focus group participants:

- » Promoting YIC services among **families of young people with disabilities** is crucial to increase outreach and ensure that this specific group can benefit from the services. When families are aware of the available support, they are more likely to encourage their children to utilise them.
- » Involving **stakeholders and other organizations working with people with disabilities** is recommended as it helps build trust among young individuals with disabilities, fostering their confidence in utilizing YIC services.
- » In addressing the specific needs of young people with disabilities, it is essential to design **physical YIC services according to universal access standards**. This includes installing elevators in multi-story buildings, implementing clear signage and wayfinding measures, providing designated parking spaces with adjacent access aisles, and incorporating features like high-contrast lettering, Braille, and colour-coded signs for individuals with visual or cognitive disabilities.
- » Offering **online consultations** is an additional solution that can greatly benefit young people with disabilities, providing them with convenient and accessible support tailored to their specific needs.
- » YIC services should ensure equality by providing important information specifically catered to young people with disabilities, such as information on universities suitable for blind individuals, thus promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities.



Main Findings	Recommended action
Preferred accessibility	<p>38% prefer to have access to both online and virtual YIC service. 37% prefer only physical access. 25% prefer only online access.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YIC Physical centres should be close to city centres to be more accessible and visible to everyone</li> <li>• Possibility of having videocalls or online discussion forums</li> <li>• Google search possibility and using social media to distribute information</li> </ul>
Access in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Info Van, especially in time of cultural events</li> <li>• Joint program for different villages,</li> <li>• Youth Ambassadors from schools may serve as a touch point in suburban and rural areas or teachers can refer to youth information workers</li> <li>• In some cultures, in rural areas, parents have a very strong role in their children's life. Convincing parents would facilitate distribution of YIC services</li> </ul>
Access for disabled people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve stakeholders and other actors working with people with disabilities</li> <li>• Design physical YIC centres according to universal access standards for people with disabilities</li> <li>• Online consultation service</li> </ul>

## 4-4 Preference

Young people prefer to receive information in different formats and from different channels. This section discusses how a YIC itself and the structure of its service could be improved to boost its outreach and usage among young people. The aim was to understand how young people think information should be presented for consumption. The respondents discussed their preferences regarding the format and channels of distributing information. The discussion involved questions such as:

- ? In what format do young people prefer to receive information? (Text, Audio, Video)
- ? On what do young people prefer to receive information? (App, Web, YIC Centres)
- ? What features could improve use of a YIC service among young people?
- ? Which sources do you people generally find reliable?

### ➔ Preferred format

Focus group participants prefer to receive information in different formats. There are a variety of preferred formats.

- **Having access to information in multiple formats is the top preference.** More than 50 percent of the focus group participants wish for multiple formats, as they believe it enhances both the reach and usability of the information. For example, videos with subtitles, or texts with pictures. Visualisation is significantly important to increase the understanding of information, while text can highlight the importance of the information and help young people focus better.
- About 34% of the focus group participants prefer to receive information in the **format of text**, especially when it comes to **sensitive information**, such as health issues. It is easier for young people to concentrate on obtaining sensitive information via reading.
- Around 32% of the participants favored **visual formats** such as videos or images, stating that visual information is easier to comprehend, locate, and less likely to cause confusion. Videos are no longer limited to entertainment; young people utilise them to acquire new skills, stay informed about developments, and grasp complex subjects.
- Around 14% of the focus group participants would like to have access to **audio format** of the information, such as podcasts. They believe it is easy to listen to an audio file and obtain the necessary information.
- A small percentage, approximately 3%, of the participants who frequently use social media platforms preferred receiving information in the form of **Reels** on platforms like **Instagram, TikTok, YouTube**, or Facebook. Storytelling and simplified content presentation make the information easily understandable.

### ➔ Preferred channels

Information should be available via different channels to outreach a high proportion of young people. **Aside from having physical centres in each city or at least in big cities, online sources should support young people's access to information.** Physical centres can exist independent from other organisations, or in collaboration and cooperation with other institutions, such as educational institutions to outreach a greater number of young people faster and easier. To improve access, participants suggested several solutions:

- » **Direct hotlines or chats possibilities** to contact and discuss with professionals should be available. **Online youth information hubs are one of the most preferred channels for focus group participants**, as long as they receive an answer from a real person instead of a machine. **Participants do not seem to like to receive answers from a chatbot, they have a strong preference for a real person.** About 54% of the focus group participants would want to use the online youth information hubs. They can access online information anytime they need.
- » **Social media is another preferred channel for focus group participants, especially Instagram and TikTok.** Facebook is the third favorite app. YouTube is also identified as a preferred information channel for videos. Approximately 29% of the participants identified social media as their main information source. The popularity of these platforms among young people stems from their easy **accessibility on smartphones** and the enjoyable experience they provide. Consequently, if information is made available on social media, it can effectively and rapidly reach out to young people.
- » There are other alternative channels highlighted by the 9% of the focus group participants, such as **online newspapers, and emails.**
- » About 8% of the focus group participants believe that information should be available in **all possible channels** to be more visible and accessible to everyone.

### ➔ Trustable channels

Young people do not trust all the available channels. **Trust is related to culture** and young people in different countries trust different channels. Overall, trusted channels for focus group participants are:

- » Social media, especially Instagram, normal webpages in each country.
- » Phone applications, media, including only TV and radio.
- » Verified sites or information sent out by reliable providers, such as famous organizations or different youth clubs.

While 42% of the focus group participants trust afore-mentioned channels, 9% of them do not trust any of the mentioned channels and they only trust information provided by a physical YIC service. Rest of the participants did not have specific ideas regarding their trusted channels.



### ➔ Preferred feature

Several features are suggested by focus group participants to increase usability of a YIC service.

- » Both physical and online **YIC services must be designed in a user-friendly** way to attract and appeal to young people. For example, the design of the services could be colourful to attract young people.
- » **Information should be short and clear, right to the point based on young people's needs and interests.** Young people do not want to spend plenty of time and energy to find information.
- » **A one-stop-shop approach to YIC is preferred**, for example a web platform providing all sorts of relevant information categorised by area, or a YIC service providing information on all topics relevant to young people. **Information should be provided in a youth-friendly language to make it easy for them to understand.** Information should be categorised into different topics and for each age group of young users.
- » To highlight important information and make sure that young people will remember critical dates it is good to use a **calendar system** especially for online youth information hubs. For example, a calendar can show deadlines for: university registration, scholarship applications, or different events. This system reduces misunderstandings.
- » Young, patient, polite, and professional workers should be employed as youth information workers to **create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for young people.** Participants believe that people close to their own age understand them better. This stresses the importance of youth participation in youth information services and peer-to-peer youth information initiatives.

Main findings	Recommended action
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information in multiple formats; text format for sensitive issues and visual format for easy understanding.</li> <li>• Educational/promotional videos disseminated on relevant platforms (social media).</li> <li>• Provide reliable verified websites, direct hotlines, chat option (Instant Messaging with a professional instead of automated chatbots), and trustable social media (Instagram and TikTok).</li> <li>• Online newspapers, and emails.</li> </ul>
Content/ Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information should be short and clear, right to the point based on young people's needs and interests.</li> <li>• Youth-friendly material co-produced by young people in cooperation with youth information providers could ensure a wider outreach.</li> <li>• Information should be shared in a one-stop-shop approach in a user-friendly language for young people.</li> <li>• Use of a calendar system for emphasizing on important deadlines.</li> <li>• Videos for educational materials.</li> </ul>

## 4-5 Evaluation

Focus group participants need to evaluate available YIC services and their content and determine if such information is trustworthy and reliable (Swart, 2023). To be able to evaluate the quality of the information obtained, young people need to receive **support and guidance** from professional youth workers. They help young people to improve their level of information and media literacy skills. In the absence of these skills, youth information professionals play an essential role in transmitting these valuable skills to young people. In this sense, the European Youth Information Charter stresses the importance of developing media and information literacy skills among youth information professionals (principle 8.2) and the imperative of transmitting these skills to young people to foster their autonomy and critical thinking (principles 5.1 and 5.2). The added value of the YIC reside in the personalised approach and its capacity to empower young people to assess information and make informed decisions considering their own aspirations, capabilities, and needs (ERYICA, 2018). This section discusses the following questions:

- ? How YIC services would help you in finding reliable information and information sources?
- ? What could be done to make future YIC services reliable for you and persuade you young people to trust them?

### ➔ Establish a reliable and trustworthy YIC service

According to the 47% of the focus group participants **a reliable and trustworthy YIC service should be established. This YIC should have specific features:**

- » The YIC service should be **available in both physical and online** forms.
- » A YIC service should be **appropriately resourced, available, accessible, and active in the long term**. Stable funding and a youth information strategy are key in this respect.

Youth information should be delivered by **trained and young professionals** who have a high level of media and information literacy skills. Resources such as the **European Youth Information Charter**, **YouthInfoComp** and the **ERYICA training system** are key tools to guide this objective.

In physical centres, young people, who are under 30 years old should be part of the team (e.g., staff and volunteers). These young workers or volunteers should be patient, polite and professional.

- » **In online platforms, information should be always up to date**. Outdated information should be deleted immediately.
- » There should be good **communication tools** (e.g., phone number, email address, etc.) between young people and youth information providers in both online and physical cases.
- » **Authors and sources of information should be visible** and available. Users should know that the information comes from a real person not a bot.
- » **Information should be fairly and equally accessible to everyone**. There should not be any discrimination in sharing information.
- » **Transparency and honesty** of information and youth information workers should be ensured.
- » **Security and anonymity** of users should be ensured.

### ➔ Enhance Trust

- » To increase the trust of young people, it is suggested to apply **ideas and insights from professionals and young people in designing and running a YIC or in sharing information**. Young people's ideas can be gathered via nationwide surveys to create a reliable database. This idea was suggested by 21% of the focus group participants.
- » Another factor to trust in YIC service among young people is to **engage families**

**and try to increase trust among them**. Family members, especially parents have a critical role in motivating their young children to trust and use a YIC service. However, only 4% of the participants mentioned the role of parents.

- » To effectively **promote YIC services**, it is crucial to showcase their successful outcomes. 17.5% of the focus group participants expressed that hearing success stories from other young users of YIC services persuades them to utilise these services. Promotional efforts can include videos on YIC webpages highlighting success stories, as well as word-of-mouth recommendations shared by peers. Encouraging youth participation and facilitating peer-to-peer information sharing are vital factors contributing to the success of the service.

Main findings	Recommended action
Increase reliability of YIC services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of both online and physical YIC services for the long term.</li> <li>• Employ young and professional youth information workers and work with young volunteers and peers.</li> <li>• Frequently update information.</li> <li>• Protect the users' privacy and confidentiality.</li> <li>• Ensure transparency.</li> </ul>
Increase trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider insight from young people and professionals in preparing materials.</li> <li>• In some cultures, parents have a critical role in their youngsters' life. To increase trust among young people their parents should approve of trustworthy of the YIC services.</li> <li>• Present previous success stories to increase trust among young people.</li> </ul>



## 4-6 Expectations

A successful **YIC service should meet young people's expectations and needs**, therefore these expectations and needs should be identified to design, run, and evaluate YIC service. Therefore, **youth participation in youth information services is essential to ensure the provision of useful and meaningful youth information**. Participatory YIC enables young people to influence the content and types of youth information that young people have access to, as well as the way that youth information services undertake their work (ERYICA and Eurodesk, 2022). This section discusses the following questions:

- ? What services/facilities/equipment do young people expect to receive from YIC services?

Focus group participants have plenty of expectations from a future YIC service.

- » High percent of the focus group participants, about 37% expect to **have access to a physical and easily accessible YIC service**, preferably close to the city centre, with different services, such as physiology consultant or counselors with young and professional staff. At least there should be a YIC service in each municipality.
- » About 3% suggested that these centres **should be open during evening hours**, since most young people are studying during working hours, so it is important for them to have access to the centre during evening times.
- » A youth information **web hub and social media with frequent updates** should be available. Approximately 44% of focus group participants expect to have access to a YIC web hub.
- » Information should be shared via **youth-friendly and amusing methods**. For example, YouTube with channels such as Veritasium and similar, which are fun but also educational.
- » A YIC service should include **local issues and individual youth needs**, respect social norms, and ensure the privacy of users.
- » Promotion for the YIC services should be done through different channels. To make sure most young people will be aware of these services.
- » Out of office activities could be available too, such as **a street psychologist**. This expectation comes from 6% of the focus group participants.
- » **Referral system**, which should help finding solutions not just advice. For example, in case of health-related issues a centre can refer young people to a suitable healthcare centre or to a specialised professional. About 4% of the focus group participants suggested the referral system.
- » Creative methods should be applied to attract more young people to use the YIC services, such as gamification.

Main findings	Recommended action
Main expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep physical centres open during the evening hours.</li> <li>• Share information via youth-friendly and amusing methods, such as videos, Reels, or games.</li> <li>• Pop-up events</li> <li>• Offer effective referral systems for sensitive issues and specialised inquiries.</li> </ul>

## 4-7 Motivation

Motivation refers to the influence of one's willingness or inclination to perform an action. Motivational factors along with the other constructs, strongly determine the tendency of a young person to use YIC services. "Young people are mostly attracted to experiences that are uplifting and at the same time produce a sense of inclusion, attention, and purpose" (DesYIgn, 2019. 29). A sense of inclusiveness and being listened to might enhance spontaneous use of YIC services by young people. Therefore, YIC workers should constantly collect ideas and feedback from young people.

Since the YIC service desires to empower young people and enhance their active participation in society, it is necessary to give young people an overview of what YIC services are or what benefits can be earned. Further sharing success stories of previous users can be useful. Recommendations can positively affect young people's willingness to use YIC services. The questions used in this section were:

- ? What could be done to motivate/encourage young people to use YIC services?
- ? How much do young people consider that recommendations of your friends/families/peers can motivate them to use YIC services?

### ➔ Motivations

To motivate focus group participants to use YIC service, the first point is availability of a physical or online service. This service must have specific features:

- The first motivational factor for young people is easy access. Therefore, being **easy to access and reach** throughout a country is necessary.
- Overload of information can be very confusing for young people, especially for those with limited literacy skills. Therefore, YIC services should constitute a **trustable source** of reliable and clear information.
- Providing **user-centred information** considering their needs and aspirations is necessary. The information landscape and the information needs of the youth change

more often and have a clear seasonality trend, therefore it is necessary to involve young people in the development process of YIC services and listen to their needs, expectations, and insights. To do so, one practical solution could be to **document their queries and create a database regularly**.

- Information for young people should be helpful, easy to understand and right to the point. Providing complex and too scientific text will reduce youth understanding. Therefore, YIC services should provide **hands-on and youth-friendly materials**.
- Ensuring a **safe and comfortable and safe atmosphere** for young people which is **free of judgment**.
- Young people trust local or educational institutions in most countries. To increase the sense of trust, **networking and cooperation possibilities should be facilitated** with youth organisations and local or educational institutions.
- To enhance the effectiveness of YIC services, it is important to amplify **peer support activities**, as young people demonstrate keen interest in such engagements. Increasing the involvement of young individuals throughout the entire process can be a valuable approach. For instance, in various events, young people can assume assistant roles, providing them with short-term opportunities for engagement. However, for sustained and long-term involvement, it is crucial for young people to thoroughly familiarise themselves with YIC services and their benefits, enabling them to become authentic youth workers or representatives of such organisations.
- According to the focus group participants, to motivate and attract more young people, the YIC services should **adopt new trends and use new tools**, such as Instagram or TikTok for promoting or transforming information, Reels, or posts.

### ➔ Recommendations

Focus group participants believe that recommendation and word of mouth plays a very significant and crucial role in the use of YIC services. When a trusted person, such as a friend, family member or peer, recommends a young person to use a YIC, they consider the advice more seriously. Good results and success stories motivate and persuade young people to use such services.

In the discussion, it was observed that the most common sources of recommendation are **schools/ teachers, other educational or vocational training institutions, parents, and peers/ friends**. Another popular way of knowing about the YIC services was the different local and cultural events and activities that the young people had participated in and thus came across the service. **Raising awareness among parents and teachers could be an effective way to reach out to a maximum number of young people.**

Main findings	Recommended action
Improve youth involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage young people in co-design of different services and events by frequently collecting insights and feedback to understand the diversity of information needs and their seasonality.</li> </ul>
Promote the services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the services via proper methods to reach out to more young people. Reels and posts in Instagram or TikTok could be useful.</li> <li>• Cooperation and collaboration with different activity centres as platforms to enhance awareness</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some cultures, recommendations from parents are highly appreciated by young people.</li> <li>• Connecting youth information services with teachers and parents and raising their awareness about youth information services.</li> <li>• Recommendations by peers are the most effective ones.</li> </ul>

## 5. POSITIVE FEATURES

During this part, the participants engaged in a discussion regarding two key features they appreciate about YIC services. Understanding the factors that effectively attract youth to utilise such services is crucial for establishing and enhancing their effectiveness. The analysis of the group discussion highlighted several important aspects. Firstly, young people highly value the **presence of active YIC services that offer comprehensive and easily understandable information**, while also utilising various channels to promote awareness among youth. They emphasised the **significance of human interactions**, allowing them to connect with professional and experienced youth workers or individuals who share similar interests, fostering a sense of belonging to a community.

Furthermore, participants emphasised the **importance of trust in the services and youth information workers**, as well as the need for **safety and privacy** across all information domains covered by YIC services. They expressed appreciation for the **diversity of information** provided and highlighted the value of receiving education on improving their information-seeking skills to make the most of YIC services. The participants also stressed the importance of creating an **open and non-prejudiced environment**. They highly praised the organisation of workshops and events as effective means of engaging young people.

Main findings	Recommended action
Information availability and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear and complete information, in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter.</li> <li>• Promote the available services via different channels.</li> </ul>
Human approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure privacy and confidentiality of the users.</li> <li>• Possibility to meet youth workers and people with similar interests.</li> <li>• Sense of belonging to a community.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve young people's information seeking skills.</li> </ul>

## 6. NEGATIVE FEATURES

This section delves into the factors **that impede or limit young people's utilisation of YIC services**, recognising that these hindrances may vary between countries, as YIC services operate differently across diverse regions. Identifying these factors is crucial for enhancing YIC services and facilitating their use among young people. Furthermore, this section highlights concerns expressed by young individuals who were previously unaware of the existence and benefits of YIC services, shedding light on the service's outreach limitations and areas for improvement.

One prominent concern raised by most participants pertains to the accessibility of YIC services, whether physical or online. **The distribution of physical YIC centres was deemed unsatisfactory**, with some participants expressing difficulty in reaching locations that were distant or challenging to access. Additionally, several participants felt that **youth workers lacked certain expected qualities**, as perceived from the users' standpoint. To better address young people's needs and provide effective assistance, it is highly recommended to employ youth workers who are young, courteous, patient, well-educated, and professionally trained.

In some countries, young people face **information overload**, while in others, there is a **lack of information** or **unfair distribution of available resources**. It is therefore advisable to share only necessary and up-to-date information in a logical and equitable manner, considering the diverse contexts in which YIC services operate.

Main findings	Recommended action
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve access to the YIC services. Good distribution of physical centres across the country, or online services on social media or implementing new mobile/ web-based apps.</li> </ul>
Youth workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is highly recommended to have young, polite, patient, educated and professional youth information workers.</li> </ul>
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of awareness among young people, better awareness and knowledge about the service could be instrumental in enhancing interest. To improve awareness suitable promotions should be applied.</li> </ul>
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share necessary and up-to-date information in a logical and fair way.</li> </ul>

## 7. PROPOSED ADDITION

This section presents the valuable insights and ideas shared by participants regarding the additional features they would like to see in the YIC services. These ideas stem directly from the participants' needs, interests, and their contemporary information-seeking behavior.

One of the most significant points raised by the majority of participants is the **importance of easy access to a physical YIC centre that offers a friendly and trustworthy environment**, or alternatively, a well-designed and up-to-date website.

The YIC services should provide well-categorised and up-to-date information on various areas based on the specific needs of young people. It is highly recommended by participants to actively involve young people in the process of designing and delivering these YIC services.

Recognising the significance of both education and employability, participants suggest that youth information centres should organise workshops or seminars addressing these topics for different age ranges. As the needs of young people vary across different age groups, tailoring these initiatives accordingly would be beneficial.

To facilitate the information-seeking process, participants emphasise the importance of having hotlines and direct contact options. Additionally, including a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section on web pages would be helpful. It is also crucial to offer educational resources for individuals with limited media and information literacy skills.

By incorporating these valuable suggestions, the YIC can enhance its services and effectively meet the diverse needs of young people, fostering their personal growth and development.

Main findings	Recommended action
Availability of YIC services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of physical and virtual centres with well-categorised and up-to-date information on different areas.</li> </ul>
Activities/ events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrange seminars and workshops on job seeking, CV and job interviews.</li> </ul>
Engaging young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging young people in designing and delivering the service.</li> </ul>
Facilitate information seeking process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a direct contact protocol (Helpline/ Messaging option).</li> <li>Adding FAQ section.</li> </ul>

## 8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides a concise summary of the insights gathered from focus group interviews and organises them to generate specific recommendations for YIC services. The discussions with five groups of young people from four Western Balkan countries involved in the project highlight the seven key areas that YIC service providers should prioritise. These recommendations aim to expand outreach to a maximum number of young people, enhance the quality of available services, develop new ones, incorporate requested features, and deliver the services through various media channels that young people are comfortable using for information seeking. These findings can be compared with notable recommendations from previous studies, such as the 2018 project Youth.info and the 2019 DesYlgn project (both funded by Erasmus+).

YIC services play a crucial role in the personal and social development of young people within society. By granting access to accurate and relevant information, as well as professional guidance, these services empower young people to make informed decisions for their life.

To improve YIC services and facilitate young people's utilisation of such services, it is essential to understand their information needs, how they fulfil those needs in the digital age, the challenges they face during the information-seeking process, solutions to assist them in overcoming these challenges, strategies to increase awareness about YIC services, means to facilitate their access to such services, approaches to monitor youth information-seeking behavior to ensure ongoing relevance, and measures to establish YIC services as a reliable source of information on various topics.

Additionally, it is important to motivate young people to utilise these services and consider the roles of schools, teachers, parents, youth workers and peers in promoting their usage. Furthermore, improving young people's media and literacy skills is crucial for enhancing their information-seeking abilities and enabling them to critically evaluate information before utilising it.

Investing in YIC services signifies a societal investment in the future, fostering the overall well-being and success of young people as they transition into adulthood. The following section summarizes the seven factors outlined in the report, providing an overview of significant findings and recommendations for each of the aforementioned areas.



## Awareness

- ✎ Levels of familiarity with YIC services among young people vary a lot. Most participants lack familiarity with YIC services, or they have a very basic familiarity. It is necessary to increase young people's awareness of the different services provided.
- ✎ Familiar participants see YIC service as an agency that mostly helps with information regarding studies, employment, health and occasionally legal issues and leisure.
- ✎ The YIC services must be tailored according to young people's needs and expectations. Annual surveys could collect youth information needs frequently.

## Improve awareness

- ✎ Visibility of the YIC services must increase via use of different methods of promotion in various channels to increase awareness among young people.
- ✎ To improve visibility of the YIC service, physical centres should be in the city centre and in areas accessible for everyone.
- ✎ Educational/promotional videos could be disseminated on relevant platforms.
- ✎ Bulk emails could be sent out to inform young people regarding YIC services.
- ✎ Adequate online presence on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, and YouTube are necessary.
- ✎ Word of mouth and presenting success stories motivate young people to use YIC services.
- ✎ Traditional promotions are effective, such as flyers.
- ✎ Promoting YIC services in local cultural events are useful to improve awareness.

## Collaborations with schools

- ✎ Collaboration with schools, vocational institutions, and other types of educational institutions to increase awareness among young people of the services available.
- ✎ Aware and expert teachers could raise awareness, connect with youth information workers, and recommend YIC services to their students.
- ✎ Involving parents and making them aware of the YIC services and their importance. Especially in the absence of the Internet, engagement with parents and schools can be effective.

## Information needs

- ✎ Wide range of desired information topics are requested: formal and non-formal education, health, employment opportunities, leisure time, legal matters, traveling, sports, events, personal development, emancipation, political issues, organizations, etc.
- ✎ Seasonality of information needs to be monitored and information should be updated according to youth needs.
- ✎ Emphasis is to have a comprehensive coverage of information by YIC services.

## Information seeking challenges

- ✎ Lack of reliable information resources; both physical and online,
- ✎ Bad design of web pages,
- ✎ Information overload,
- ✎ Availability of irrelevant or useless information,
- ✎ Invalid and unreliable information,
- ✎ Incomplete or biased information,
- ✎ Outdated information,
- ✎ Fragmented information,
- ✎ Unfair distribution of information, and
- ✎ Lack of information and media literacy skills among young people.



## Solutions to tackle information seeking challenges

- ✍ Establishment of reliable and complete sources of information; both physical and online,
- ✍ Organising and categorising information on different topics based on youth needs,
- ✍ Involving youth in designing or delivering the services (co-design),
- ✍ Providing contact points for urgent questions,
- ✍ Offering guidance and support for information seeking; educating media or information literacy skills,
- ✍ Ensuring equal accessibility of information,
- ✍ Implementing filtering systems to curate information,
- ✍ Regularly updating information,
- ✍ Disclosing the sources of information and methodologies used for research,
- ✍ Qualified, professional, and young youth workers should provide guidance and support in a youth-friendly way,
- ✍ Making the teachers aware of the service so they can recommend it to their students, and
- ✍ Engaging parents and making them aware of the service and its importance. In the absence of the Internet, engagement with parents and schools can be effective.

## Accessibility

- ✍ Most participants prefer to have both physical and online access to YIC services. Physical access provides personal interactions, intimacy and trust in information received directly from authorities, while online access is more convenient and faster.
- ✍ Optimising search engines (Google search),
- ✍ Virtual discussion forums and instant messaging with the presence of expert youth information workers,
- ✍ Video calls,
- ✍ An easy and interactive website,
- ✍ Hotline,
- ✍ Info van, and
- ✍ A mobile application

## Access in rural areas

- ✍ Youth info vans,
- ✍ Availability of online services,
- ✍ Local cultural events,
- ✍ Joint programs,
- ✍ Collaboration of YIC services with schools and distributing information with the help of teachers (involving schools and teachers), and
- ✍ Convincing parents regarding the usefulness of YIC services for young people.

## Increasing accessibility for young people with disabilities

- ✍ Promoting YIC among families of young people with disabilities,
- ✍ Collaboration with other stakeholders providing services for people with disabilities,
- ✍ Establishing user-friendly physical centres for young people with disabilities, and
- ✍ Online services for young people with disabilities with specific features, for example read out features for blind people.

## Preferred Format

- ✍ Preference for multiple formats to increase outreach and usability,
- ✍ Text format is more suitable for sensitive information, it highlights information importance and aids focus.
- ✍ Visual formats (e.g., videos, pictures). Visualisation enhances understanding.
- ✍ Audio format (e.g., podcasts) is less popular.

## Preferred feature

- 👉 One-stop-shop approach to YIC services,
- 👉 Youth-friendly language (not very academic, legal, or professional terminologies),
- 👉 Categorised information by topics and age groups,
- 👉 Calendar system for important dates,
- 👉 Short, to the point and clear information based on young people's needs and interests,
- 👉 User-friendly design for physical and online YIC services,
- 👉 Importance of youth participation and peer-to-peer initiatives, and
- 👉 Employing young and experienced people as youth information workers,
- 👉 Working with young volunteers and peers.

## Preferred channels

Preference for information availability across multiple channels:

- 👉 Physical centres,
- 👉 Direct hotlines or chats with professionals (no bots),
- 👉 Online youth information web hubs,
- 👉 Social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc),
- 👉 Phone applications, online newspapers, and emails, and
- 👉 All possible channels.

## Trustable sources

- 👉 Trust relates to culture; therefore, it might be different for each country,
- 👉 Social media (Instagram) and normal webpages are the most trusted sources. Especially when a young influencer shares information,
- 👉 Phone applications, media (TV and radio),
- 👉 Verified sites or information sent out by reliable providers,
- 👉 Some people do not trust any sources.

## Evaluation

- 👉 Assist young people in finding reliable and valid information,
- 👉 Establish reliable and trustworthy YIC services, both online and physical,
- 👉 Transfer information by young and professional workers,
- 👉 Update information frequently. And consider young people's need in preparing information,
- 👉 Clarify source of information (author),
- 👉 Ensure transparency and security of information,
- 👉 Highlight the role of professionals and families,
- 👉 Promote YIC services with presenting successful stories.

## Expectation

- 👉 Physical and online YIC services should be available.
- 👉 Information should be distributed via user-friendly methods.
- 👉 Local issues and individual youth needs should be covered.
- 👉 Available services should be promoted via different channels.
- 👉 Out of office activities are requested, such as street consultations.
- 👉 Youth need an effective referral system.

## Motivation

- 👉 Constituting a trustable source of reliable information, which is easy to access,
- 👉 Providing user-centered information based on youth needs, interests, and aspirations,
- 👉 Provide hands-on and youth-friendly materials,
- 👉 Ensuring a safe and comfortable atmosphere for young people,
- 👉 Facilitating cooperation with other youth organisation and local institutions,
- 👉 Recommendations from teachers, family members, friends, and peers are motivational.

## 9. DISCUSSION

The results of analysing focus group data from five Balkan countries indicated that even though most young people lack awareness regarding youth information and counselling services, or they have limited understanding, they are interested to learn more about such services. Therefore, all the recommended actions have to be implemented to raise awareness among young people.

The youth information-seeking behaviors demonstrate a clear inclination towards accessing information through both physical and virtual platforms. As a result, it is essential for youth information and counselling services to ensure the availability of these platforms to cater to the diverse preferences of young individuals.

In order to effectively cater to the information needs of young people, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive infrastructure that encompasses various channels of access. This includes the development of mobile applications, web-based apps, and interactive webpages with integrated chat options, in addition to the provision of physical centres. These virtual access points will ensure that young individuals can conveniently obtain the information they seek through their preferred digital platforms.

Furthermore, it is crucial to prioritise the creation of user-friendly centres that are specifically designed to accommodate individuals with diverse types of disabilities. By adopting an inclusive approach, these centres will become accessible to all young people, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. The design should consider factors

such as ease of navigation, ergonomic considerations, and the provision of assistive technologies to guarantee a seamless and empowering experience for everyone.

To ensure effective utilisation of services, it is vital to organise necessary and up-to-date information in topic-based categories. Among the youth, key areas of interest encompass education, employment, and health. The additional areas include leisure time, legal matters, travelling, sports, events, personal development, emancipation, political issues, organisations. By structuring information in this manner, the information-seeking process is streamlined, enabling young individuals to locate relevant resources more efficiently.

To enhance awareness and instill trust in youth information and counselling services, it is crucial to establish strong collaborations with key entities such as schools, educational institutions, and various governmental and non-governmental organisations. Additionally, engaging young people themselves and their parents as important stakeholders is highly recommended. As the cognitive authorities of young individuals, their recommendations carry significant weight and can effectively raise awareness and foster trust among their peers.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that youth comprise a diverse group, belonging to various cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the impact of these collaborations may not be universally applicable or uniformly effective across all contexts. Cultural nuances and individual circumstances should be taken into account when implementing strategies to ensure maximum reach and impact

among diverse youth populations.

However, to effectively provide YIC services, it is crucial to align them with the specific needs and expectations of young people. It is essential to have a deep understanding of the various internal and external challenges that they encounter in their information-seeking endeavours. Among the most common challenges reported by young individuals are the scarcity of reliable information resources, information overload, and the presence of irrelevant, unreliable, incomplete, or biased information. Additionally, outdated, or fragmented information, unfair distribution of information, and the lack of adequate information and media literacy skills among young people pose significant hurdles.

To improve youth information-seeking behaviour it is crucial to enhance their information and media literacy skills, empowering them to independently seek and evaluate information. In this regard, the employment of educated, expert, and youthful youth workers becomes essential. These skilled professionals can play a pivotal role in equipping youth with

higher levels of media and information literacy. Another effective solution is to establish strong connections and partnerships with other complementary services that can contribute to the education and development of young people's media and information literacy skills. By providing guidance, support, and educational initiatives, young people's capabilities regarding critical thinking, research skills, and the ability to discern reliable sources, will improve, thereby young individuals can navigate the information landscape with confidence and make more informed decisions.

To keep the YIC services along with the youth needs, it is necessary to monitor the information demands of young people. annual queries and making a database will help to stay relevant all the time. This will help the service providers to know their users' information demands and at the same time, the seasonal pattern of information could be traced. In addition, engaging the youth in design, delivery and evaluation is a must to have a successful YIC service.

# 10. SUMMARY PER FOCUS GROUP

## a. Albania – Youth Voice Network of Organisations

### Background information

Six young people from Albania including three females and three males participated in the focus group study. All of them were 15 to 19 years old. All participants were originally from Albania and current residents of this country. Three of the participants had a high school degree and three had an elementary school degree. All of them lived in small towns. Four of the participants were students, and two were unemployed. None of them earned money. All were single. See more details in *Table 2*.

Table 2: background information in Albania

Type of information	Categories	Sub-categories	N
Age	15 – 19		6
	20 – 24		
	25 – 29		
Gender	Female		3
	Male		3
	Don't want to specify		
	Other		
Country of residence	Albania		6
Country of origin	Albania		6

Education (highest degree)	Primary education		3
	Secondary education		
	High school degree		3
	Bachelor's degree		
	Master's degree		
	Higher than Master's degree		
Living Area	Countryside / Small town		6
	Medium sized city		
	Large city		
Occupation	Only student		4
	Employed		
	Unemployed		2
Income range	None		
	Under 100 Euros		
	Between 100-200 Euros		
	Above 200 Euros		
	Under 500 Euros		
	500-1000 Euros		
	Above 1000 Euros		
Marital status	Single		6
	Married		
	In a relationship		
	Prefer not to say		

### Main results from the Albanian focus group interview

#### Familiarity with YIC services

The majority of participants demonstrated limited familiarity with YIC services, with only two having a basic understanding. Unfortunately, none of the participants had direct access to a functioning YIC centre either physical or online. Currently, YIC services take the form of offices that provide limited resources and information, mainly pertaining to cultural events or psychosocial support offered within schools.



Participants who had a basic familiarity with YIC services were aware of the valuable information and support they offer. These services encompass job-related activities, such as courses for career development, promotion opportunities, and assistance with creating CVs. YIC services also provide comprehensive health information covering both physical and mental well-being. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of the friendly atmosphere within these centres, where peer support and professional guidance can be accessed.

### **Increase visibility of YIC services**

Among the participants from Albania, two individuals expressed a keen interest in learning more about YIC services and using them. To increase the visibility of YIC services, the focus group participants in Albania suggested various strategies, which include:

- 1) Establishing connections with municipalities, schools, faculties, and youth boards in universities.
- 2) Leveraging social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, visual promotions through billboards in cities, and distributing flyers were also recommended. Moreover, employing mass email campaigns, using television and radio advertisements, and organising events were mentioned as effective ways to promote YIC services. It was noted that although many young people may not watch TV or listen to the radio, their parents do. This implies that informed parents can play a crucial role in promoting the use of YIC services among young family members.

### **Information needs and challenges**

Focus group participants on Albania need different types of information, including education both formal and non-formal (e.g., scholarships, youth work activities), health and mental health, employment and career counselling, and socialisation (e.g., how to find friends or different groups of young people as a new student out of their hometown).

Focus group participants in this country face several challenges in seeking information, the most important challenge is lack of availability of reliable sources, which provides accurate and complete information regarding different topics.

- ! There is no direct contact information for young people to reach out to and ask their questions.
- ! Some sources provide unreliable information, and some other sources use difficult terminologies, which is hard for participants to understand.
- ! Participants lack enough knowledge on how to seek information or evaluate the available information.

Two solutions were suggested by focus group participants to solve the existing problems:

- 1) To provide young people with a comprehensive source which has all the reliable and up to date information, such as an online web hub.
- 2) To open a youth information and counselling point in schools and universities, or some youth information workers visiting schools frequently to distribute information.

### **Accessibility**

Participants express a preference for having both online and physical YIC services, as each option offers distinct advantages. The online option is praised for its speed, ease of use, convenience, and alignment with the modern, digitalised lifestyle. Additionally, participants highlight the increased privacy afforded by online centres, with some even suggesting the inclusion of a phone call option for further accessibility.

On the other hand, a physical centre provides the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with others, fostering a sense of community and support. Moreover, participants note that using a physical centre reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can sometimes arise in online communications.

By having both online and physical YIC services available, participants believe they can enjoy the benefits of convenience and privacy while also having the opportunity for personal interaction and a reduced risk of miscommunication.

### **Improving access to YIC service in rural areas and for people with disabilities**

To improve access to YIC services in rural areas, two solutions were suggested by the participants:

- 1) Implementing an automated messaging system that can send messages to all young people residing in the villages. This method aims to proactively reach out to them and provide information about YIC services and their benefits.
- 2) Establishing a direct phone line specifically for young people. By offering this phone line, young people can call at any time to ask questions and seek guidance.

### **Preferences in receiving information (format and channel)**

Participants from Albania express a preference for receiving information in text or video formats, with only one participant considering the inclusion of audio formats as well. They emphasise the importance of concise and clear information that directly addresses their needs and concerns. By tailoring the information in such a manner, it becomes more

engaging and relevant to them.

Three participants express a preference for having a dedicated web hub where they can search for information, or a direct phone number they can call at any time to access the desired information. On the other hand, two participants specifically mention their interest in receiving information through social media, particularly on platforms like Instagram. They place their trust in information disseminated through social media, as well as other media sources and webpages.

## Evaluation of information

Participants need guidance for evaluating information. They argue that to assist young people in evaluating and accessing reliable information from YIC services, there should be professional guidance provided to help them identify trustworthy resources. However, it is crucial that the reliability of these resources is ensured through quality control mechanisms or other means. By establishing quality control mechanisms, the reliability and credibility of the information can be verified, fostering confidence among young people seeking information.

Overall, the participants emphasise the importance of reliable resources and the provision of guidance to help them navigate and evaluate the information available. They value the trustworthiness of information sources and recognise the need for mechanisms to ensure the reliability of the information provided. A YIC service should have specific features to be reliable:

- ✍ Have young and professional staff
- ✍ Good communication methods

## Expectations from YIC services

The focus group participants in Albania express their expectations to have access to a physical location offering diverse services, as well as the availability of information through webpages or social media platforms. Additionally, one participant emphasise the importance of a referral system within the YIC service, stating that it is more effective in meeting their needs quickly compared to simply providing information.

In order to cater to the needs of the participants, a future YIC service should incorporate several features, for example:

- ✍ Live chat option to enable direct communication with a real person.
- ✍ The availability of a physical address for document submission, if required, is considered essential.

## Enhance motivation

To increase the motivation of the focus group participants to use a future YIC service in Albania, it is crucial to establish accessible centres with specific features. These centres should be actively promoted through various channels, while highlighting successful outcomes resulting from using the services. Recommendations from family members, friends, and peers are identified as influential factors that can motivate and encourage participants to engage with a YIC service.

## b. Bosnia and Herzegovina (1)- CEREBRA

### Background information

Eight young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) including seven females and one male participated in the focus group study. One of them was 15 to 19 years old and seven were 20 to 24. All participants were originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) and current residents of this country. All participants had a high school degree.

Three of them lived in small towns and five in large cities. All participants were students, and all earned a small amount of money. They had different marital statuses, three are single, one married and four of them preferred not to say. See more details in *Table 3*.

Table 3: background information in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1)

Type of information	Categories	Sub-categories	N
Age	15 – 19		1
	20 – 24		7
	25 – 29		
Gender	Female		7
	Male		1
	Don't want to specify		
	Other		
Country of residence	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1)		8
Country of origin	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1)		8
Education (highest degree)	Primary education		
	Secondary education		
	High school		8
	Bachelor's degree		
	Master's degree		
	Higher than Master's degree		
Living Area	Countryside / Small town		3
	Medium sized city		
	Large city		5

Occupation	Only student		8
	Employed		
	Unemployed		
Income range	None		
	Under 100 Euros		2
	Between 100-200 Euros		1
	Above 200 Euros		5
	Under 500 Euros		
	500-1000 Euros		
	Above 1000 Euros		
Marital status	Single		3
	Married		1
	In a relationship		
	Prefer not to say		4

### Main results from the Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) focus group interview

#### Familiarity with YIC services

Most participants in the focus group interview from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) were already familiar with YIC services and their various offerings. They acknowledged that a YIC:

- Apply diverse learning techniques, such as theater-based learning.
- Provide different youth clubs.
- Organise workshops, seminars.
- Provide therapy and counselling services.

Online platforms are available to access information on education, training, and job opportunities, with established connections to employers facilitating easier access to employment. The scope of information and services provided by youth centres includes job-related activities, legal issues, as well as entertainment, cultural, and international events.

## Increase visibility of YIC services

Regarding increasing the visibility of YIC services, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) suggested several methods:

- ✍ Promoting the services through various platforms and regularly publishing posts is seen as a primary promotional approach
- ✍ Sharing informative flyers
- ✍ Having a booth at different events are additional effective strategies

It was emphasised that daily repetition of advertisements on social media can help in raising awareness.

## Information needs and challenges

Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) expressed their diverse information needs, including both formal and non-formal education, employment and career counselling, volunteering opportunities, and updates on local cultural and social events. They also expressed interest in information related to economy, art, and ecology.

In the quest for information, focus group participants on this country face several challenges. These challenges include the lack of reliable websites providing information, such as information from organisations and event organisers, insufficient direct contact information to engage with professionals, and the prevalence of incomplete and non-essential information. Overcoming these challenges is crucial to ensure the availability of accurate and relevant information for the participants.

Two solutions were suggested by participants to solve the existing problems:

- 1) To provide right, complete, and reliable information sources, and
- 2) to provide young people with direct contact information, they can call and discuss their issues with.

## Accessibility

Out of the participants, three expressed a preference for having access to a physical YIC service, while only one participant favored exclusively online services. One participant expressed a desire to have access to both online and physical services. The convenience of online services was highlighted, as they provide fast and easy access to information. On the other hand, physical centres offer the advantage of personal interaction, engendering trust and reducing confusion.

## Improving access to YIC service in rural areas and for people with disabilities

In terms of improving access to and use of YIC services in rural areas, establishing connections between youth centres and schools was seen as a practical solution. Training teachers to serve as information relays with other services can effectively bridge the gap. Furthermore, it is important to convince parents of the benefits of these services for their children. This could involve persuading parents to allow their children to visit physical centres in other cities or facilitating access to online platforms. Word of mouth was highlighted as a powerful tool for promoting YIC services in rural areas, as positive experiences and testimonials can generate interest and engagement.

Regarding youth with disabilities, families should be informed about the benefits of the services offered. In addition, it is wise to involve stakeholders and other actors working with people with disabilities to increase their trust in YIC services.

## Preferences in receiving information (format and channel).

Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) expressed a strong preference for receiving information in text format. They find it the most convenient and accessible way to access information. However, video content is also popular among the participants, with the condition that subtitles are provided. This ensures that the information can be easily understood and accessible to individuals with hearing impairments or those who prefer reading along with the visual content. By offering information in both text and video formats, the participants can have a range of options to choose from based on their preferences and needs.

One participant expressed a preference for a phone application that would allow them to seek information at any time they desire. Another option favoured is having a web hub where they can easily search for information on key areas of interest. Two participants specifically mentioned their interest in receiving information through social media platforms, such as Instagram. Additionally, 25% of the participants expressed a desire to have access to information through various channels. They trust phone applications, social media platforms, and traditional webpages as reliable channels.

A multi-channel approach ensures that information reaches a wider audience and accommodates different preferences and technological capabilities. The trust placed in these mediums by the participants further emphasises the importance of using various platforms to effectively disseminate reliable and relevant information to the target audience.



## Evaluation of information

To help young people to evaluate YIC services and find reliable information, a YIC should follow specific guidelines:

- ! Ensure the transparency of information providers. It is important to clearly identify the authors of the information so that users can be confident that it comes from real individuals rather than automated bots. Success stories of service users should be showcased and disseminated
- ! Professionals' ideas should be applied

## Expectations from YIC services

Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1) have expressed their expectations for a YIC service in their country. They desire access to a physical location that offers a range of services, along with information available in web platform or through social media. It is important that the website is comprehensive, providing information on various topics and organized in user-friendly categories. Additionally, there is a specific request for the inclusion of street psychology services, which would greatly benefit the target group. Young people further expect to receive services via creative methods, such as games.

## Enhance motivation

To enhance the motivation of participants to use YIC services in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), it is crucial to prioritise the reliability of the services. Ensuring user privacy is also of utmost importance to foster a safe and secure environment for youth seeking information or complementary services. In physical centres, it is essential to cultivate a welcoming and youth-friendly atmosphere to promote a positive user experience.

Furthermore, recommendations from family members, friends, and peers play a significant role in motivating and encouraging participants to engage with a YIC service. These personal endorsements can instill confidence and trust in the services offered, further promoting their use among the target audience.

## c. Bosnia and Herzegovina (2)-ORC Tuzla.

### Background information

Eight young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) including five females and three males participated in the focus group study. Six of them were 15 to 19 years old, two were 20 to 24. All participants were originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) and current residents of this country. Five of the participants had a high school degree and three had an elementary school degree.

One of them lived in a medium size and seven in small towns. Six of the participants were students, two were unemployed. None of the participants earn money. They had similar marital statuses; they all were single. See more details in *Table 4*.

*Table 4: background information from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2)*

Type of information	Categories	Sub-categories	N
Age	15 – 19		6
	20 – 24		2
	25 – 29		
Gender	Female		5
	Male		3
	Don't want to specify		
	Other		
Country of residence	Bosnia and Herzegovina (2)		8
Country of origin	Bosnia and Herzegovina (2)		8
Education (highest degree)	Primary education		3
	Secondary education		
	High school		5
	Bachelor's degree		
	Master's degree		
	Higher than Master's degree		

<b>Living Area</b>	Countryside / Small town		7
	Medium sized city		1
	Large city		
<b>Occupation</b>	Only student		6
	Employed		
	Unemployed		2
<b>Income range</b>	None		8
	Under 100 Euros		
	Between 100-200 Euros		
	Above 200 Euros		
	Under 500 Euros		
	500-1000 Euros		
	Above 1000 Euros		
<b>Marital status</b>	Single		8
	Married		
	In a relationship		
	Prefer not to say		

## Main results from the Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) focus group interview

### Familiarity with YIC services

None of the participants in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) were familiar with YIC services due to the absence of these centres in the country. However, they expressed their belief that YIC services would provide valuable services on job-related activities, such as offering courses on various job search, informing on opportunities, and assisting with creating effective CVs and LinkedIn profiles.

### Increase visibility of YIC services

All participants showed interest in learning more about YIC services and their potential benefits. The participants emphasised the significance of the internet as a powerful

tool to increase the visibility of services. They also suggested that universities and non-governmental associations could play a crucial role in offering youth services and promoting them to young people.

### Information needs and challenges

In terms of information needs, the participants highlighted several areas of interest. They expressed the need for both formal and non-formal education-related information, such as scholarships and enrollment procedures for different universities. Additionally, they mentioned the importance of accessing information about health and mental health services, employment and career counselling, and personal development and access to autonomy.

Participants in this focus group faced several challenges when seeking information, with the most significant challenge being the lack of reliable and proper sources of information. They expressed frustration over the high prevalence of irrelevant information on the internet and their limited skills and knowledge to navigate through it effectively. Another obstacle they encountered was the availability of outdated content, particularly on certain school websites that were not functional or regularly updated, making it difficult for them to find the information they needed.

The participants suggest one solution to address these challenges, which involves providing young people with secure and trustworthy sources of information. They emphasized the importance of having access to accurate and up-to-date information to ensure they can make informed decisions and find the resources they require. YIC services are therefore considered to have potential to fill in this gap.

### Accessibility

Preferences regarding access to YIC services varied among the participants. Two participants expressed a preference for having access to both online and physical services, recognising the advantages of each. Some participants favoured exclusively online services, appreciating the convenience and accessibility they offer. On the other hand, some participants emphasised the importance of having access to a physical centre. They believed that physical centres provide opportunities for interaction with others, reduce social isolation, and inspire greater trust.

### Improving access to YIC service in rural areas and for people with disabilities

In terms of improving access to YIC services in rural areas, one suggested solution was to establish YIC centres in small cities located near multiple villages. This approach would ensure that young people living in the countryside become aware of these centres through word of mouth. And they have a chance to access physical services via a short trip.

Additionally, the proximity of these centres to their residences would facilitate easy access for the youth when they need assistance or information.

Regarding disabled people, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) suggested using online services, phone calls and live chat to help them find quality and adapted information.

### **Preferences in receiving information (format and channel)**

The majority of participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) expressed a preference for receiving information in text format, particularly for sensitive topics. They believed that detailed explanations in written form would enhance their understanding. However, one participant expressed a desire to receive information in multiple formats, including text, video, and images.

For seeking information, participants need guidance and support relied heavily on their personal networks and non-governmental organisations as trusted sources. They considered verified webpages to be reliable sources of information as well.

### **Evaluation of information**

For seeking information, participants need guidance and support. It is not easy for them to seek information on the Internet by themselves. To help young people to evaluate YIC services and find reliable information, there should be guidance for them to find reliable resources and content. However, the reliability of resources should be ensured by quality control mechanisms. In addition, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) mostly trust physical centres and to look for information in person.

### **Expectations from YIC services**

Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2) expressed their expectations for a physical centre that offers a variety of services and is staffed by young and professional individuals. They emphasised the importance of being able to visit the centre in person and interact with professionals who are close to their age, as it instills a sense of reliability and ensures they receive youth-friendly information. Furthermore, they emphasised the need for these centres to meet social standards and be culturally sensitive.

### **Enhance motivation.**

To enhance the motivation of young people to use future YIC services in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2), it is important to adopt and incorporate new trends. For example, using platforms like TikTok and features such as Reels to promote and transform information could be effective in capturing the attention of young users. Additionally, having offices or presence in schools and universities would make it more convenient for young people to

access these services.

Recommendations from family members, friends, and peers were highlighted as influential factors in motivating and encouraging participants to access YIC services.

## d. Montenegro – Forum MNE

### Background information

Six young people from Montenegro including four females and two males participated in the focus group study. Four of them were 15 to 19 years old, two were 20 to 24. All participants were originally from Montenegro, but only one was originally from Serbia. They all were residents of Montenegro. Four of the participants had a high school degree and two had a bachelor's degree.

One of them lived in a large city and five in medium sized cities. Two of the participants were students, one was unemployed, and three had jobs, as content creator, entrepreneur, and health mediator. Just one participant earned money. They had different marital statuses, four were single, two of them were in a relationship. See more details in *Table 5*.

*Table 5: background information in*

Type of information	Categories	Sub-categories	N
Age	15 – 19		4
	20 – 24		2
	25 – 29		
Gender	Female		4
	Male		2
	Don't want to specify		
	Other		
Country of residence	Montenegro		6
Country of origin	Montenegro		5
	Serbia		1
Education (highest degree)	Primary education		
	Secondary education		
	High school		4
	Bachelor's degree		2
	Master's degree		
	Higher than Master's degree		

Living Area	Countryside / Small town		
	Medium sized city		5
	Large city		1
Occupation	Only student		2
	Employed	Content creator,	1
		Entrepreneur	1
		Health mediator	1
Unemployed		1	
Income range	None		
	Under 100 Euros		
	Between 100-200 Euros		
	Above 200 Euros		
	Under 500 Euros		
	500-1000 Euros		
	Above 1000 Euros		
Marital status	Single		4
	Married		
	In a relationship		2
	Prefer not to say		

### Main results from the Montenegro focus group interview

#### Familiarity with YIC services

Most of the participants from Montenegro had a basic familiarity with YIC service, however there is no available YIC in Montenegro as such. They are aware that there are virtual groups (e.g., Viber groups) providing information for young people on different topics, including groups run by public authorities targeting young people.

In addition, different organizations, mostly non-governmental, and personal contacts are trusted sources of information for young people. Only one of the participants was well-informed about these organizations, as the person in question had work experience in one of them.

The participants from Montenegro no longer have access to a functioning YIC centre.



Currently, there are either no active YIC services available or only organisations that offer limited services and information for young people, mainly related to cultural events.

In Montenegro, alternative sources have emerged to provide the youth with relevant information, including articles and non-governmental organisations. Focus group participants with basic familiarity expressed that a YIC service provides information regarding health issues, mostly psychology and entertainment-related topics.

### **Increase the visibility of YIC services**

Participants in Montenegro believe that there are several ways to increase the visibility of the YIC service. For example, promoting the services in schools for students or promoting via word of mouth. Hearing about success stories of other youth and peers encourages young people to use the YIC service.

### **Information needs and challenges**

Participants in Montenegro need different types of information, including education both formal and non-formal (scholarships, university enrolment and exchange programs), health, employment and career counselling, volunteering, sports, political issues, legal advice, especially labor law and legislation regarding starting a business, events (e.g., local cultural events, international events, and different workshops), and personal development/autonomy. In addition, they would like to receive information regarding learning foreign languages and arts.

Participants in this country encounter multiple challenges when seeking information:

- ! Firstly, there is a lack of reliable sources available to provide them with the necessary information.
- ! Secondly, discrimination and the unfair or selective distribution of information further exacerbate the problem. Information does not seem to be equally accessible to everyone, according to participants, certain sources are hidden and restricted.
- ! Furthermore, participants in this country often lack the motivation to actively pursue information.

Several solutions were suggested by participants to solve the existing problems:

- 1) Young people should receive guidance and support to find information and use it for their benefit.
- 2) Information should be organized and categorized for easy searching possibilities. For example, several Viber groups distribute information on all the topics and for different age groups.
- 3) Information should be filtered and reliable.
- 4) Information should be freely accessible and distributed to everyone without any discrimination.

- 5) Several participants recommend the establishment of a comprehensive webpage or platform that offers youth information on various topics clearly categorised. This webpage would serve as a reliable and inclusive source where young people can access information freely and without any biases.

### **Accessibility**

All participants would like to have access to both online and physical services. They believe that both physical and online YIC services have their own distinct advantages. For example, online services provide fast and easily accessible information, aligning perfectly with the modern and digitalised lifestyle. Establishing an online service is particularly convenient, especially for the initial setup, and enables widespread access to people across the entire country. Furthermore, creating an online centre proves to be highly cost-effective, though digital services need to be well resourced to succeed in their purpose and meet the expectations of their users.

On the other hand, participants express their preference for having access to a physical YIC centre. They believe that a physical centre offers valuable opportunities for interacting with individuals who share similar needs and interests. They emphasise the importance of face-to-face discussions and the potential to collectively find solutions to their problems. Furthermore, they appreciate the sense of intimacy that a physical centre provides. These participants firmly believe that visiting a physical centre makes it easier for them to access information.

One participant highlighted the approach of initially exploring online centres as a preferable option, arguing that by checking online resources first, users can potentially find sufficient information without the need to visit a physical centre. However, if the online search proves inadequate, the availability of a physical centre provides an alternative to ensure access to comprehensive information and individualized assistance.

### **Improving access to YIC service in rural areas and for people with disabilities**

Regarding improving access to YIC services in rural areas two solutions were suggested:

- 1) Establishing online services, and making it possible for young people to have access to online YIC service in rural areas.
- 2) Teaching young people in rural areas to seek for information online.
- 3) Convince parents about the usefulness of these services for their young children. In this case parents will allow their children to visit physical centres in other cities.

Regarding young people with disabilities, a centre should consider their specific needs and provide them useful and relevant information and services. In addition, any physical centre or online service should be accessible to different types of disabilities. For example, in case of a physical centre, availability of an elevator is necessary.

## Preferences in receiving information (format and channel)

The participants from Montenegro demonstrate a strong preference for receiving information in various formats. They express interest in combinations such as text and video, or text paired with pictures, where visual elements enhance the understanding and engagement. Additionally, they acknowledge the effectiveness of podcasts as a means of sharing information alongside textual content. Interestingly, one participant specifically mentions a desire to receive information in the form of Reels on social media platforms like TikTok. They believe that this format aligns better with the lifestyle of young people, offering a closer connection and relevance to their interests.

Information should be readily accessible through a single, reliable source that caters specifically to the needs of young people. Whether in online or physical centres, it is essential to prioritise a user-friendly design that takes into account the interests of the focus group participants. Implementing a calendar system can greatly enhance the ease of viewing and remembering important dates. For instance, a calendar can prominently display deadlines for university registrations, scholarships, and various events, ensuring that such crucial information remains easily accessible and memorable.

The majority of participants express a strong preference for utilising social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, as primary channels for accessing information. They find these platforms to be highly effective in delivering relevant content. Additionally, participants emphasise the importance of having a dedicated web hubs or website where they can easily search for comprehensive information. YouTube is also highlighted as another favored channel for sharing information among young people in Montenegro.

## Evaluation of information

Participants in this country place their trust solely in verified sources and reliable providers when it comes to accessing information. Although a preferred channel to access content is social media, they express a lack of trust in the information disseminated through social media platforms. Instead, they prioritise sources that have undergone rigorous verification processes to ensure accuracy and credibility.

Participants argue that in order to assist young people in evaluating YIC services and accessing reliable information, there should be guidance provided to help them identify trustworthy resources (media and information literacy). However, it is crucial to ensure the reliability of these resources through quality control mechanisms. A reliable YIC service should possess specific features, including outreach to multipliers (family, peers, and teachers) and universal access to information without any form of discrimination.

## Expectations from YIC services

Participants in Montenegro express the expectation of having physical centres in each

municipality that offer diverse services and operate during evening hours. They also emphasise the importance of having a web platform where information is readily available. Considering that most participants are unfamiliar with YIC services, it is essential to promote these services and their offerings through various channels.

Participants further anticipate that the services and information provided by these services are tailored to local issues and aligned with the needs of the youth population. Moreover, they emphasise the importance of fair and unbiased distribution of information. Each physical centre should be staffed with knowledgeable professionals, both male and female, who possess a deep understanding of young people's concerns and involve them in the process. Additionally, establishing an easily accessible communication channel would enable young people to reach out for assistance whenever required.

## Enhance motivation

Focus group participants strongly believe that in order to enhance young people's motivation to use a future YIC service in Montenegro, it is crucial to have a well-established service with distinct features. These services should be actively promoted through various channels, and the successful outcomes resulting from using these services should be widely showcased. Recommendations from family members, friends, and peers also play a significant role in motivating and encouraging young people to engage with a YIC service. Furthermore, ensuring that the information provided within the centre aligns with the needs and expectations of young people, and is regularly updated, becomes vital in fostering their motivation to benefit from the YIC service.

## e. North Macedonia – Poraka Nova

### Background information

Six young people from North Macedonia including four females and two males participated in the focus group study. One was 15 to 19 years old, three were 20 to 24, and two were 25 to 29. All participants were originally from North Macedonia and residents in this country. Three of the participants had a high school degree and three had a bachelor's degree.

One lived in a medium-size city and five in large cities. Four were students, one was unemployed, and one has a job. Just one participant earned money. They had different marital statuses, three were single, and three of them preferred not to say. See more details in *Table 6*.

*Table 6: background information in North Macedon*

Type of information	Categories	Sub-categories	N
Age	15 – 19		1
	20 – 24		3
	25 – 29		2
Gender	Female		4
	Male		2
	Don't want to specify		
	Other		
Country of residence	North Macedonia		6
Country of origin	North Macedonia		6
Education (highest degree)	Primary education		
	Secondary education		
	High school		3
	Bachelor's degree		3
	Master's degree		
	Higher than Master's degree		

Living Area	Countryside / Small town		
	Medium sized city		1
	Large city		5
Occupation	Only student		4
	Employed	Employed in a company	1
	Unemployed		1
Income range	None		4
	Under 100 Euros		
	Between 100-200 Euros		
	Above 200 Euros		
	Under 500 Euros		1
	500-1000 Euros		
	Above 1000 Euros		
	Prefer not to say		1
Marital status	Single		3
	Married		
	In a relationship		
	Prefer not to say		3

### Main results from the North Macedonian focus group interview

#### Familiarity with YIC services

Most of the focus group participants from north Macedonia were not familiar with YIC service and only two had a basic familiarity. None of the participants had access to a real YIC service, since there are not commonly available in the country, or the equivalent services provide limited services and information, e.g. information regarding local cultural events.

Participants with basic familiarity were aware that a YIC service provides information and services regarding job-related activities (e.g., courses about job finding, promotion of work opportunities, CV design, etc.), legal issues, and leisure time. In addition, they offer peer support in a friendly atmosphere.

## Increase visibility of YIC services

Two of the participants wished to learn more about these centres and services and use them. Participants in North Macedonia believe that there are several strategies to increase the visibility of the YIC service. For example, they mentioned connection with the municipality, schools, faculties, youth boards in universities, social media, and visual and audio promotion in cities, such as billboards. Among all the suggested methods, the use of social media was the most popular one.

## Information needs and challenges

Focus group participants from North Macedonia need different types of information, including education both formal and non-formal, health, employment/ career counselling, events (e.g., local cultural events and international events), and personal development and access to autonomy. Youth information helps young people make decisions that will impact their future. 50 percent of the participants expressed the need to access a YIC service covering all the topics relevant to them.

Participants in this country face several challenges in seeking quality information.

- ! The most important challenge is the high availability of irrelevant information.
- ! Information overload is another big obstacle.
- ! Disinformation and the inability of web services meeting the needs and expectations of young people (bad design).

Two solutions were suggested to solve the existing challenges:

- 1) To increase the offer of provide accurate and reliable information for young people.
- 2) To support and guide young people on how to seek information (educate young people and improve their media and information literacy skills).

## Accessibility

Two of the participants preferred to have online access to a YIC service, since it is fast, easy and in line with the current digitalised lifestyle. Three preferred YIC services, as they believe that a physical centre offers the opportunity to interact with other people with similar needs and interests, hear new ideas, and create bonds.

They mentioned that a physical centre may provide better support and clarity. In addition, they highlighted a higher level of trust in YIC services. Only one of the participants preferred both, online services, and physical centres.

## Improving access to YIC service in rural areas and for people with disabilities

Regarding improving access to YIC services in rural areas two solutions were suggested:

- 1) Using mobile info points present in villages during cultural events, and
- 2) Connecting YIC services with schools and training teachers to refer to information providers.

Regarding disabled people, a YIC service should cover their specific needs and provide them with useful and relevant information and services. In addition, physical centres should be user-friendly and accessible for them.

## Preferences in receiving information (format and channel)

Participants from North Macedonia mostly preferred to have information in text format, especially for sensitive information. Video is the second most popular format for accessing information, and some consider the possibility of accessing information in audio format. One of the participants preferred to have access to information in all possible formats.

Three of the participants preferred a direct hotline to call anytime they wish to receive information and to have an online one-stop-shop to search for information. Two participants would like to receive information via social media, mainly Instagram. Another suggested email as a key channel to receive information. Only one of the participants preferred to receive information through all possible channels.

## Evaluation of information

They trust information available on verified sources or shared by reliable providers. In addition, they trust information provided by social media, mainly Instagram. The participants did not mention any specific Instagram pages. Two of the participants do not trust any sources of information or any providers.

Participants argue that to help young people to evaluate YIC services and find reliable information, there should be guidance for them to find quality resources and content. However, the reliability of resources should be ensured by quality control mechanisms. A YIC service should present specific features to be reliable, which include according to participants:

- 👉 Being available and accessible in the long term
- 👉 Having young staff and volunteers
- 👉 Ensuring transparency and honesty the information provided
- 👉 Updating information frequently
- 👉 Ensuring the security and anonymity of the users



## Expectations from YIC services

Participants in North Macedonia expect to have access to a physical place with different services and to see information on youth information web hubs or social media. Since most participants are not familiar with YIC service, the service should be promoted through different channels and media. They expect that the information and services provided considers local issues and youth needs. In addition, these centres should be able to ensure the privacy of users.

## Enhance motivation.

Participants believe that to increase young people's motivation to use a future YIC service in North Macedonia, there should first be an available centre with specific features. These centres should be promoted through different channels and success stories should be widely disseminated. In addition, recommendations from family members, friends, and peers are helpful to motivate and encourage young people to use YIC service.

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PIONEERING YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICES  
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS