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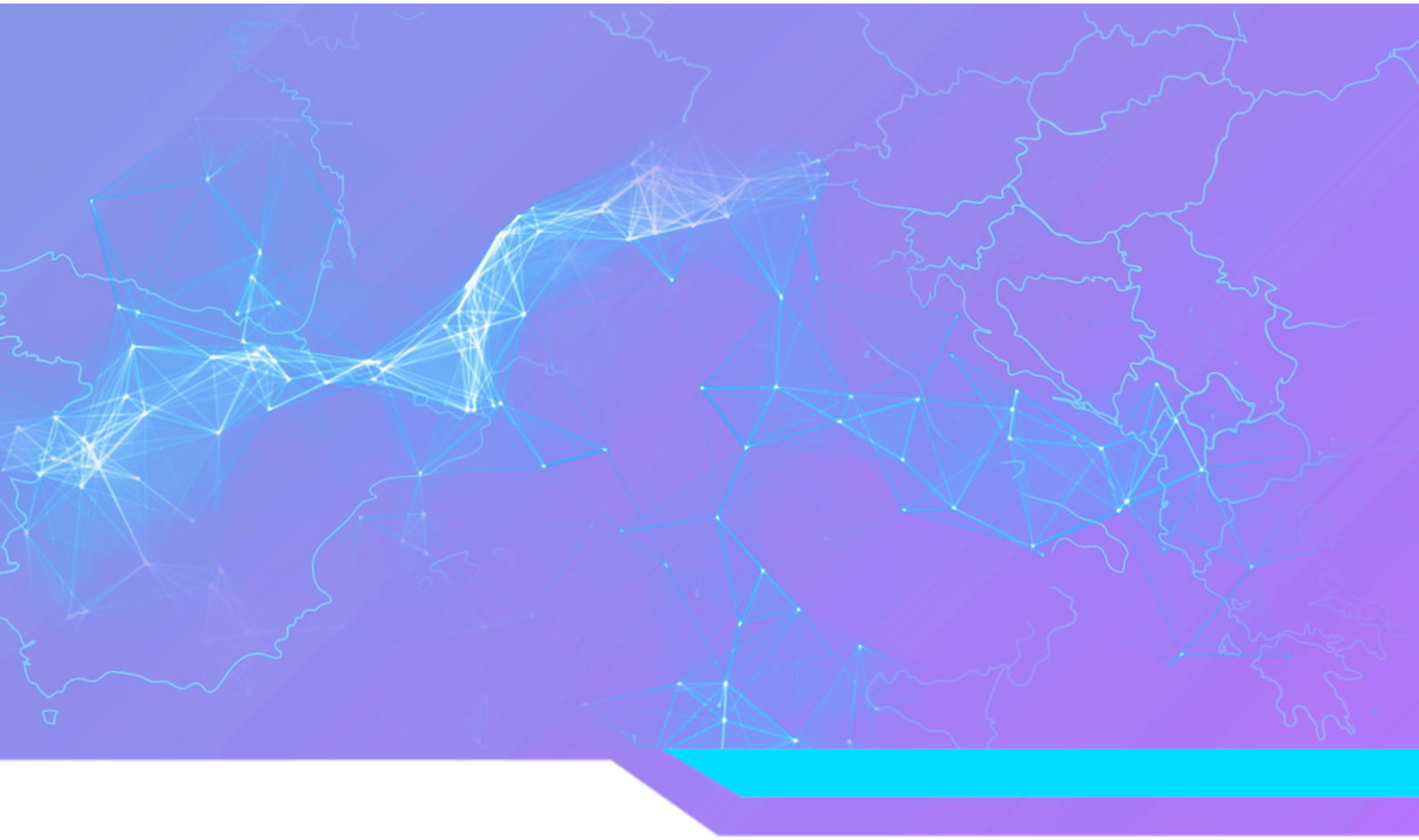

MAPPING OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL DEMOCRACY:

Skills, Education and Digital Rights

Case of Albania

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights

uzor
Udruženje za odgovorni i održivi razvoj

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Executive summary

Digitalization is rapidly transforming societies, offering immense opportunities for progress while simultaneously presenting new challenges. These challenges, such as digital divides and cybersecurity risks, can inhibit citizens from fully leveraging the benefits of digitalization and protecting themselves from the associated threats. Youth, as one of the most digitally connected age groups, are uniquely positioned to take advantage of digital opportunities but often face barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the digital landscape, particularly in the context of civic engagement and political activism.

The aim of the research is to explain the link between political participation/social activism and digital literacy and, i.e. to demonstrate the extent and way in which digital skills and knowledge of digital rights constitute important factors (or determinants) for youth's participative and activist practices in the digital sphere. To produce the report a mix-method was used constituting of document analysis, online survey, focus group discussions and in-depth expert interviews.

The research employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating document analysis, an online survey, focus group discussions, and in-depth expert interviews to provide a comprehensive analysis of youth digital activism in Albania.

The findings reveal a nuanced landscape where Albanian youth are both aware of and interested in social and political issues, but there is a significant gap between their belief in the power of digital activism and their actual involvement in digital civic activities. While 79.8% of respondents regularly engage with news and social issues, and 74.1% believe in the potential of digital activism to effect societal change, only 19.6% actively participate in digital activism, suggesting a prevalent trend of "slacktivism." Many youth limit their engagement to passive activities, such as sharing content, rather than taking more direct actions, which is further compounded by the perception that digital activism may be superficial.

Key barriers to active digital participation include concerns about internet privacy and safety, a lack of time, and skepticism about the ability to drive real change. Focus group discussions highlighted the fear of online abuse as a significant deterrent, as well as the commercialization of youth engagement in digital spaces. Additionally, the research reveals a digital divide, particularly affecting vulnerable youth, who rate their digital skills lower than their non-vulnerable peers. This divide is further exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, limiting access to both technology and digital education.

Additionally, trust in consultative processes is low among Albanian youth, with low levels of trust impacting their active participation in both physical and digital consultation and participation process.

There is a need to engage in trust building processes, where young people build trust towards real-life experiences, which can then be transferred in the digital world with increased levels of activism.

Cybersecurity is another major concern for Albanian youth, with many feeling underprepared to protect themselves from online risks. Privacy and safety concerns are widespread, yet most youth have a limited understanding of their digital rights. This lack of awareness contributes to feelings of vulnerability and low levels of trust in institutions' ability to safeguard these rights. Moreover, youth demonstrate limited trust in consultative processes, both online and offline, which impacts their willingness to engage in activism or political participation.

The research underscores the need for comprehensive measures to overcome these barriers and enhance youth digital participation. Public institutions, civil society organizations, political parties, and youth organizations all have a critical role to play in ensuring that young people can fully leverage digital opportunities while being protected from associated risks. Public institutions should focus on building trust and inclusivity by ensuring that digital technologies are accessible to all young people, regardless of their socio-economic background, geographic location, or abilities. While civil society organizations should engage youth in awareness campaigns, both online and offline, promoting digital activism, digital rights, and safe online practices.

Formal education, lifelong learning programs, informal education and capacity building activities, as continuously working towards building trust in institutions and processes, are key to fostering meaningful participation of Albanian youth in digital democracy.

Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing a shift of youth-led social movements, from traditional in-person activism to engaging online through various forms of digital platforms and tools. Movements like the Arab Spring [1]and the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity[2], along with hashtag campaigns, illustrate how activists of all ages have utilized the internet to organize, mobilize, and advocate for their causes, including those developed with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as All Eyes on Rafah[3]. For example, the #MeToo hashtag was shared over 19 million times globally within less than a year, while the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was used an average of 20,000 times daily worldwide. These networked social movements, regardless of the cause (whether advocating for environmental issues, civil rights, economic reforms, or political transparency), have shown a remarkable capacity to quickly and effectively mobilize large numbers of people and react toward social norms and governmental actions.

Online communities have increasingly stepped in to support vulnerable groups, often filling gaps where government processes have been overwhelmed. In recent years, digital activism has emerged as a powerful tool for grassroots political mobilization for development and peace. Generation Z[4] is redefining civic engagement by using social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to connect with peers and promote civic initiatives. These platforms serve as safe spaces for expressing opinions and launching diverse campaigns. Through hashtags, mentions, and direct messages, young people and organizations can easily collaborate to drive meaningful change[5]. Contrary to the stereotype of disengagement, there is significant evidence of political and social engagement among Gen Z, especially in supporting rights related to immigration and equality, challenging the narrative that they are disinterested in politics.

In Western Balkans, even though digital infrastructure constitutes a challenge[6], young people engagement in internet seems to be above 85% in the whole region[7], although exact figures for daily use are not specified. Digital tools are becoming increasingly important in the region. Another variable of digital engagement is participation in digital education. Based on an ETF report 31% of young people in Western Balkans have participated in online courses.[8] Moreover, a 2023 European Central

[1] For a quick introduction please check: https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring, last accessed 30 September 2024
[2] For a quick introduction please check: https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Maidan-protest-movement, last accessed 30 September 2024
[3] For a quick overview please check: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/29/what-is-all-eyes-on-rafah-decoding-the-latest-viral-social-trend, last accessed 30 September 2024
[4] For the definition please check: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Generation-Z, last accessed 30 September 2024
[5] Friel, S. (n.d.). *Modern-day youth activism: Youth engagement in the digital age*. Global Fund For Children.
[6] UNICEF. (2023). *Digital learning landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia: A policy analysis*. https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/5666/file/UNICEF-Digital-Learning-Landscape-2023.pdf, last accessed 30 September 2024
[7] Regional Cooperation Council. (2023). *Balkan Barometer 2023*. Retrieved from https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/, last accessed 10 September 2024
[8] European Training Foundation. (2024). *Regional Insight Report 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/etf-regional-insight-report-2024

Bank report provides interesting facts when it comes to digital participation in banking and online services. The report shows that the use of digital banking services has risen to approximately 50% of the population, indicating a steady increase in digital banking adoption.[9] Also, the Media Sustainability Index 2023 indicates that 70% of people in the Western Balkans access news online regularly. This reflects a continued trend towards online news consumption.[10] Lastly, the increase in use of digital tools, is also noted in the World Bank's 2024 report, which highlights that 20% of young people in the Western Balkans use the internet for civic or political engagement, marking an increase from previous years.[11]

In Albania, young people are increasingly engaging in digital activism, using social media and other platforms to advocate for various causes, mobilize communities, and influence political discourse. Recognizing the critical role that digital skills, literacies, and rights play in modern democratic engagement, the European Parliament has emphasized the urgent need to build capacities among youth in these areas. The "Youth Participation in Digital Democracy: From Digital Skills to Digital Rights of Youth with Fewer Opportunities in the Western Balkans" (EYDR) project, funded by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the Field of Youth Programme, addresses this need by focusing on equipping young people with the necessary digital competencies for effective participation in today's digital landscape. This initiative, coordinated by SCiDEV and involving partners from Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Spain, aims to bridge the gap in digital democracy participation, particularly for those with fewer opportunities. In the context of the project, a mapping exercise is conducted with the aim of explaining the link between political participation/social activism and digital literacy and, i.e. to demonstrate the extent and way in which digital skills and knowledge of digital rights constitute important factors (or determinants) for youth's participative and activist practices in the digital sphere.

The findings from this mapping will provide a baseline knowledge resource for further youth initiatives and contribute to the development of policies and practices that support effective youth participation in digital democracy. By fostering networking, peer-to-peer support, and the exchange of best practices, the project aims to raise awareness among stakeholders and encourage meaningful policy dialogue. Through these efforts, the EYDR project will help ensure that young people in the Western Balkans are well-equipped to navigate and influence the rapidly evolving digital-political landscape.

Definitions

[9] European Central Bank. (2023). *Annual Report 2023*. https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/annual/html/index.en.html, last accessed 10 September 2024
[10] IREX. (2023). *Media Sustainability Index 2023: Western Balkans*. https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-western-balkans, last accessed 10 September 2024
[11] World Bank. (2024). *Digital Engagement Report 2024*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment/publication/digital-engagement-report-2024, last accessed 10 September 2024

To frame this study, several key terms and concepts are essential. The authors have taken into consideration the following definitions from Council of Europe.

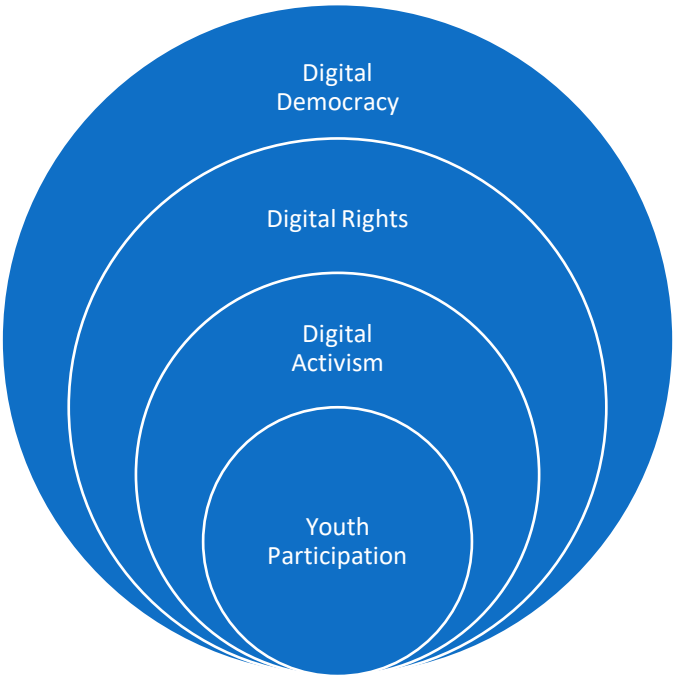


Figure 1. Theoretical Consideration of Definitions

- **Digital democracy**[12], also referred to as e-democracy, involves the use of digital technologies to enhance democratic processes and participation. It aims to empower civil society and improve policy-making procedures by facilitating both bottom-up and top-down initiatives. Digital democracy is based on democratic, human, social, ethical, and cultural values, and it must respect and implement fundamental freedoms, human rights, and minority rights, including freedom of and access to information. It is human-centred and not technology-centred, focusing on strengthening participation, inclusiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, transparency, openness, and accountability.
- **Digital Activism**[13] involves the use of information and communication technology (ICT), social media, and other digital tools to enable individuals, particularly young people, to influence and engage with political and civic life. It encompasses various forms of online participation, including the use of digital platforms to advocate for social, political, or environmental change.

[12] Council of Europe. *Handbook on Digital Democracy*. https://rm.coe.int/handbook-e-democracy/16809fda61, last accessed 14 September 2024
[13] Council of Europe. *Digital Citizenship Education* https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/active-participation, last accessed 29 August 2024

Digital activism allows for the expression of opinions, organization of movements, and mobilization of support for various causes.

- **Digital Rights**[14] refer to the rights of individuals to access, use, create, and publish digital media, as well as the right to privacy and freedom of expression online. These rights are an extension of human rights into the digital realm, ensuring that individuals can enjoy privacy, security, access, inclusion, and freedom of expression in the online environment. Digital rights also encompass responsibilities, such as using digital technologies in a safe and responsible manner and respecting the rights of others.
- **Youth Participation**[15]**:** According to the Council of Europe, youth participation is defined as having the right, the means, the space, and the opportunity, along with the necessary support, to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities to contribute to building a better society. This concept is central to democratic citizenship and aims to achieve positive changes in young people's lives and society.

Research context

According to the 2023 census data[16], young people aged 15 to 29 years old account for approximately 18% of Albania's population, marking approximately a 7% pp decrease from the 2011 household and population census, when they constituted approximately 25% of the country's total population[17]. These numbers call for urgent interventions, in first mapping and understanding the reasons why young people are leaving the country, and secondly, instill support measures and mechanisms to ensure education, employment and participation of young people in the country's development, in a meaningful and impactful manner.

Moreover, the youth unemployment rate for this age group is estimated at 22.0%, indicating persistent challenges in the labor market for young people. This high unemployment rate underscores the need for effective employment policies and programs to support youth in finding stable and meaningful work opportunities, alongside with deeper policies and measures that link education and labor market.

Additionally, the rate of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was notably high at 25.2%, which is more than double the EU-27 average. This statistic highlights a critical issue, as a significant portion of the youth population is disengaged from both the labor market and

[14] ibid
[15] Council of Europe. *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life,* Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life - Youth (coe.int) last accessed 10 September 2024
[16] National Institute of Statistics, INSTAT, https://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/censet/censet-e-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2, last accessed October 15, 2024.
[17] National Institute of Statistics INSTAT, https://www.instat.gov.al/en/children-and-youth-official-statistics/population/percentage-of-youth-15-29-years-old-to-the-total-population-at-the-beginning-of-the-year/ last accessed October 11, 2024.

educational institutions. Addressing the NEET rate is essential for improving the overall socio-economic conditions for young people in Albania, ensuring they have access to education, training, and employment opportunities that can lead to a more prosperous future.[18]

Internet penetration in Albania stood at 80.1% in 2023[19]. INSTAT's 2023 survey on Information and Communication Technologies usage in Households and by Individuals[20] shows that 83.1% of the population aged 16-74 uses internet. From this age group, 96.2% state that they use internet several times during the day. Interestingly, the same report states that 99.8% of surveyed individuals state that they use smartphones to access internet. While only 28.2% of the population accesses internet through laptop. The gap on devices used to access internet can shed light into the level of digital skills of the population, as well as one can argue on the purpose of use of internet, being mainly for communication purposes.

Eurostat[21] estimates the digital skills level of the Albanian population aged 16-74 years old to be at 23.32%, marking a 0.48 pp decrease from 2022. The Eurostat indicator, a composite one, relates to internet or software use that individuals aged 16-74 perform in five specific areas (Information and data literacy, Communication and collaboration, Digital content creation, Safety, and Problem solving). Contrary to Eurostat data, INSTAT evaluates an increase in digital or computer skills of the population. However, there is no overall estimate of the level of digital skills in the country, and INSTAT focuses on evaluation across several areas such as file transferring, installing software/applications, copying or moving files or folders, using software to edit, using word processing software, creating presentations, using spread sheet software, changing the settings of any software, and writing code in a programming language.

It is important to emphasize that quality data, that truly captures the reality of digital skills and internet use in the country is crucial for sustainable policy development and interventions.

The overall internet penetration landscape is nuanced within the country's territory. Data pertaining to 2023, are not available, and for the sake of argument, referral is made to data from 2021[22], when urban areas, particularly the capital city Tirana, have the highest rates of internet penetration. In 2021, Tirana had an urban penetration rate of 43.55%, followed by Korça at 27.8%. In contrast, rural areas face lower internet penetration rates. Durrës had the highest rural penetration rate at around 23%, while other regions like Tirana, Shkodra, and Lezha had rural penetration rates of about 10%

[18] United Nations Development Programme in Albania UNDP. *Youth Guarantee.* https://www.undp.org/albania/stories/youth-guarantee-guarantee-opportunities#:~:text=Albania's%20youth%20face%20significant%20employment,%2D27%20average%20of%2011.7%25. last accessed October 11, 2024.

[19] Data Portal. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-albania, last accessed October 15, 2024.

[20] INSTAT https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/social-condition/information-and-communication-technologies-ict-usage-in-households-and-by-individuals/#tab2, last accessed October 15, 2024.

[21] Eurostat, Digital Skills Indicator, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_sp410/default/table?lang=en&category=t_isoc.t_isoc_sk, last accessed October 15, 2024.

[22] National Authority for Electronic Communications, Annual Report 2021, https://akep.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/AKEP-Raporti-Vjetor-2021.pdf, last accessed October 15, 2024

each. This disparity highlights the ongoing digital divide between urban and rural areas in Albania, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to improve internet access in less connected regions.

Efforts to enhance digital literacy and participation are ongoing, with various initiatives aimed at increasing access to digital education and services. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access to digital tools and services across different regions and socio-economic groups.

The digital literacy of Albanian youth is a mixed landscape. According to research and expert interviews conducted as part of the "Youth Participation in Digital Democracy" project, funded by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the Field of Youth Programme, digital education in Albania is still underdeveloped. Many young people have access to digital tools and the internet, but their ability to effectively use these tools for educational and professional purposes varies significantly. Digital democracy in Albania has seen significant advancements in recent years.

The country's digital transformation efforts began in 2013, and by 2022, Albania has digitized 95% of its public services, offering 1,225 e-services.[23] Efforts to enhance digital democracy include initiatives to increase citizen participation at the local level, improve transparency, and enhance decision-making processes. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access to digital tools and services across different regions and socio-economic groups.

Albania is one of the countries that has ratified the Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention[24]. The Budapest Convention was transposed into national law in Albania in 2008. The Criminal Code[25] addresses offenses related to pornography and cybercrimes. Some of these criminal acts, though indirectly, deal with forms of cyberviolence such as cyberbullying, cyber harassment, online hate speech, cyberstalking, online grooming, sexting, child sexual abuse materials, non-consensual intimate image abuse, and sextortion. Initiatives have been taken to address these criminal offenses through specific provisions targeting the most prevalent forms of online violence faced by young people. The most widespread issues are cyberbullying and non-consensual intimate image abuse, which can be reported online via the National Cyber Security Authority's website[26] for videos containing illegal or harmful content, as well as through the Audiovisual Media Authority's website.[27]

[23] European Network of National Human Rights Institutions – ENNHRI. *Albania's Digital Transformation Journey.* https://ennhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Albanias-Digital-Transformation-Journey-1-Kejsi-Rizo.pdf, last accessed October 11, 2024.

[24] *Convention on Cybercrime*
https://qbz.gov.al/share/PFqIJuY_S7uzTEBwUTlqCQ, last accessed 30 September 2024
[25] Republic of Albania. *Criminal Code*
https://qbz.gov.al/share/_YCvl02dROybrYpg2hNERg, last accessed 30 September 2024
[26] https://aksk.gov.al/raporto-3/, last accessed 30 September 2024
[27] Since August 22, 2024, the Audiovisual Media Authority has collaborated with TikTok to enable reporting of harmful content.
https://ama.gov.al/denonco-shkelje-per-tiktok/, last accessed 30 September 2024

Young people have the right to express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs without fear of government censorship. This right encompasses the ability to post content, share information, and engage in discussions on social media, forums, blogs, and website. On the other hand, freedom of speech and expression of opinion online may violate the rights of other individuals, such as privacy, reputation, dignity, and other public interests, such as safety and public order. This right is guaranteed in Article 22 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania.

The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms for all individuals, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination in both physical and digital spheres.[28] Individuals or groups claiming discrimination may submit a complaint, along with evidence, to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, either in writing or, in exceptional cases, orally, to ensure documentation. Moreover, young people have the right to access official information on public issues according to Law No. 119/2014 "On the Right to Information" as amended.[29]

While Albania does not have a specific law governing online media, there are existing laws that protect against infringement of the individuals' rights including the Criminal Code, The Law on Protection from Discrimination[30], the Law on Audiovisual Media[31], the Law on Protection of Personal Data, and the Law on Copyright and Related Rights[32].

Albanian legislation also protects personal data and the right to privacy through Law No. 9887, dated on March 10, 2008, "On the Protection of Personal Data"[33]. The right to privacy and the protection of personal data in the Republic of Albania is also guaranteed by Article 35 of the Constitution.[34] A new law on data protection, aligned with the GDPR, has been prepared, and still has to be passed in Parliament for approval.

Cyberbullying is one of the most common problems faced by young people in Albania, as expressed in focus groups and interviews with youths who were afraid to express their opinions or post on social media due to potential bullying or becoming a meme. Although there are no specific laws addressing online discrimination, Law No.10221 "On Protection from Discrimination" applies to activities

[28] Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of *Albania 1. All are equal before the law. 2. No one may be unjustly discriminated against for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education, social status, or parentage.*
[29] Law No. 119/2014 "*On the Right to Information*" https://qbz.gov.al/share/LH3Zz5PTSMm8EejQM_XsKg, last accessed 30 September 2024
[30] *The Law on Protection from Discrimination* https://qbz.gov.al/share/IHdHbRxBReqlLh6wR3FyWQ, last accessed 30 September 2024
[31] Law Nr.97/2013 "*On Audiovisual Media*" https://qbz.gov.al/share/Bau5VcgJQz6NkhuW_8tkMw, last accessed 30 September 2024
[32] *The Law on Copyright and Related Rights* https://qbz.gov.al/share/WNyqIqt4TlGFh8LYwSqlUw, last accessed 30 September 2024
[33] Law No. 9887 "*On the Protection of Personal Data*" https://qbz.gov.al/share/5ZCL2d56SAKf9Q12rlQC6w, last accessed 30 September 2024
[34] Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania *1. No one may be obliged, except when the law requires it, to make public the data connected with his person. 2. The collection, use and making public of data about a person is done with his consent, except for the cases provided by law. 3. Everyone has the right to become acquainted with data collected about him, except for the cases provided by law. 4. Everyone has the right to request the correction or expunging of untrue or incomplete data or data collected in violation of law*. https://qbz.gov.al/share/JiLN1sTiQu6JD0BWHggXjA, last accessed 30 September 2024

conducted on the Internet, addressing issues such as hate speech, bullying, harassment, and other forms of discriminatory behaviour in digital spaces. However, this law does not address algorithmic bias.

The specific legal framework for youth participation in Albania is primarily guided by the National Youth Law 75/2019, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of young people and the mechanisms for their involvement in decision-making processes. This law emphasizes the importance of youth engagement at both central and local levels, ensuring that young people can contribute to policy development and implementation.

The National Youth Strategy further supports this framework by providing a comprehensive strategic orientation for youth development, focusing on education, employment, health, and active citizenship[35]. The National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 in Albania is designed to enhance opportunities, services, and support for young people, emphasizing their active involvement in society. It encourages youth to engage in societal and democratic processes, empowering them to participate in community issues and decision-making at both local and national levels. By fostering an environment where young people can express their voices and contribute to policy-making, the strategy aims to ensure that youth priorities are represented and addressed. The National Youth Council plays a crucial role in this process, monitoring the implementation of youth policies and advocating for the needs and aspirations of young Albanians.

In addition to promoting active participation, the strategy places a strong emphasis on increasing digital literacy and skills among youth. It provides quality education in information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance employability and prepare young people for the digital economy. The strategy also supports youth innovation and the use of technology to foster creativity and entrepreneurship. By equipping young people with the necessary digital skills and encouraging technological innovation, the strategy aims to create a generation of digitally savvy and entrepreneurial youth who can contribute to Albania's economic and social development.

Albania's Digitalization Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) [36]is another important document that contributes to establish an enabling environment for youth participation in digital democracy. It primarily focuses on fostering innovation, enhancing digital skills, and promoting economic development through technology. While the strategy emphasizes the importance of digital skills and infrastructure, it also indirectly supports e-democracy by creating an environment where young people can engage more effectively in digital spaces.
The strategy includes several key components relevant to youth and e-democracy:

- **Digital Skills Development**: The strategy highlights the need to improve digital literacy among young people, ensuring they have the skills necessary to participate in the digital economy

[35] EU-CoE Youth Partnership. *Youth Wiki Chapter Albania*, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/114007071/Youth-Wiki-Albania.pdf/f3355a46-9dc3-156b-95ab-3fab48f10964, last accessed 10 September 2024
[36] European Commission. *Smart Specialization Platform*. https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/albania, last accessed 15 September 2024

and democratic processes. This includes integrating digital skills into the education system and providing training programs.

- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship**: By promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, the strategy aims to empower young people to create and engage in digital initiatives. This can lead to increased participation in e-democracy as young entrepreneurs develop platforms and tools for civic engagement.
- **Digital Infrastructure**: Improving digital infrastructure is a key goal of the strategy, which includes expanding access to high-speed internet and digital services. This infrastructure is crucial for enabling young people to participate in e-democracy, as it provides the necessary tools and connectivity.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts the participation of young people in digital democracy in Albania remains low, because of main bottlenecks like lack of digital literacy and skills, an incomplete legal framework on digital rights. While there are initiatives to improve digital literacy, many young people still lack the necessary skills to engage effectively in digital democracy. This includes not only technical skills but also understanding how to use digital platforms for civic engagement and advocacy. Taking into account the above, this report unpacks existing constraints and suggests evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle the barriers in the sections that follow.

Methodology

This report utilizes a comprehensive methodology combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods, combining focus groups with youth and interviews with digital rights experts, with quantitative measurement of youth perceptions on digital activism and digital rights. This approach aims to capture the perspectives of young individuals, especially those from vulnerable groups, on various aspects of digital skills, literacies, and rights.

Survey data and analysis

Participants

For this study, a sample of 400 youth aged 18-30 years old was initially targeted to represent the nationwide population. Data was collected online, and the link was widely distributed to several social media channels and networks. Out of the 400 individuals contacted, 213 responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of 53.25%. Although this falls short of the original target sample size, it is sufficient for a general analysis at a 95% confidence level, with an estimated margin of error of ±6.7%. To ensure that the data more accurately reflects the nationwide population, the responses were weighted by gender. 72.3% of participants were girls and 26.3% were boys and 3 participants stated that they didn't want to answer this question. Weighting was applied to ensure that the gender distribution of the sample more accurately reflects the known distribution of the population and improve representativeness of the results. The demographic distribution after weighting is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Gender distribution of the sample after weighting

Gender	Weighted Frequency	Weighted Percentage
Male/Boy	106	49.7
Female/Girl	105	48.9
Prefer not to answer	3	1.4
Total	214	100.0

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was organized into four sections, in addition to the demographic information section, to comprehensively capture various aspects of the participants' experiences and perspectives. These sections included:

(1) *Participation and Activism*, exploring attitudes and perceptions regarding activism in the digital sphere;

(2) *Use of Digital Platforms*, examining the frequency of use and the integration of digital platforms into everyday life;

(3) *Digital Skills*, aiming to analyze gaps in digital literacy;

(4) *Digital Rights*, exploring participants' awareness and opinions on online privacy and data protection.

Data analysis

The data collected through google forms were then converted to SPSS 25. The process was followed by a data cleaning process, mostly on variable labelling and coding and checking variables for high levels of missing values. The analysis is of a descriptive nature and the results are widely understood and used by different actors. All sections present information on frequency and percentages.

Ethical considerations

No personal or identifiable information has been collected from the questionnaire. Participants have been informed of the aim of the survey and the destination of the data and results of the survey. A rigorous approach of ensuring consent was done for the focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Focus group and interviews

To enrich the analysis and delve into the in-depth perceptions of young people and youth experts, the report also encompassed two focus groups and expert interviews. Two focus groups were conducted: one comprising general youth and another consisting of individuals from vulnerable groups. The general youth focus group aimed to capture the broad experiences, aspirations, and challenges faced by young people in Albania.

In contrast, the focus group with vulnerable groups sought to understand the unique difficulties and needs of marginalized populations, including but not limited to, those facing economic hardship, social exclusion, or disabilities. Each focus group session was facilitated by experienced moderators who employed open-ended questions and interactive activities to encourage candid discussions and ensure a rich collection of qualitative data. The focus groups were conducted at the SCiDEV premises on July 15 and 17[37].

In addition to the focus groups, expert interviews were conducted to provide a deeper contextual understanding and validate the findings from the focus groups. These interviews involved professionals and academics with extensive knowledge in youth development, social policy, and community engagement in Albania. The experts were selected based on their expertise and contributions to relevant fields, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on the issues at hand. The

[37] SCiDEV (2024) Evaluating Digital Skills, Literacies, and Rights of Youth: Insights from EYDR Focus Groups: https://eydr.scidevcenter.org/6433-2/

combination of focus groups and expert interviews allowed for triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and depth of the report's conclusions.

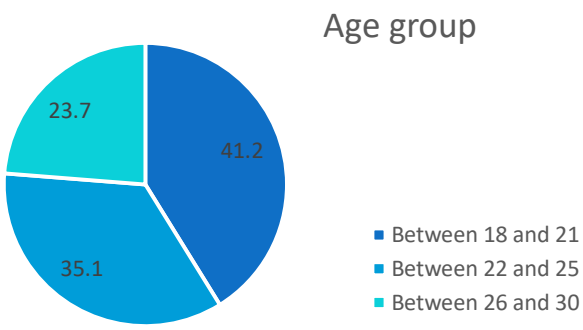
In total, 6 interviews were conducted: 3 interviews with experts and 3 interviews with young leaders.

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Interviews with digital rights experts	Interviews with youth leaders
15 July 2024	*17 July 2024*		
9 participants	6 participants	*3 interviews*	*3 interviews*

All sessions were recorded and transcribed, with thematic analysis applied to identify key patterns and insights across the different data sources. Interview questions, as well as focus groups guides are integral part of the report found in Annex 2 and Annex 3.

Results analysis and discussion

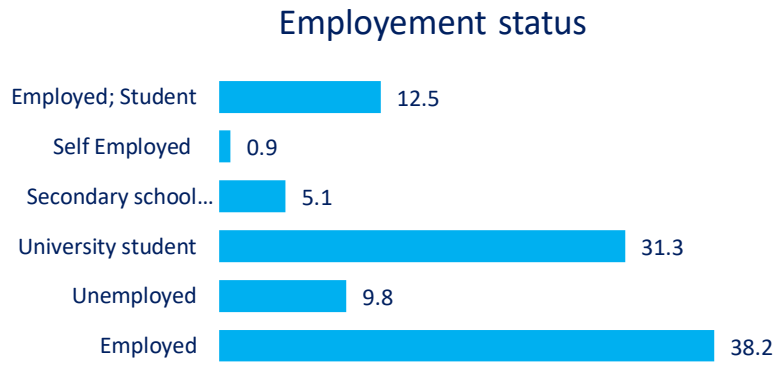
Demographics



Graphic 1 Age Group

The sample has a well- balanced age distribution. Most participants are between 18 and 21 years old, comprising 41.2% of the sample. followed by those aged 22 to 25, who make up to 35.1% of the participants. The smallest group is those between 26 and 30 years old (23.7%). Regarding education level, the majority of participants have higher education degrees. Specifically, 44.4% hold a Master's degree, and 40.9% have completed a Bachelor's degree. A smaller portion of participants, 12.6%, has completed secondary school, while only 1.4% have a primary school education. Two participants hold a PhD.

The sample is predominantly urban with 83.2% of participants living in urban areas, compared to only 16.8% residing in rural areas. The employment status of participants indicates a diverse range of economic activities. The majority, 38.2%, are employed, while a significant portion, 31.3%, are university students. Those combining work with education constitute 12.5% of respondents and are employed students, and 2.1% are employed secondary school pupils. A smaller segment of the sample is unemployed (9.8%), with very few individuals being self-employed (0.9%). Additionally, 5.1% are secondary school pupils not engaged in employment.



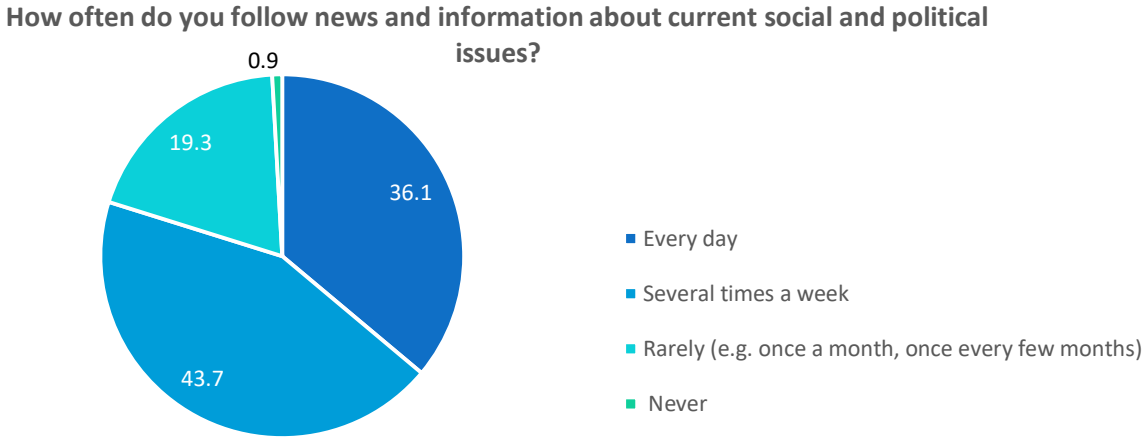
Graphic 2 Status of employment

The majority of respondents, 67.3%, have a monthly income between 0-500 EUR per month, indicating **a predominance of lower-income participants**. A smaller proportion, 24.9%, earns between 500-1000 EUR, while only 7.9% have a monthly income exceeding 1000 EUR. This suggests a **considerable economic disparity within the sample, with most individuals earning within the lower income range**.

Participants were also asked about their belonging to specific youth groups and 3.9% of participants identify as LGBTQI+, 2.1% belong to an ethnic minority, and 0.3% are youth with a disability.

Participation and youth activism

This section provides analysis on several questions related to youth participation and activism. The first ladder of participation and engagement is being informed on the news on current social and political issues. A large majority of respondents (79.8%) are regularly engaged with news and



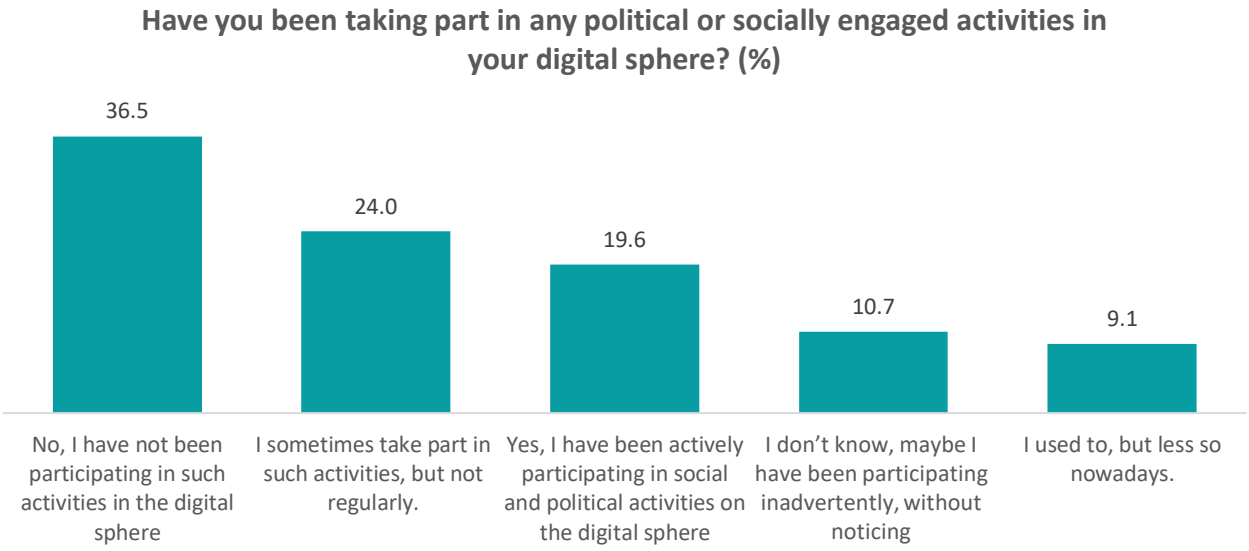
Graphic 4 Frequency of getting information

information about current social and political issues. Specifically, 36.1% of them follow such information daily, while 43.7% do so several times a week. This indicates that **the majority of youth are informed about current issues**. / A smaller portion (19.3%) follows social and political news rarely, and only 0.9% reported never doing so.

Graphic 3 Participation and/or membership

Participants were asked if they are engaged in any type of formal political, social or youth organization. The majority of respondents (42.1%) are not involved in any formal or informal organizations, political parties, or other activities. However, 33.2% of them are members of formal organizations, such as registered youth or student organizations, 15.9% are involved in informal organizations or youth groups and 8.9% are engaged in political parties or movements. Additionally, 16.8% have stated to be active in other ways, still adding to the pool of youth being actively engaged in formal and non-formal organizations.

Activism in the digital sphere plays an increasingly important role in today's social and political landscape. The findings reflect a broad spectrum of engagement, ranging from active participation to passive or uncertain involvement, with most respondents, **36.5%, reporting not participating in any form of digital activism**. Meanwhile, 24% occasionally take part, though not regularly, and **19.6% are actively engaged** in these activities. Interestingly, 10.7% of respondents were unsure if they had participated, possibly doing so inadvertently, while 9.1% used to be more involved but have since become less active.

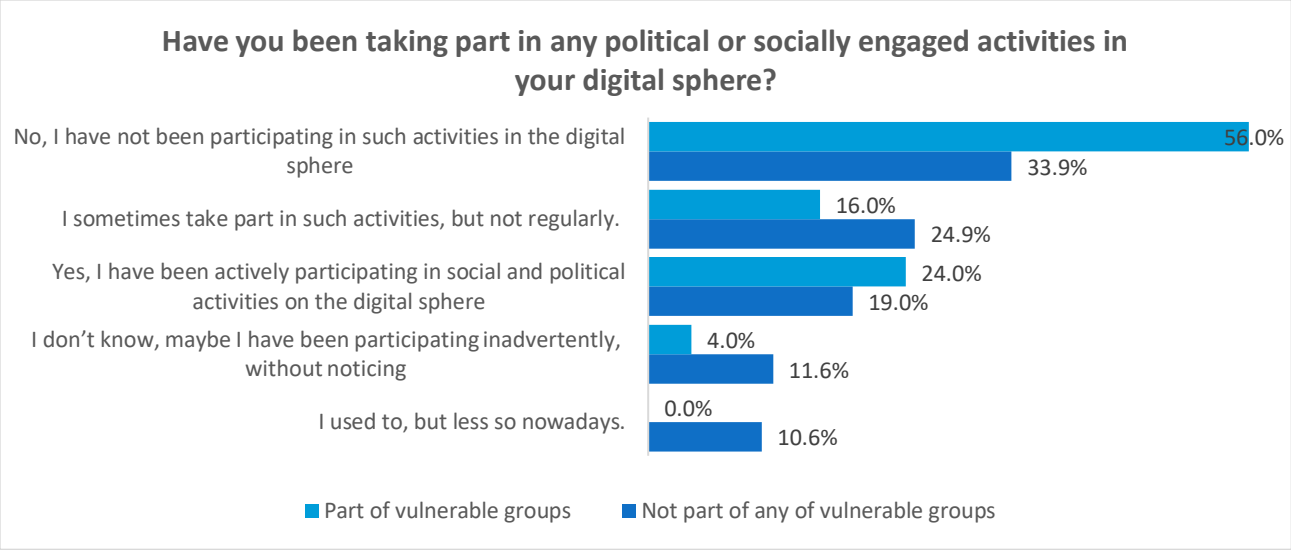


Graphic 5 Activism in digital sphere

For individuals from vulnerable groups[38], such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or those identifying as LGBTQI+, there appears to be **a different dynamic in digital activism**. More than **half of the respondents from these groups, 56% of them, reported no involvement in digital activism. However, those who do participate are more likely to be actively engaged compared to their non-**

[38] There is a small group of youth with disabilities, belong to an ethnic minority or identify as LGBTQI. All together as a group they compose 9.8% of the sample. Given the very small number of participants in each group we cant make meaningful statistical comparisons, so for comparison reasons they were all grouped in one group.

vulnerable counterparts. While these trends are evident, further analysis did not reveal statistical significance, and the small size of the vulnerable group sample requires caution in interpreting the



Graphic 6 Activism in digital sphere by vulnerability

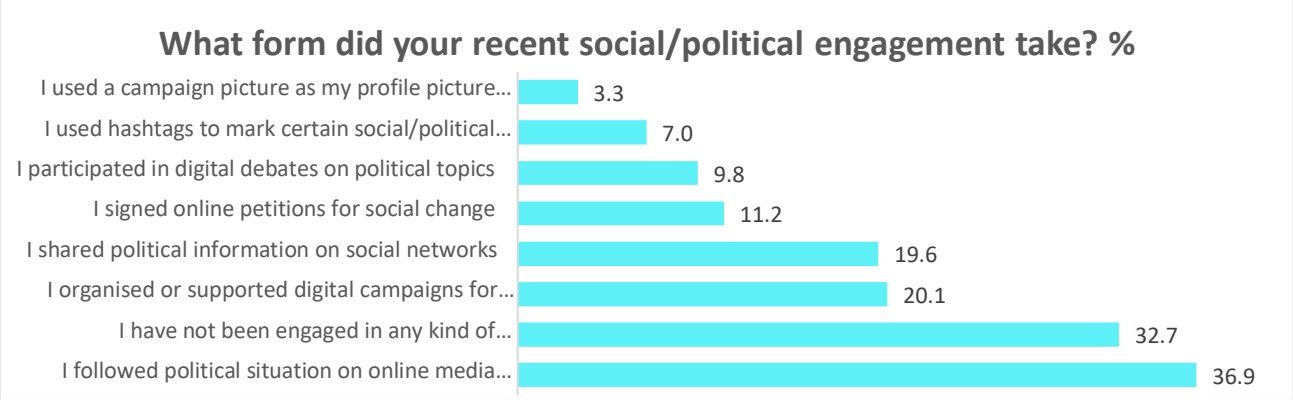
results. Further studies need to be undertaken to fully explore and understand the differences in engagement between vulnerable and non-vulnerable groups.

Participants were also asked about the form and the theme of activism they engaged in, in the digital sphere. **36.9%, reported following political developments** through online media and portals, suggesting **that staying informed is a way of engagement**. **One third of participants (32.7%) indicated that they have not been engaged in any form of social or political activity**.

Perceiving activism as the mere fact of staying informed was also echoed in the focus groups, where a part of participants viewed activism mainly as solely participating in groups where they are informed about activities within their scope of interests.

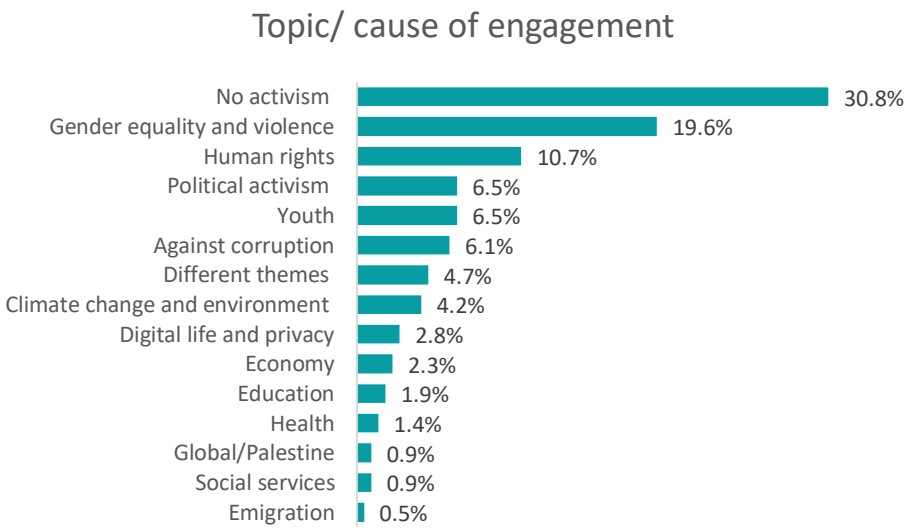
Only one fifth of respondents, **20.1% reported that they organized or supported digital campaigns for social goals**. **19.6% of participants stated they shared political information on social networks**. Other forms of participation included signing online petitions (11.2%), engaging in digital debates (9.8%), using hashtags to raise awareness (7.0%), and showing support through campaign profile pictures (3.3%).

Looking at this data patterns of slacktivism start to emerge. Slacktivism,[39] the term combines the *words slacker and activism and posits that people who support a cause by performing simple measures are not truly engaged or devoted to making a change*, can be argued to plague the overall youth engagement behaviors among the selected sample.



Graphic 7 Froms of digital participation

Regarding the theme of their recent engagement, **gender equality and violence were among the most prominent topics** (19.6%). **Human rights** saw significant involvement at 10.7%, followed by

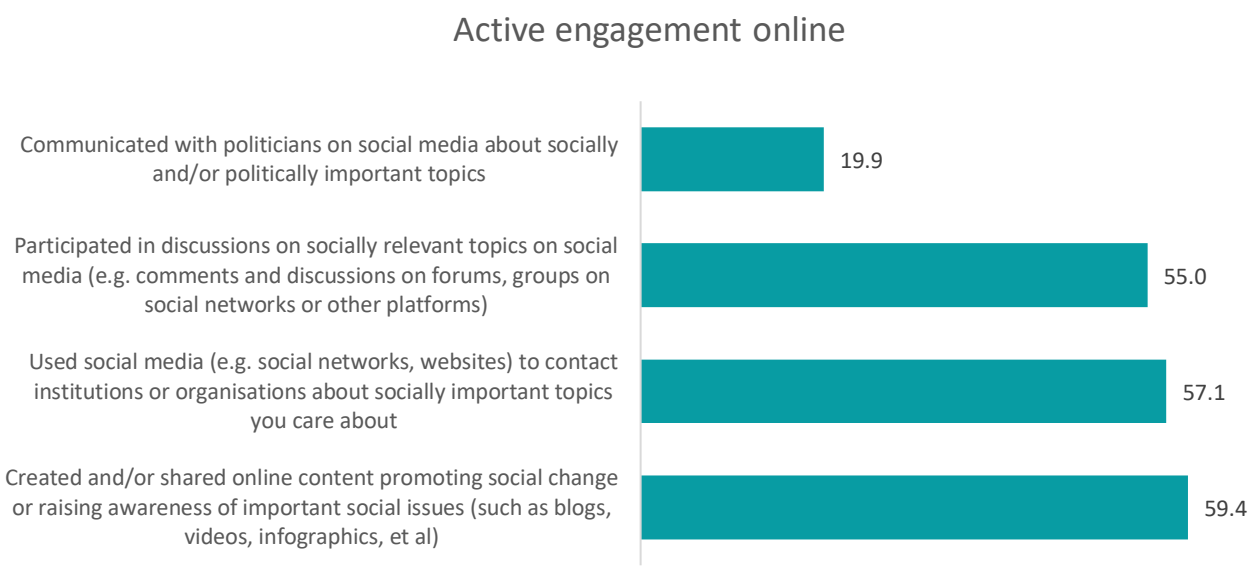


Graphic 8 Theme of political/social engagement in the digital sphere

39 https://books.google.be/books?id=E1jwF1bK1tQC&pg=PA143&lpg=PA143&dq=posits+that+people+who+support+a+cause+by+performing+simple+measures+are+not+truly+engaged+or+devoted+to+making+a+change&source=bl&ots=bB27Wf7F86&sig=emUHoB4wGN8hmisCjqz79Vm9Dzc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=posits%20that%20people%20who%20support%20a%20cause%20by%20performing%20simple%20measures%20are%20not%20truly%20engaged%20or%20devoted%20to%20making%20a%20change&f=false

political activism and youth-related causes, both at 6.5%, and **anti-corruption protests** at 6.1%. Climate change and environmental concerns accounted for 4.2% of participation. Topics like digital life and privacy (2.8%), economy (2.3%), education (1.9%), health (1.4%), global issues (0.9%), social services (0.9%), and emigration (0.5%) saw lower levels of participation. Additionally, 4.7% of participants reported engaging in diverse themes.

For a more nuanced understanding participants were asked about their active engagement and



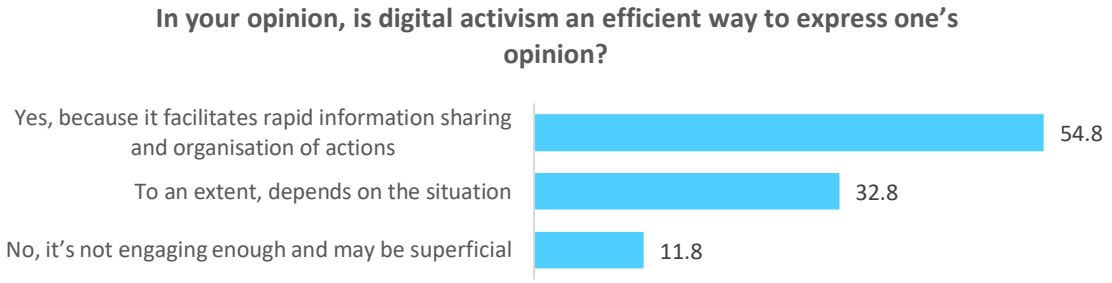
initiation of activities online, with results shown in graph 9.

Graphic 9 Forms of active participation in the digital sphere

Data shows that **the most common form of youth digital engagement is creating/sharing content promoting social change or raising awareness** (59.4%). Unable to disaggregate data on what percentage of respondents solely shares content promoting social change or raising awareness, it can be argued that elements of slacktivism dominate in the overall digital activism landscape in the country. **This is an important finding that indicates the need to incorporate comprehensive methods to increase digital activism among youth to achieve the change they need in the wider society.**

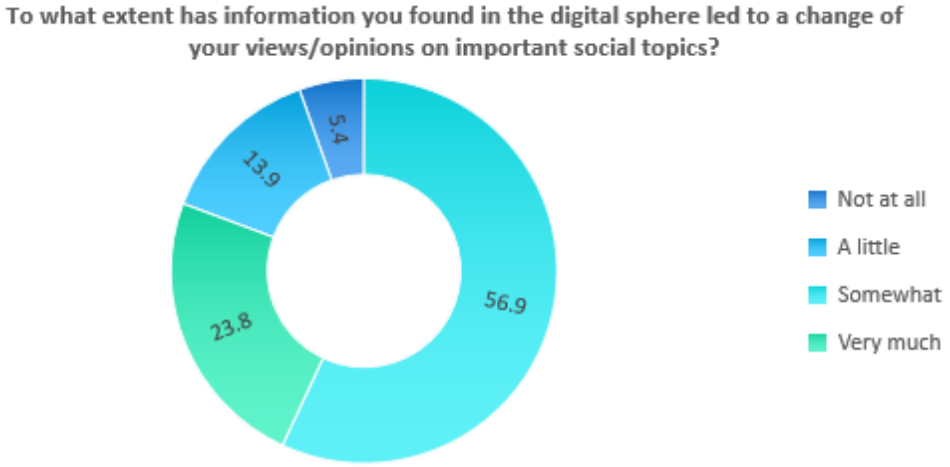
The second and third most common form of digital activism among youth is using social media to contact institutions or organizations about socially important topics (57.1%), and participating in discussions on socially relevant topics through comments, forums, or groups on social networks (55%). The least form used among the respondents is communicating with politicians on social media about socially and/or politically important topics. This may be a result of general lack of trust which is

common in the Albanian culture of politics, but also an indicator of fear of negative reactions which was one of the themes identified in the focus groups.



Graphic 10 Perception about Digital Activism's efficiency

Generally, the respondents believe that digital activism is an efficient way to express one's opinions. For 54.8% of participants think that the ability to facilitate rapid information sharing and organization of actions online is its most significant benefit. Additionally, 32.8% of respondents believed that digital activism effectiveness depends on a specific situation, while 11.8%, argued that digital activism is not engaging enough and may be superficial. One participant added also that this quick mass dissemination of information can also be harmful in case of incorrect information sharing.

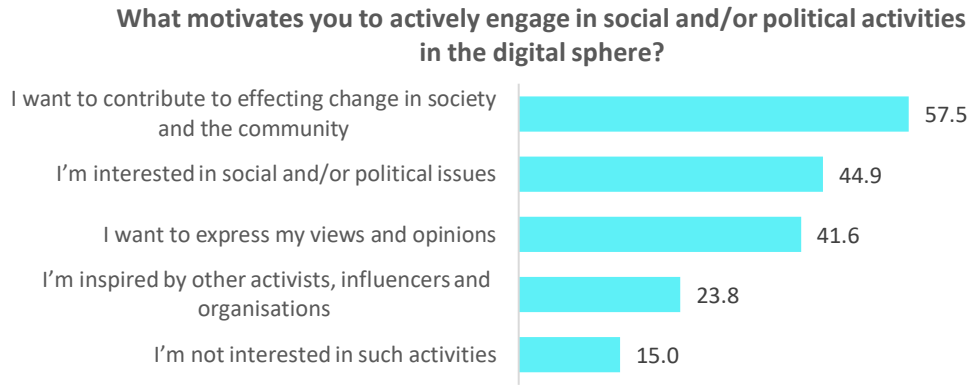


Graphic 11 Impact of information in changing views/opinions

To some extent information found in the digital sphere appears to have moderate influence on shaping views and opinions on social topics. Nearly **one in five participants (23.8%) noted a substantial impact, stating that their opinions had changed "very much".** A significant majority of respondents **(56.9%) reported that their views had changed "somewhat" due to information found**

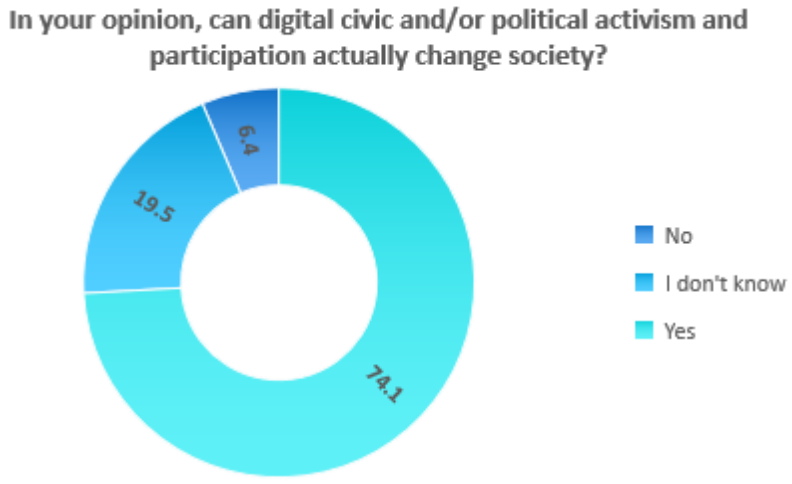
online. This is particularly important as it highlights the influence of online content, whether from reliable or misleading information, on shaping youth perceptions, opinions, and attitudes.

When considering motivations for engaging in social and/or political activities within the digital sphere, several key drivers emerge. **The most significant motivation**, identified by 57.5% of respondents, is the **desire to contribute to affecting change in society and the community**. Additionally, 44.9% of participants are motivated by **an interest in social and/or political issues**, indicating a deep-seated concern for these matters. **Expressing personal views and opinions** also plays a substantial role, with 41.6% of respondents citing this as a motivating factor. Inspiration from



Graphic 12 Motivation to engage in digital sphere

other activists, influencers, and organizations influences 23.8% of individuals, while 15.0% expressed no interest in such activities.

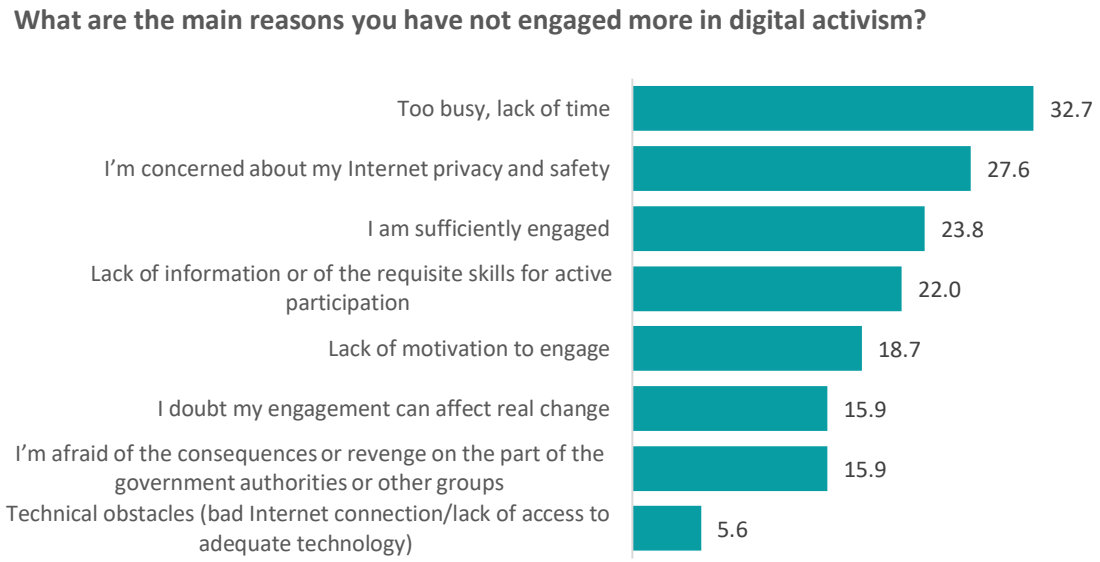


Graphic 13 Role of digital activism in societal change

The majority of participants, 74.1%, believe that digital civic and/or political activism and participation can indeed affect change in society. This reflects strong confidence in the power of digital engagement and activism to influence social and political outcomes. It should not go without mentioning that this belief on digital civic and/or political activism and participation affecting change

in society does not reflect in actual engagement of respondents with only 19.6% stating that they actively participate in social and political activities in the digital sphere.

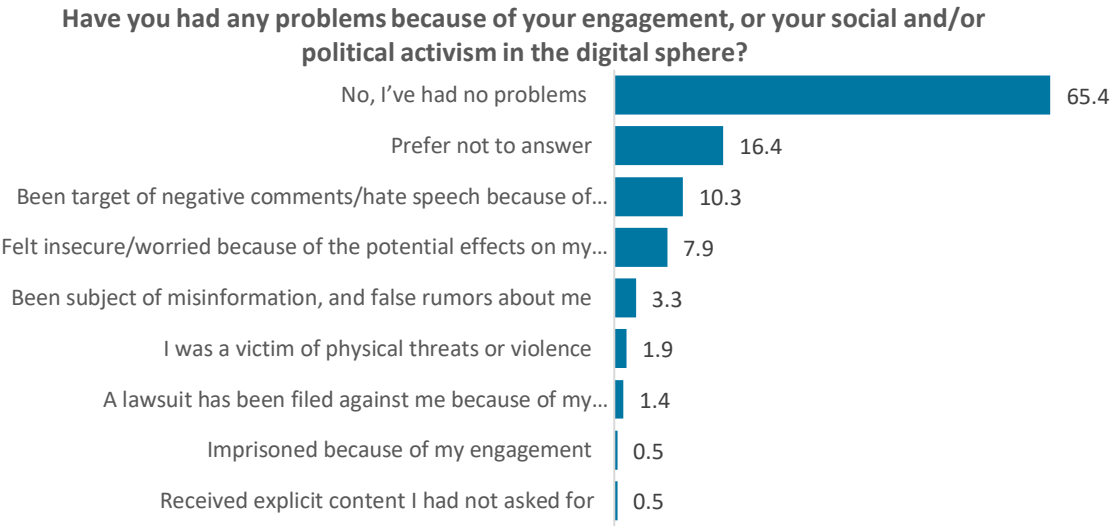
19.5% of respondents are uncertain about its impact, suggesting some skepticism or lack of clarity on the effectiveness of digital activism. A small minority, 6.4%, are convinced that digital activism cannot bring about societal change.



Graphic 14 Main reason for not engaging more in digital activism

The main reasons for limited engagement in digital activism reflect a combination of personal, technical, and contextual factors. **The most common barrier, cited by 32.7% of respondents, is being too busy or lacking the time to participate, followed by concerns about internet privacy and safety** with 27.6% expressing this as a reason for reduced engagement. Additionally, 23.8% feel they are sufficiently engaged already, while 22% attribute their lack of involvement to insufficient information or skills. Fear of revenge or other consequences from government or other groups (15.9%), skepticism about their ability to affect change (15.9%), and a general lack of motivation (18.7%) also have a role into the decision not to engage more. Lastly, 5.6% of respondents cite technical obstacles, such as poor internet connection or lack of technology, as a barrier.

Different from survey results, **in focus group discussions** fear of online abuse was the main theme identified as a barrier to digital participation**.** Furthermore, they raised the argument that youth tend to resist attempts at monetizing their engagement. They claim that due to monetization efforts, people on social media, with an emphasis on TikTok, engage in abusive behaviors and language. Such attitudes contribute to a sense of normalization of the language and cyber bullying patterns, which hinders reaction and youth engagement.



Graphic 15 Consequences from digital activism

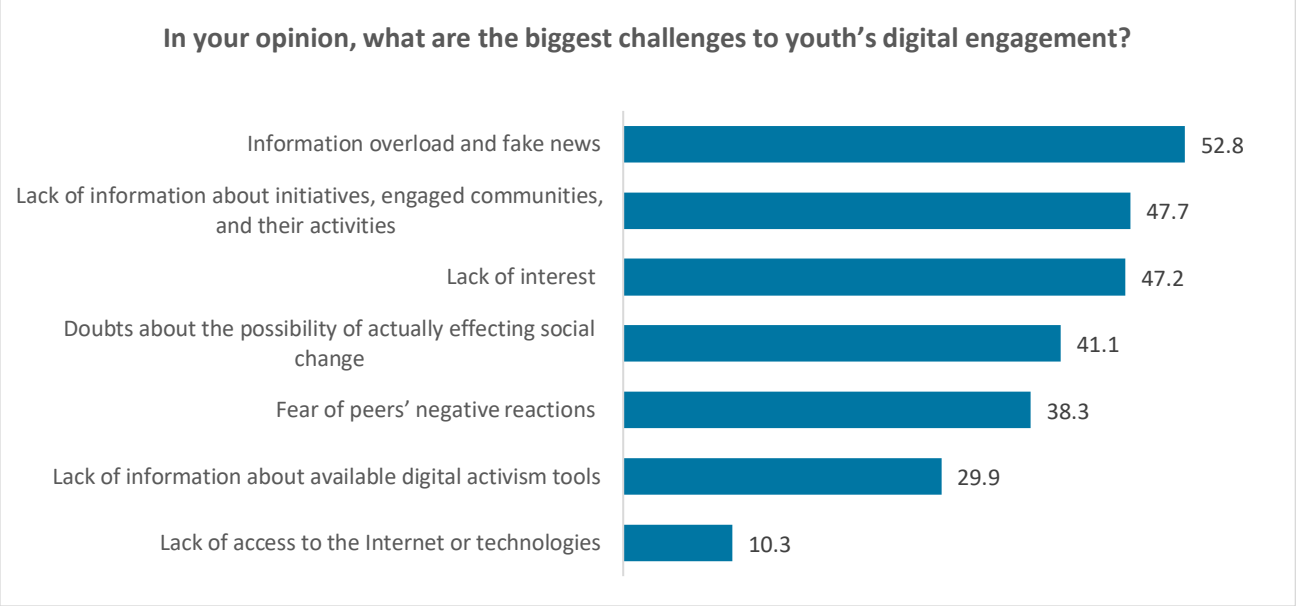
Most respondents of those who declared engaging in digital social and/or political activism (65.4%) report having experienced no problems due to such engagement, and 16.4% of them chose not to answer. Among those who did report problems, **the most common issue was being targeted by negative comments or hate speech (10.3%)**, followed by **feeling insecure or worried about privacy or safety (7.9%)**. Other concerns include being the subject of misinformation or false rumors (3.3%), physical threats or violence (1.9%), and, in rare cases, legal action or imprisonment due to their activism (1.4% and 0.5%, respectively). A small percentage (0.5%) reported receiving explicit content they had not asked for.

Participants were also asked about the biggest challenges to youth digital engagement. Results show that challenges are multifaceted, with **the most prominent concern being the overwhelming presence of information overload and fake news (52.8%).** The second most relevant barrier identified regarded **lack of information about initiatives, engaged communities, and their activities (47.7%)**, **as well as a general lack of interest (47.2%)**. Doubts about the potential to effect real social change were also commonly cited (41.1%), alongside fear of negative reactions from peers (38.3%). Furthermore, the lack of information on digital activism tools (29.9%) and limited access to the internet or necessary technologies (10.3%) also present considerable obstacles.

Focus group discussions shed further light on the fears of youth regarding repercussions from digital participation and activism. Young people due to **polarized social media communities, shaming/offensive comments, perceived judgement from others and lack of institutional support** are being driven to **self-censoring**. Especially in the context of activism in social media platforms,

focus group participants, elaborated that challenging people's biases on social media could lead to bullying or cancelling.

"I think there are some type of unwritten rules that in case you have an opinion that it goes very against the majority, you just keep it to yourself. You do not show it, publish it, share it in stories or comments because you know that the majority is against you". –says one of the participants.



Graphic 16 Biggest challenges to youth's digital engagement

How can youth be encouraged/motivated to be socially active in the digital sphere?

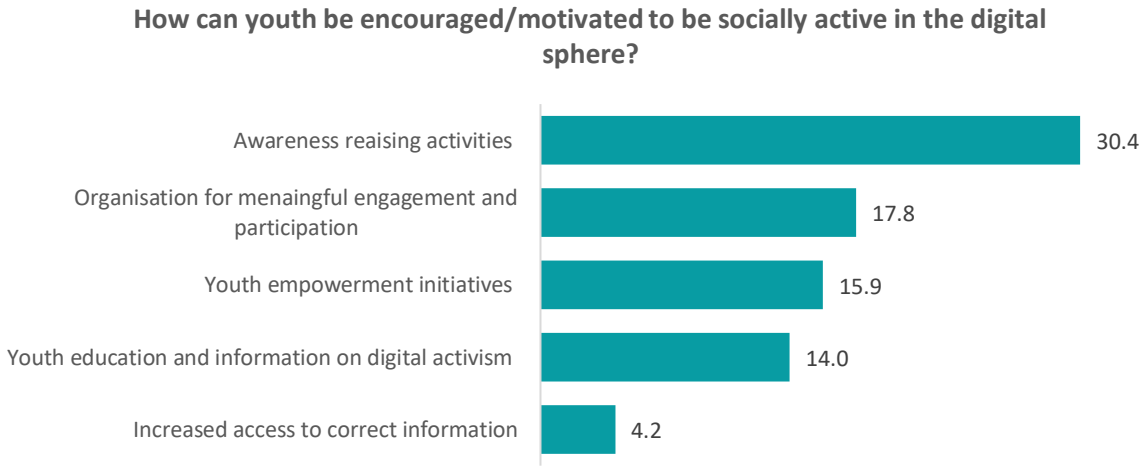
Respondents were asked to give some suggestions on how to motivate youth community to play an active role in digital activism. There are several key themes that emerge after analyzing the answers thematically.

The most prominent themes identified from their answers are awareness raising, organizing meaningful participation opportunities and sharing successful cases of digital activism, initiatives that built trust and tackle challenges of disinformation and privacy protection.

Awareness emerges as a key factor in enhancing youth engagement in digital activism. When youth are made aware of the impact of their digital engagement and are provided with concrete examples of successful digital activism best practices, they are more likely to feel motivated and empowered. Additionally, awareness efforts should focus on **educating young people about the importance of their personal contributions and ensuring they are well-informed about social issues**. This can be

achieved through **campaigns, informative sessions, and highlighting the positive role of digital activism**. By **addressing misinformation**, **providing relevant information**, and **demonstrating real-world impacts**, awareness initiatives can help reduce fears and increase confidence in participating in digital activism.

Regarding **organization for meaningful participation** most of the answers highlight the importance of organized activities to effectively engage youth in digital activism. Organizing **face-to-face discussion groups and panels allows young people to actively express and debate their viewpoints**. This can be argued as a trust building step, where young people build trust towards real-life experiences, which can then be transferred in the digital world with increased levels of activism. Creating **engaging digital content, such as multimedia and interactive posts**, helps foster a sense of community and motivates participation. **Providing opportunities to develop digital skills through workshops** and training and **recognizing their efforts with awards or certifications, motivates youth to engage**. Additionally, developing **user-friendly platforms, leveraging popular influencers, and offering various incentives** like scholarships or prizes can significantly boost engagement. Another insight is also related to **tailoring strategies to different age groups and interests,** and using appealing formats like TikTok or Instagram, to ensure that the information resonates and reaches the target audience.



Graphic 17 How to encourage youth to be socially active in the digital sphere

Youth empowerment also emerged as a key theme in respondents' suggestions to motivate youth in digital activism. **To effectively empower and build trust with youth in the digital realm**, it is crucial to address their needs and concerns comprehensively. Participants **highlight economic needs,**

protection online, orientation on digital activism, but what is more important they need their voices to be considered and heard.

Participants also suggest that empowerment initiatives should **focus on social issues and themes that resonate with the youth**, moving beyond repetitive and monotonous topics and highlight the most important problems and challenges youth generation face. Encouraging **genuine involvement by ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers** can significantly enhance their engagement. A sub-theme of youth empowerment was also trust. Some of respondents stated that youth generation needs to regain trust in political system and society that their voices matter and can bring real change. **Highlighting real-life examples of how digital engagement has led to tangible changes can inspire and motivate youth.** For some of them it is essential to create a **secure and supportive environment for digital expression**, including providing necessary resources and acknowledging successful digital activism.

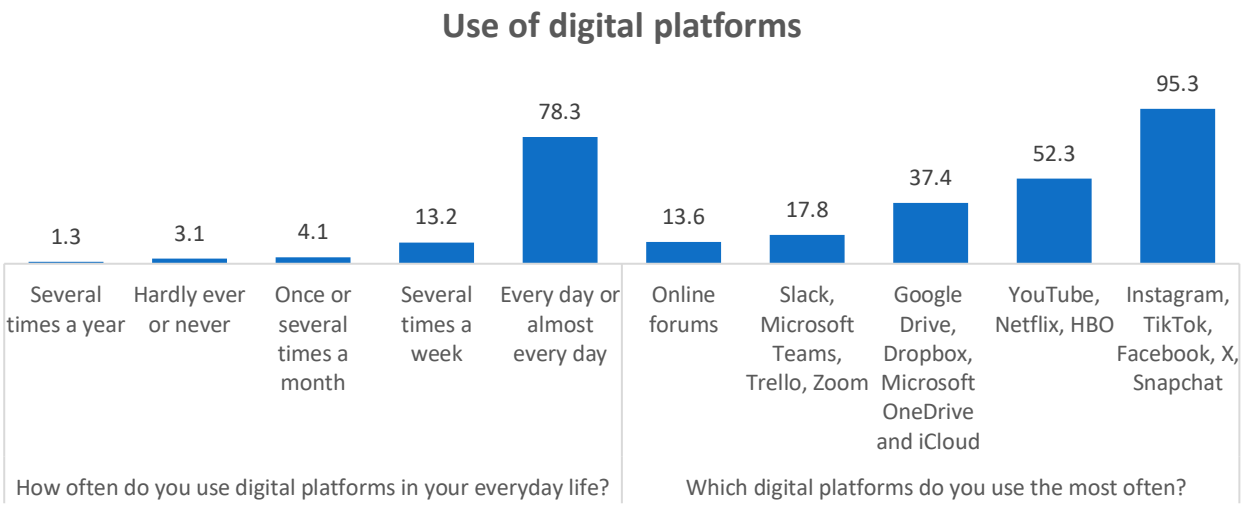
A considerable portion of the youth value **education and creating information opportunities** for youth digital activism might also play a role in influencing youth to actively engage in digital activism. Some participants highlight the importance of education for responsibility to actively engage for a better society. Some of the key recommendations include **organizing educational webinars and targeted training sessions that address areas of interest and enhance digital literacy, combatting misinformation with accurate and timely information, aligning digital engagement with real-world experiences to make discussions more relevant**.

Some participants highlight the importance of school education in digital activism. They suggest that **integrating media literacy and social/political education into school curricula would help students critically assess information and advocate for human rights**. Early engagement in schools and organizing interactive, enjoyable activities would build a sense of community and motivate active participation. These activities would equip young people to contribute meaningfully to digital activism and actively impact societal change.

Use of digital platforms

Participants were asked a set of questions on the use of digital platforms and tools. Results reveal a significant and frequent engagement with digital platforms in daily life. **A substantial majority, 78.3% of respondents, use digital platforms every day or almost every day**. Among the various digital platforms, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, and Snapchat dominate usage, with 95.3% of respondents favoring them. Meanwhile other platforms, providing mainly entertainment services like YouTube, Netflix, and HBO are the next most popular, used by 52.3% of respondents. Cloud storage services such as Google Drive, Dropbox, and Microsoft OneDrive are utilized by 37.4% of respondents, while collaboration and communication tools like Slack, Microsoft

Teams, Trello, and Zoom are less frequently used, at 17.8%. Online forums are used the least, by only 13.6% of individuals.



Graphic 18 Platforms used by youth

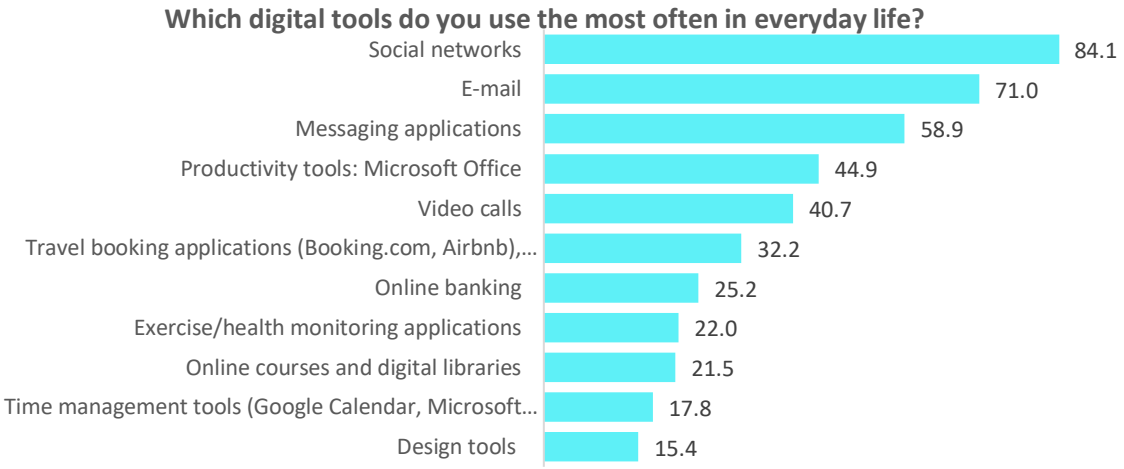
The most prevalent digital tools used daily revolve around communication, with social networks highly utilized by 84.1% of respondents, who engage on them regularly. E-mail (71.0%) and messaging applications (58.9%) are also widely used by youth. Microsoft Office tools and Video calls are used by less participants (44.9% and 40.7% respectively). Even **less participants use travel and booking applications (32.2%). Online banking is used only by 25.2% of respondents.** Next in line come health monitoring applications (22.0%) and online courses, including digital libraries (21.5%) being used by one in five participants approximately. Design tools are the least used among the categories listed, at 15.4%.

The use of digital platforms by Albanian youth is similar to the European[40] average, where 83% of youth use regularly social networks. A significant distinction is noticed in regard to the use of online banking, which in EU is used by 64% of young people[41].

Interestingly, focus group discussions bring new perspectives in social media use, with participants stating that youth use social media not only for communication purposes, but also to explore certain interests and gain new skills.

[40] European Commission. (May 2024). *Statistics explained: Digital economy and society statistics - households and individuals*. Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/39761.pdf

[41] Eurostat. (2023, July 14). *Young people in the EU: Daily internet use above 94% in all countries*. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230714-1



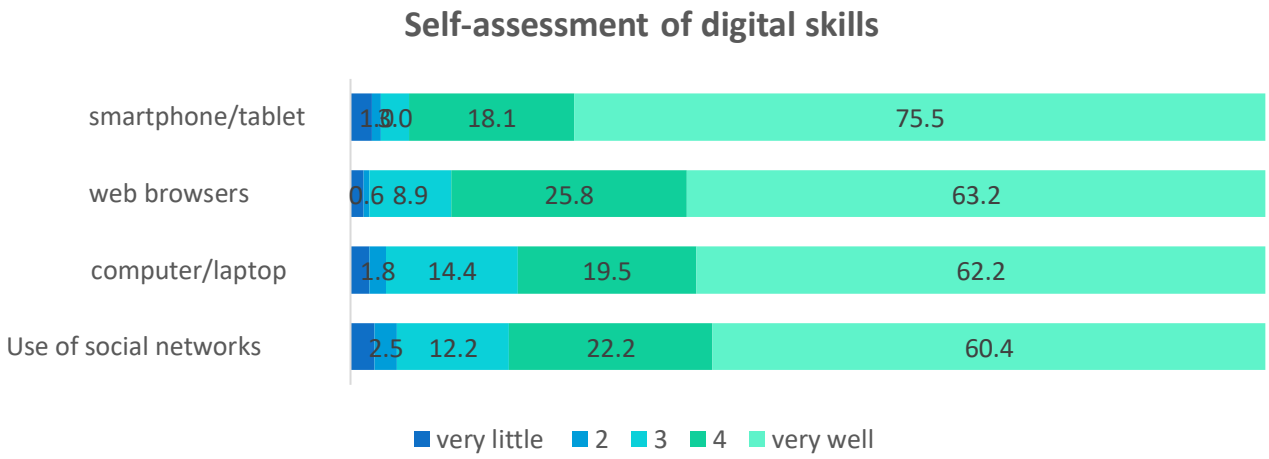
Graphic 19 Digital tools used most often by youth in everyday life

Digital skills

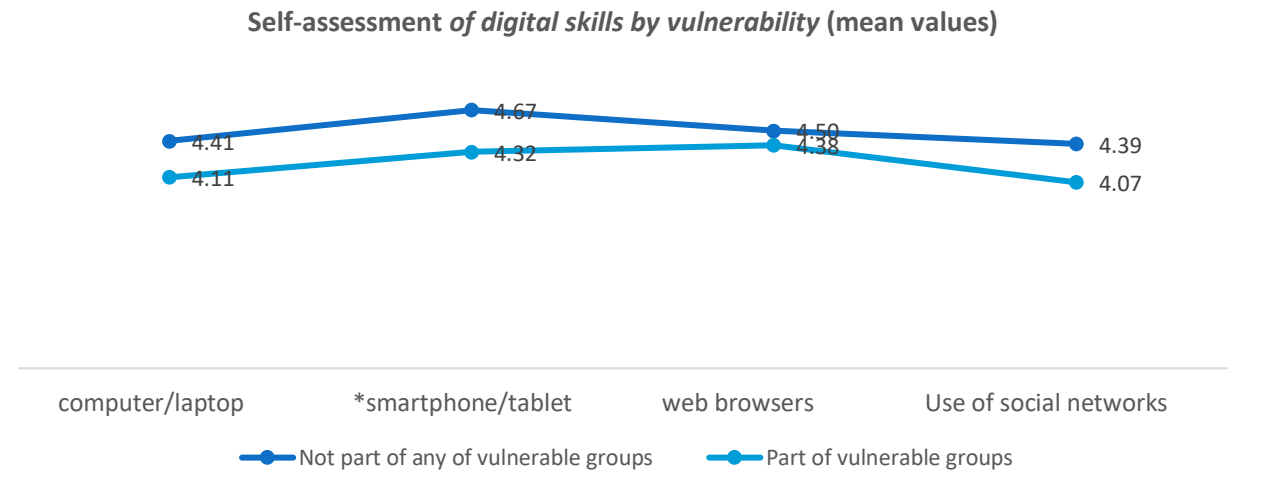
The survey also aimed to provide an overview of digital skills among respondents, considering their importance to thrive in the digital world. In this survey digital skills refer to: '*abilities to use computers, the Internet and mobile phones in a smart way. They encompass everything, from sending an e-mail and searching the Internet to using social networks and learning basic programming'.*

Participants were asked to rate their digital skills on a scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (very well). In overall, respondents assess their digital skills highly, with **more than half of participants feel very confident in their digital skills.** 62.2% of respondents state they use very well computer or laptops. Very few percentages of participants assess they have little or very little digital skills, with 1.8% in using computers or laptops, 5.1% in using social networks, to 2.1% in using web browsers.

Through focus group discussions the understanding and usability of digital skills was further expanded. Focus group participants perceived digital the ability to understand the risks, the ability to protect their privacy and digital communication, including digital marketing and content creation. They showed particular interest for skills such as digital communication, which is strongly related to the growing need of the labour market for such skills.



Graphic 20 Self assessment of digital skills



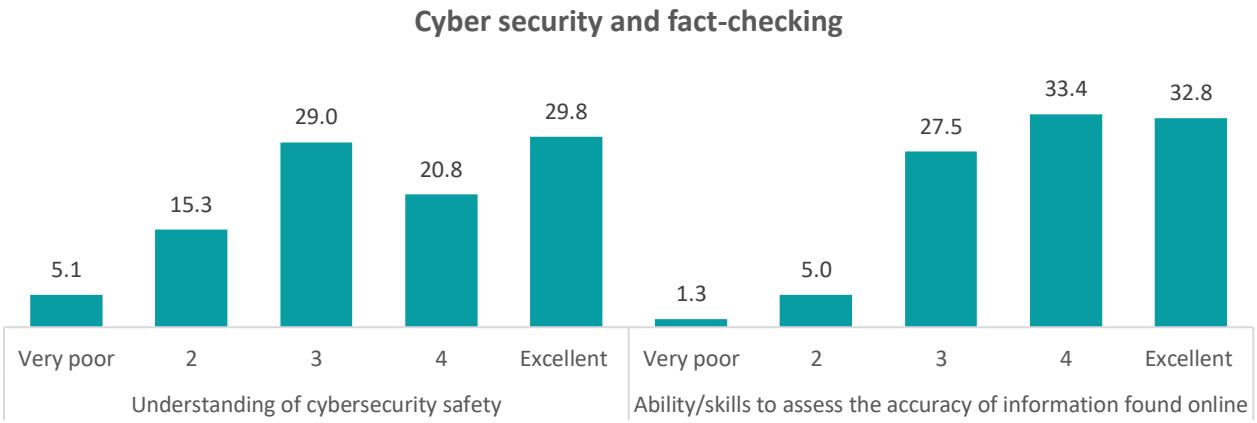
Graphic 21 Self-assessment of digital skills by vulnerability

When compared by vulnerability, **non-vulnerable participants assess their digital skills higher across all technologies, with significant differences observed in smartphone and tablet use** (M=4.67 vs. M=4.32). Notable but not significant differences were encountered in computer/laptop usage (M=4.41 vs. M=4.11) and social network engagement (M=4.39 vs. M=4.07), while Web browser usage shows a minor mean difference (M=4.50 vs. M=4.38). Even though the changes are not statistically significant for most categories, same pattern across them is noticed. These **differences might be related to limited access to digital devices and technologies for vulnerable groups impacting also**

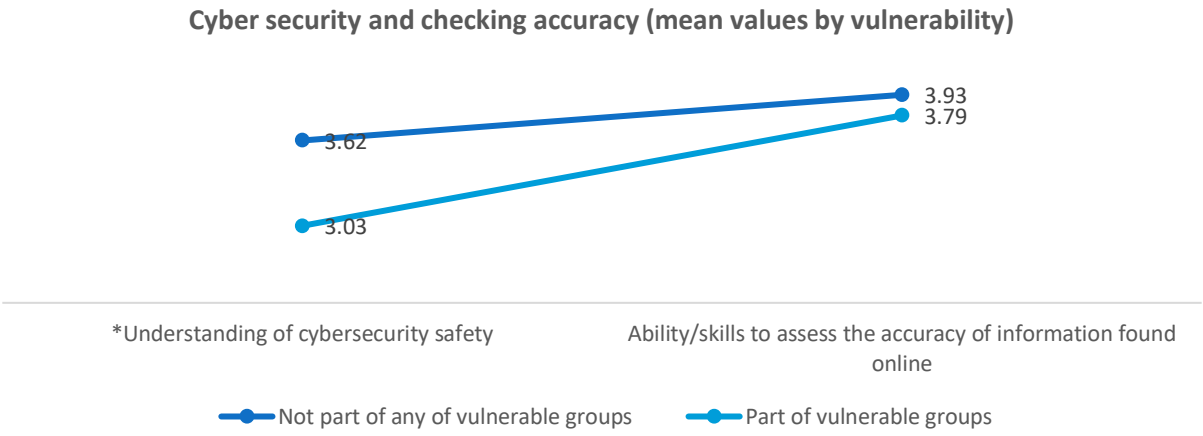
their self-assessment of digital skills. Further research is needed to properly understand the role of vulnerability in access to digital technologies and acquired skills by using them.

Through expert interviews an emphasis is put on the unequal access to digital infrastructure, which constitutes a significant barrier in youth activism particularly in rural areas, where internet connectivity and availability of digital devices is limited. Youth leader, Gentjan Hajdari, highlighted that "unequal internet access, especially in rural areas, and lack of digital devices" are significant barriers to youth digital participation. This digital divide is not just about connectivity but also about the socio-economic challenges that come with it. Hajdari emphasized the need for "better digital infrastructure and more comprehensive digital education programs" to bridge this gap.

The very high self-assessed in using digital technologies are not matched by the same levels of cyber security and information literacy. Regarding safety and protection online, only **about half of the respondents feel they have excellent or good understanding of cybersecurity principles** (e.g. safety protocols, password management), with only 29.8% rating their understanding as excellent. **One in five participants rate their understanding as poor (15.3%) or very poor (5.1%).** Regarding the skills and abilities to **assess the accuracy of information found online, 32.8% of participants rate their skills as excellent,** 33.4% as very good and 27.5% rate their skills as moderate. Very few participants rate their skills and abilities as poor (5%) or very poor (1.3%).



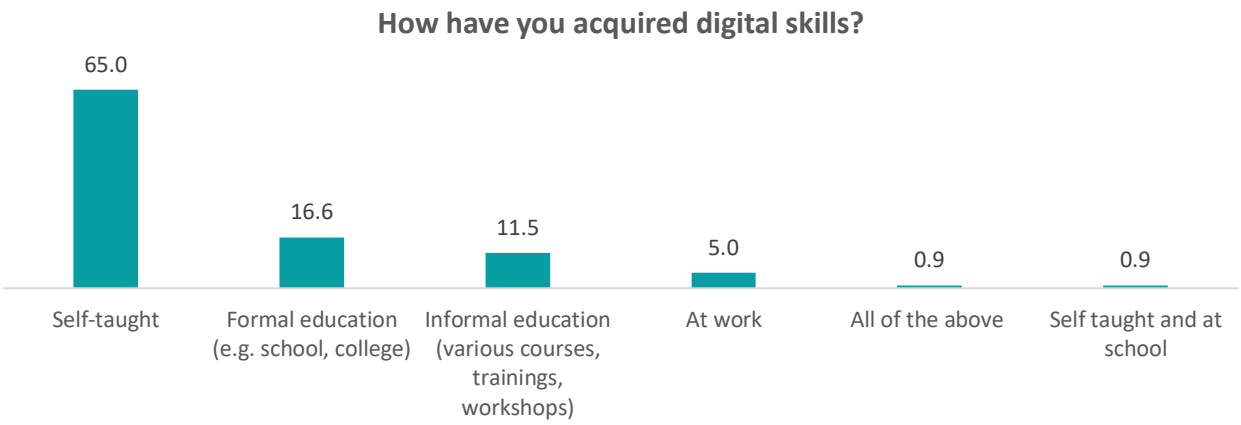
Graphic 22 Self-assessment of cyber security knowledge and fact checking abilities



Graphic 23 Cyber security knowledge and fact-checking ability self-assessment by vulnerability

The analysis shows differences in cybersecurity awareness and information literacy skills between vulnerable and non-vulnerable youth. Respondents that do not belong to vulnerable groups show a greater understanding of cybersecurity principles, with a mean score of 3.62 compared to 3.03 for those in vulnerable groups. Additionally, their ability to assess the accuracy of online information is also slightly higher (3.93) than that of vulnerable individuals (3.79) but not significant, which suggests that **vulnerable groups may experience challenges in both cybersecurity knowledge and the critical evaluation of information, which could impact their online safety and informed decision-making**.

Low cyber security skills make youth more vulnerable online. As cyber security expert, Edlira Golleshi, pointed out during expert interviews, *lack of digital skills and awareness among youth makes them vulnerable to online threats, while stressing the importance of "educational reforms to improve digital literacy and empower young people to protect their digital rights.*

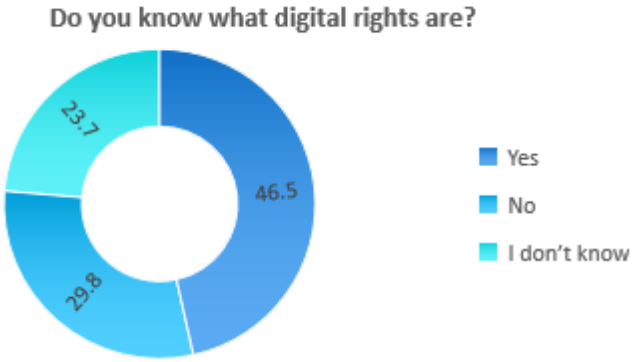


Graphic 24 How have respondents acquired digital skills?

Mos of participant (65%) have acquired digital skills by themselves, while 16.6% have been educated on digital skills in school or college, and 11.5% have attended informal education events such as various courses, trainings and participated at workshops. For a small group of participants (5%) work has been the place where they have acquired their digital skills.

Digital rights

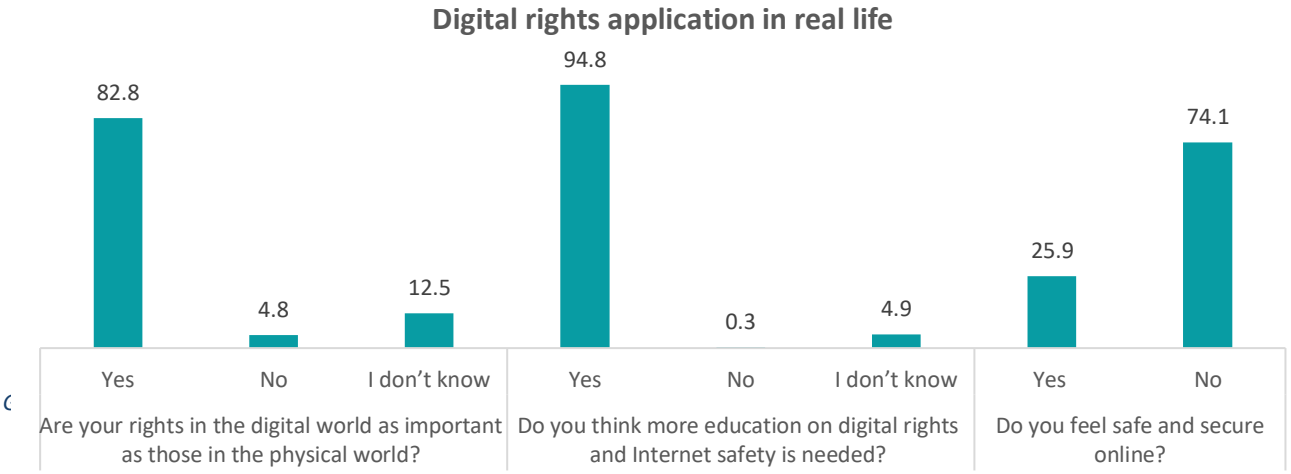
In this section is analyzed the respondents' level of understanding, importance, and challenges surrounding digital rights. Although it is a very important issue, **results showcase that digital rights are not properly understood. Only 46.5% of respondents stated that they know what digital rights are.**



Graphic 25 Respondent knowledge about digital rights

When asked on the digital rights they know, two digital rights principles dominate **privacy (25.2%), and freedom of expression (22.4%).** While data protection, the right to information, and online safety, are mentioned by fewer participants, respectively by 16.8%, 13.1%, and 8.4% of them. Equal access to information (2.8%) and protection from online discrimination (2.3%) are also listed as digital rights from fewer participants. Similarly, participants in focus group discussions exhibited a limited understanding of their digital rights. While participants were aware of rights like freedom of expression, privacy, and copyright, their knowledge was not comprehensive.

One particularly complex issue FG participants faced related to data handling, such as the posthumous



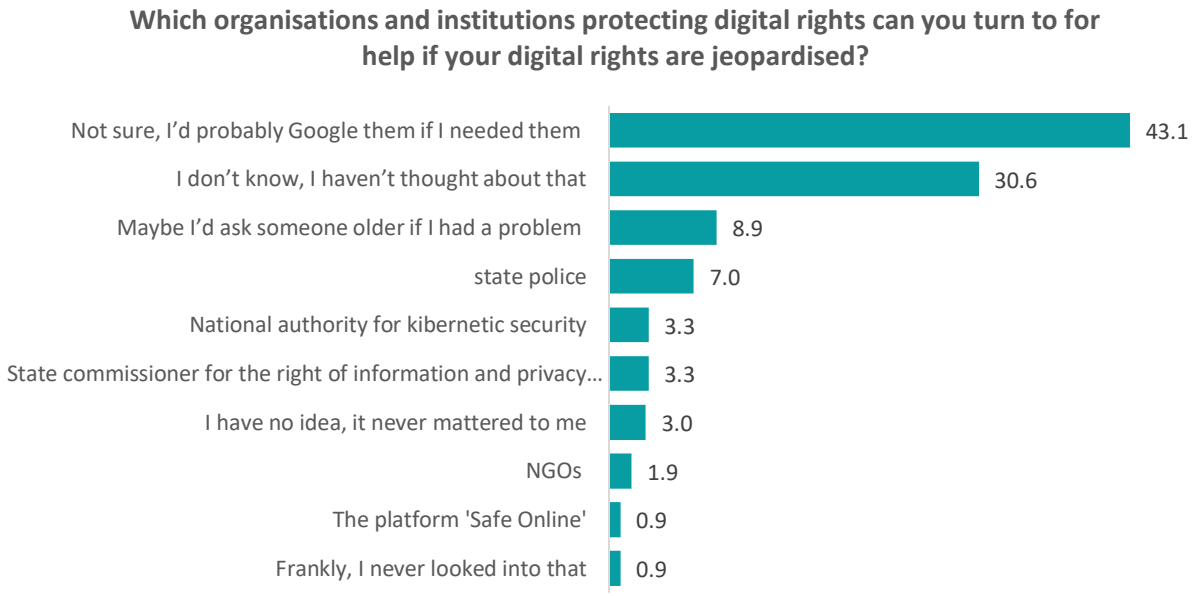
Graphic 27 Digital rights application in real life

control of digital accounts, which was unfamiliar to most participants.

82.8% of the respondents believe that their rights in the digital world are as important as those in the physical world. A significant majority, **94.8%, see the need for more education on digital rights and Internet safety**, with a negligible 0.3% disagreeing, and 4.9% feeling uncertain.

Despite these high levels of awareness, **only 25.9% of respondents feel** safe and secure online, while 74.1% express concerns about their online safety. This constitutes an important finding **indicating a mismatch between skills self-assessment and real-life application of skills**, considering that more than half of respondents feel they have excellent or good understanding of cybersecurity principles

The data reveals a **general uncertainty among respondents regarding who they should contact in case of an issue related to digital rights violations or online safety.** The majority, **43.1%, indicate that they would likely search online for help if needed, while 30.6% admit they simply don't know who to contact and haven't thought about it**. A notable 8.9% say they would ask someone older for advice. **Only small percentages would reach out to specific authorities, with 7.0% opting for the state police, 3.3% for either the state commissioner for the right of information and privacy protection or the national authority for cyber security**.



Graphic 28 Which organization would you contact in case your digital rights are being jeopardized?

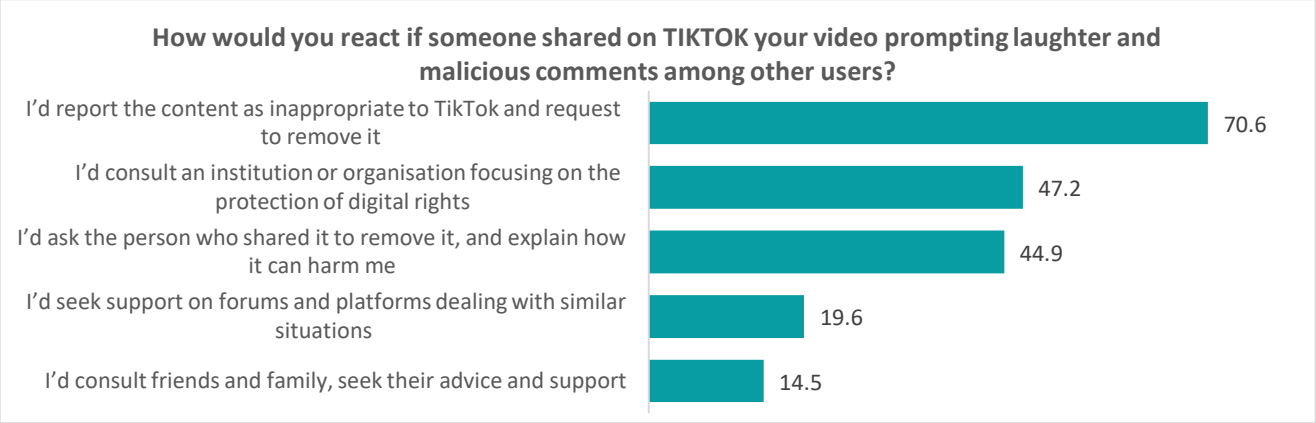
Focus group discussion contributes to increasing understanding on such small percentage of respondents choosing reaching out to state authorities for support. First, youth witnesses and experience cyberbullying, image exploitation, impersonation by different social media accounts, and inappropriate exposure of children online, but, when faced with one of the upper mentioned issues, or digital rights violations in general, young people stated they would rather report incidents to the media then the police. FG participants perceive that public institutions tend not to implement laws and regulations and lack capacities to deal with cyber threats, both technical capacities and outdated technology.

One of the respondents states:

"To be honest I wouldn't bother to go to the police, because I personally know they do not have nor the information, neither resources. There are no resources. A person with a computer of 2010 cannot find the IP of someone if they have used VPN. They cannot."

The second main reason mentioned by FG participants that refrains them from asking for institutional help is fear of being judged by their community for what has happened to them. Nevertheless, FG participants were aware of the potential improvement of the institution in case they handle more cases.

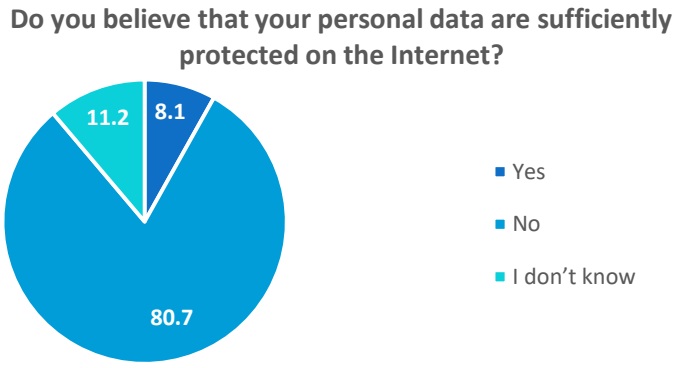
Focus group participants suggested that this lack of trust in institutions could be countered by a series of measures like improved education on digital rights, and incorporation of digital rights education into school curricula. Furthermore, focus group participants believed that improvement of legal frameworks, stronger measures to ensure online safety and combat discrimination would enhance their digital rights protection.



Graphic 29 How would respondents react if someone shared malicious content against them?

When asked how they would react if a personal video of theirs was shared on TikTok, provoking laughter and malicious comments, **the majority of participants (70.6%) say they would report the content as inappropriate and request TikTok its removal. Nearly half (47.2%) would consult an institution or organization** specializing in digital rights protection, while **44.9% would directly ask the person who shared the video to remove it**, explaining the harm it could cause. Some participants (19.6%) would seek support from forums and platforms dealing with similar situations, and 14.5% would turn to friends and family for advice and emotional support.

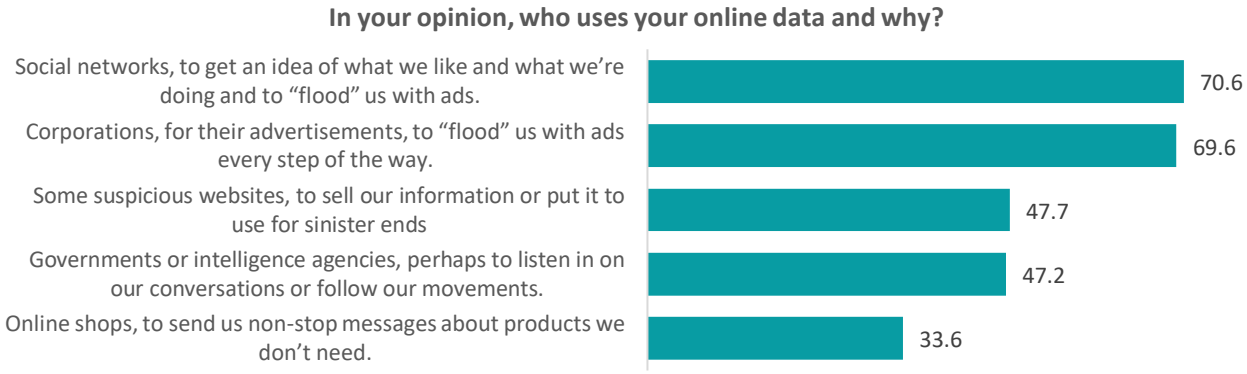
Strikingly, youth people in focus group discussions believe that shutting down social media platforms or implementing strict measures, such as those discussed for TikTok, were not viable solutions. Instead, they suggested that the focus should be on implementing security mechanisms and establishing criteria to prevent various forms of cybercrime, online attacks, cyberbullying, discrimination, identity theft, parent control, and the distribution of images.



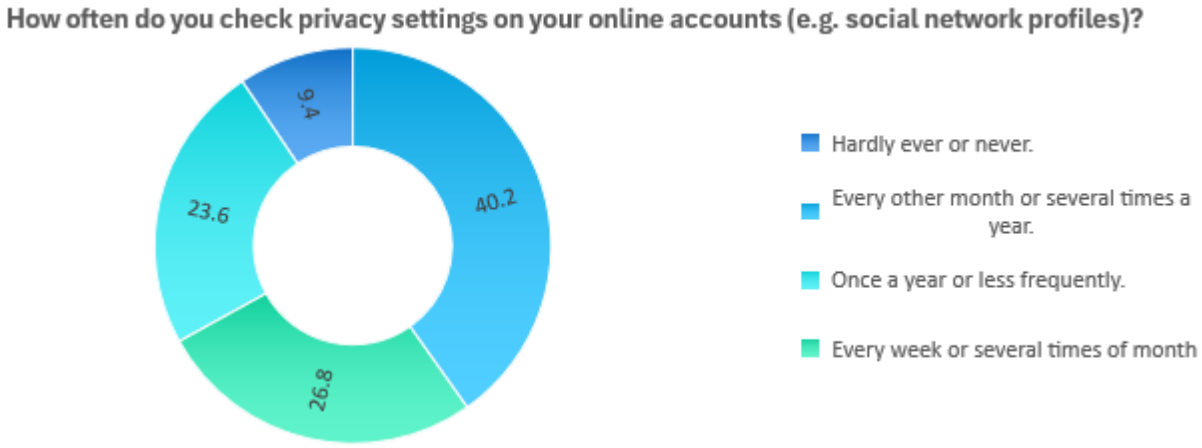
Graphic 30 Perception about the safety of their data

The significant majority of respondents (80.7%) believe that their personal data is not sufficiently protected on the Internet, highlighting widespread concerns about online privacy and data security among participating youth. Only a small fraction (8.1%) feel confident that their personal data is adequately safeguarded, while 11.2% are uncertain. This significant level of distrust underscores the need for stronger data protection measures and better public awareness about how personal information is handled online. Furthermore, more education should be delivered on who handles peoples data, what regulates such data handling, and what are the rights and responsibilities of the data holder, to encapacite them to better protect their personal data.

Participants believe that their online data is being used by various entities, primarily for advertising and surveillance purposes. **Social networks are viewed as the biggest users of personal data**, with 70.6% of participants indicating that these platforms collect information to understand user preferences and "flood" them with ads. Corporations closely follow, with 69.6% agreeing that they use citizens' data for targeted advertisements. Other participants believe that websites (47.7%) use their data for more other purposes, such as selling information. **Governments and intelligence agencies are seen by 47.2% as potentially using data to monitor conversations and movements**, while 33.6% think online shops misuse data to promote products.



Graphic 31 Who uses data



Graphic 32 Frequency of checking privacy settings

The frequency with which participants check their privacy settings on online accounts varies, with a significant portion doing so occasionally. The largest group, **40.2%, checks their settings every month or several times a year.** 26.8% review their settings weekly or several times a month. On the other hand, 23.6% only check once a year or less frequently, while 9.4% hardly ever or never check their privacy settings.

Case study analysis

In this section, the report explores exemplary case studies of successful platforms that have significantly enhanced youth digital participation. Highlighting diverse geographical contexts, we examine one innovative platform from Spain and three from the Western Balkans. These case studies illustrate how digital tools and initiatives can empower young people, fostering their engagement in social, political, and economic spheres. The section compares the successful case from Spain, as a partner country in the EYDR project consortium, as well as Western Balkan cases.

The case studies presented in this section underscore the transformative potential of digital platforms in enhancing youth participation and activism. By examining successful initiatives such as Decide Madrid, U-Report, Western Balkans Info Hub, and Hajde Media, we gain valuable insights into the key factors that contribute to their effectiveness. These include youth-friendly approaches, participatory design, sustainable funding, open-source innovation, real-time feedback, multistakeholder cooperation, and cultural relevance. These success factors align closely with the findings from the expert interviews and focus group discussions, which highlighted the importance of digital literacy, robust infrastructure, legal protections, and institutional support. The case studies not only illustrate practical applications of these principles but also provide a roadmap for implementing similar initiatives in Albania. By integrating these best practices, Albania can address the challenges identified in the research and foster a more inclusive and empowered digital environment for its youth.

The success of the initiatives highlighted in the case studies can be attributed to several key factors:

1. **Youth-Friendly Approaches**: Initiatives like U-Report prioritize accessibility and engagement by using platforms familiar to young people, such as Viber, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. This ensures that the tools are user-friendly and resonate with the target audience.
2. **Participatory and Inclusive Design**: Platforms like Decide Madrid and Western Balkans Info Hub emphasize participatory approaches, allowing users to propose, support, and vote on projects or policies. This inclusivity fosters a sense of ownership and active involvement among young participants.
3. **Sustainable Funding and Support**: Sustainable financial backing, as seen with Decide Madrid and Western Balkans Info Hub, ensures the longevity and continuous improvement of the platforms. This stability allows for consistent engagement and the development of impactful initiatives.
4. **Open Source and Innovation**: The use of open-source software, as demonstrated by Decide Madrid, encourages transparency and adaptability. It allows other regions to replicate successful models and tailor them to their specific needs.
5. **Real-Time Information and Feedback**: U-Report's real-time polling feature provides immediate insights into the concerns and opinions of young people. This timely feedback is crucial for responsive and effective policy-making.

6. **Multistakeholder Cooperation**: The success of Western Balkans Info Hub is partly due to the collaboration between various stakeholders, including NGOs, universities, research centers, and private entities. This diverse cooperation enhances the platform's reach and impact.
7. **Focus on Relevant and Innovative Themes**: Addressing current and pressing issues, such as digital literacy, green energy, and data security, ensures that the platforms remain relevant and engaging for young people. This focus on innovation attracts participation and fosters meaningful dialogue.
8. **Regional and Cultural Relevance**: Initiatives like Hajde Media leverage common cultural elements and regional contexts to foster a sense of community and shared purpose. This cultural relevance enhances engagement and cooperation among young people.

Spain: Decide Madrid[42]

Decide Madrid originated from the anti-austerity protests that erupted in Spain in 2011. Many people were frustrated by the perceived failure to address the financial crisis, high unemployment, corruption, and limited opportunities for young people. There was a widespread belief that Spanish institutions lacked legitimacy. The movement called for increased transparency, accountability, and citizen participation to enhance democracy, urging all levels of government to find new methods to empower citizens and promote a more open government. It is an online platform created by the Madrid City Council to facilitate public involvement in decision-making. It allows citizens to express their concerns and engage in various activities, including developing proposals, voting on new local laws, participating in debates, engaging in participatory budgeting, and taking part in consultations.

Why Did It Succeed?

The platform enabled citizens to either propose their own projects or support existing ones to advance them to the final stage. Under the leadership of Carmena, the local government intended to directly implement all proposals that garnered support from over 2% of the municipal population and were approved through public consultation. When no proposal reached the 2% threshold, the required approval percentage was lowered to 1% to encourage more engagement. Developed within the administration, the digital platform benefited from Madrid's high rate of digital connectivity, with over 90% of the population having regular access to broadband internet. This provided an ideal environment for experimenting with new forms of citizen participation.[43]

Some of its most notable characteristics are as below:

- **Open Source:** Between 2015 and 2018, the number of participants grew from 45,000 to 90,000, and the allocated budget increased from €30 million to €100 million. The rapid success of Decide Madrid and its open-source software drew global attention, leading numerous cities to adopt Consul Democracy software. In response to government changes, some of the developers behind the software established the Consul Democracy Foundation—a coalition of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing digital citizen participation using open-source technology. Despite the scaling back of Decide Madrid, its global impact persisted. According to Consul Democracy, its software is now used in 35 countries by 135 institutions, benefiting 90 million citizens.
- **Innovation and financial backup:** Although Decide Madrid has faced challenges, it has had a lasting impact on political participation worldwide. Managed by the Foundation, the Consul Democracy platform continues to develop and is now less reliant on political shifts in Madrid.

[42] Nesta. (n.d.). *Decide Madrid*. https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/six-pioneers-digital-democracy/decide-madrid/
[43] Cushing Rodriguez, S., & Veciana, E. (2023). *Decide Madrid and Consul Democracy: When the export surpasses the original*. Democracy Technologies. https://democracy-technologies.org/participation/decide-madrid-and-consul/

Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo: U-Report [44]

Since May 16, 2018, Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo have joined the U-Report community under the U-Report Western Balkans framework, a collaborative initiative designed to address the issues faced by young people in the region. U-Report, developed by UNICEF Global, is a free and anonymous digital tool that engages young people aged 15 and older (with a focus on those aged 15 to 24) through simple polls sent via Viber. Plans are in place to extend the service to Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. This platform aims to tackle the challenges of incorporating youth voices into policy processes, especially at the local level.

Why Did It Succeed?

- **Youth Friendly Approach:** By participating in U-Report, young people can voice their concerns about community issues, use the results to raise awareness, engage in campaigns, and share updates with other U-Reporters.
- **Problem Solving Oriented:** U-Report fosters dialogue, freedom of expression, and provides young people with a platform to actively participate in policy development and stay informed about issues that matter to them, enabling them to make a positive impact in their communities.
- **Real Time Information:** Developed by UNICEF, U-Report features real-time polling as a core function. In the Western Balkans, the poll results can be viewed at both the municipal level and across the entire sub-region, allowing for swift and straightforward comparative analysis to pinpoint the challenges and issues reported by young people.

[44] U-Report Western Balkans. (n.d.). *Stories*. https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/stories/

Western Balkans Info Hub[45]

The EU has developed together with the Western Balkans a forward-looking agenda, outlining a comprehensive, long-term strategy for cooperation with the region. The POLICY ANSWERS project aims at facilitating policy learning through political dialogue, policy analysis, capacity building, thematic coordination, and pilot activities across various work packages. Its further objectives are to establish an information hub and to implement communication and stakeholder engagement strategies. POLICY ANSWERS goes beyond R&I policies and addresses key EU thematic priorities. The project supports policy development in Research and Innovation, but also addresses policy areas such as Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, aligning different areas towards key thematic priorities.

This platform serves the general aim of POLICY ANSWERS which is:

- to monitor and support policy coordination within the EU-Western Balkans cooperation;
- to support the Western Balkans in strengthening their potential for successful participation in regional and multilateral Research and Innovation activities;
- to promote regional cooperation in Research and Innovation;
- to enable networking and access to information for local and regional actors.

Why Did It Succeed?

- **Participatory approach:** WBIH is build based on participatory approach, having a dedicated space for networking, exchange of information and cooperation in the region.
- **Sustainable Funding:** The platform has a sustainable resource now because it is supported by EU. This allows enough resources to ensure a qualitative work and crate more opportunities from young people within Western Balkans.
- **Multistakeholder cooperation:** The initiative was designed with the contribution of 13 partners, thus having a diverse profile of the main contributors and implementors of the entitative. From NGOs, to universities, research centres and private entities, WBIF enables a unique digital space for exchange of different perspectives and encourages cooperation and dialogue among its members and final beneficiaries.
- **Innovative themes and topics:** WBIH tackle the hottest topics relevant to the region. From macro-regional strategies to green energy, data security, AI, connectivity, research and innovation, digital transition etc, the platform enables all interested individuals to share insights, information, news and opportunities with likeminded individuals and entities from the region.

[45] Western Balkans Info Hub. (n.d.). *Home*. https://www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu/

Hajde Media[46]

"Hajde Media" platform (www.hajde.media) is a new online meeting place for all young people who are interested in active participation and daily monitoring of interesting events, news and opportunities in the Western Balkans.

"Hajde!" platform was officially launched on December 8, 2021 in Tirana, during a regional ministerial meeting on youth and education organized by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Minister of State for Youth and Children of Albania and the Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania. It is run by RYCO, which is a regional intergovernmental organization established by the six governments of the Western Balkans with the aim of positive exchange of experiences between young people in the region.

Why Did It Succeed?

- **A new regional space for interaction:** On the platform, young people will have the opportunity to get to know each other, share their experiences and gain useful knowledge and information about professional opportunities and events in the region.
- **Constructive Digital Media Space:** This platform represents a constructive digital media space for young people from the region, which proves that obstacles should not be obstacles, but rather an opportunity for growth, development and successful regional cooperation.
- **Common ground and joint symbolism:** The name of the platform is characteristic, because the word 'hajde' has the same meaning in all languages in this area and because the symbolism of the meaning 'hajde' is a call to action and movement. Let's collaborate, create new values and move towards a better future.
- **Social values and regional impact:** One of the main goals of the platform "Hajde!" is to promote a spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among young people in the WB. This is the first platform of its kind. The youth platform was created by young people, with their ideas and through their visions.

[46] Balkan Web. (2021, December 27). Hajde: A new regional platform for youth cooperation is waiting for you. https://www.balkanweb.com/hajde-nxito-nje-platforme-e-re-rajonale-per-bashkepunimin-e-te-rinjve-po-te-pret/#gsc.tab=0

Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth digital activism is nuanced in Albania marked by both opportunities and barriers that require comprehensive measures to be addressed and taken advantage of.

A high percentage of respondents, 79.8% of them, are regularly engaged with news and information about current social and political issues. Moreover, 74.1%, believe that digital civic and/or political activism and participation can indeed affect change in society. These numbers speak of a largely informed youth population, who strongly believe in digital civic activism to affect change, but that in reality is very little actively involved in social and/or political activities in the digital sphere, with only 19.6% of participants stating to do so. These findings clearly show elements of slacktivism dominating the overall digital activism landscape in the country.

Considering the massification of digital technologies, their extensive use in today's world, it becomes necessary to undertake measures that facilitate and encourage youth's participation in digital activism. The analysis showed trends of slacktivism by Albanian youth, who primarily engage in sharing content promoting social change or raising awareness, with the majority of respondents believing that digital activism is an efficient way to express one's opinion, while 11.8% of them believing it is not engaging and might be superficial. Interestingly, respondents are aware of misinformation, fake news, and sometimes reluctant to engage in information sharing, as they might be engaged in promoting information that is not accurate. This level of awareness is somehow met with information literacy skills, with 66.2% of respondents evaluating their information checking accuracy skills as excellent and very good.

As key barriers to engaging in activism online young people mentioned lack of time, concerns about internet privacy and safety, and among other skepticism about heir ability to affect change.

Through focus group discussions fear of online abuse was the main theme identified as a barrier to digital participation. Focus group discussions shed light into a new argument, stating youth tend to resist influence attempts at monetizing their engagement.

The study showed differences in self-assessed digital skills among vulnerable and non-vulnerable youth, with the latter assessing their digital skills higher than vulnerable groups. This finding was further expanded during expert interviews, shedding light into the digital divide present in the country, both in terms of skills and access to technology, factoring in also socio-economic challenges that contribute do it.

Cybersecurity skills emerged as a shortcoming of Albanian youth, increasing their vulnerability online, as are privacy and safety concerns.

Both survey and focus group discussions showed the Albanian youth have a limited understanding of what digital rights are, and subsequently their exercise and protection. Although they show a limited understanding, they see digital rights as important as in the physical world.

Low levels of trust towards institutions in offering protection in the digital world are among key findings of focus groups with youth.

Young people in albania have little understanding of what digital rights are, and they are not properly understood.

Overarching recommendations from young people for stakeholders, public and non profit

Young people believe that youth activism can be incentivized by increasing awareness, organization of meaningful participation opportunities, sharing successful cases of digital activism, initiatives that built trust and tackle challenges of disinformation and privacy protection. These are the recommendations provided directly by youth:

- Awareness is key to enhancing youth engagement in digital activism. When young people are informed about the impact of their digital contributions and shown examples of successful activism, they feel more motivated and empowered to participate.
- Educating youth on the value of their contributions and keeping them informed about social issues is crucial. This can be done through campaigns, informative sessions, and showcasing the positive outcomes of digital activism. By addressing misinformation and providing accurate information, awareness efforts can reduce fear and boost confidence in digital activism.
- Organizing face-to-face discussions and panels allows youth to express their views and build trust in real-world experiences, which can translate to increased digital activism.
- Engaging digital content, like multimedia and interactive posts, fosters community and motivates participation. Offering digital skill-building workshops, training, and recognizing achievements with awards or certifications also encourages youth to engage.
- User-friendly platforms, leveraging influencers, and incentives such as scholarships or prizes can significantly boost youth involvement. Tailoring strategies to different age groups and interests using platforms like TikTok or Instagram ensures the information resonates with the target audience.
- To build trust and empower youth digitally, their concerns—such as economic challenges, online safety, and orientation in digital activism—must be addressed. Most importantly, their voices need to be heard and considered.
- Focusing on social issues relevant to youth, rather than repetitive topics, and highlighting key challenges facing their generation helps maintain engagement. Ensuring their voices reach decision-makers encourages genuine involvement.
- Combat the lack of trust in institutions by showcasing real-life examples of digital activism leading to tangible changes, inspiring youth participation.
- Create a secure, supportive environment for digital expression by offering resources and recognizing successful activism. Organizing educational webinars and targeted training enhances digital literacy, combats misinformation, and aligns digital engagement with real-world issues.
- Integrating media literacy and social/political education into school curricula will help students critically assess information and advocate for human rights effectively.

Recommendations for policy makers

Public institutions should engage in measures to increase trust and support safe and comprehensive use of digital technologies by all young people, irrelevant of their backgrounds, regions they live in, any form of disabilities they embrace, or socio-economic backgrounds.

1. Instill Cybersecurity Curriculum in Pre-University Education:

- **Objective**: Equip students with the knowledge and skills to identify and mitigate cybersecurity threats from an early age, fostering a culture of digital safety and responsibility.
- **Actions**: Introduce a comprehensive cybersecurity curriculum into pre-university education that covers basic concepts such as secure internet browsing, password management, privacy settings, recognizing phishing attacks, and online scams. This curriculum should evolve with students' grades, starting with basic awareness at primary levels and advancing to more complex topics like data protection, social media risks, and ethical hacking at higher levels.
- **Example**: Develop interactive lesson plans, games, and real-world simulations to make learning about cybersecurity engaging and relevant. Partner with cybersecurity firms or digital platforms to provide resources and tools that enhance the educational experience.
- **Outcome**: Students develop into digital citizens who are aware of potential risks and possess the skills to protect themselves and others online, ultimately contributing to a safer, more secure digital environment.

2. Teach and Train Pre-University Teachers on Cybersecurity Topics:

- **Objective**: Enable teachers to become proficient in cybersecurity topics so they can effectively teach students and integrate these lessons into their broader educational approaches.
- **Actions**: Organize specialized training programs for pre-university teachers that focus on key cybersecurity concepts, current digital threats, and practical ways to integrate cybersecurity education into existing curriculums. These programs should also cover how to protect students' personal data and create a safe online environment in schools.
- **Example**: Develop certification programs in partnership with tech companies or cybersecurity organizations, offering teachers up-to-date information on emerging digital threats and strategies for addressing them. Encourage teachers to share cybersecurity best practices with parents to extend protection into the home.

- **Outcome**: Teachers become digital safety ambassadors who are confident in delivering cybersecurity lessons and fostering a safer digital culture among students.

3. Address the Digital Divide by Creating Digitalization and Innovation Centers in Remote Areas:

- **Objective**: Bridge the digital divide by providing access to technology and digital skills training in remote or underserved areas, ensuring equitable access to digital tools and education.
- **Actions**: Set up "Digitalization and Innovation Centers" in collaboration with local governments and educational institutions in rural and remote areas. These centers should provide access to computers, high-speed internet, and digital literacy training for students, adults, and small business owners. They could also host coding workshops, IT support services, and innovation hubs for local entrepreneurship.
- **Example**: Each center could have designated staff to provide hands-on training in basic digital skills, cybersecurity awareness, and the use of online services. Additionally, the centers could offer youth mentoring programs that connect students with professionals in the tech industry.
- **Outcome**: These centers would reduce the digital divide, providing opportunities for economic growth, digital entrepreneurship, and social inclusion in remote areas, while fostering innovation.

4. Strengthen Implementation Capacities of Data Protection Laws:

- **Objective**: Ensure that data protection laws are effectively implemented and enforced, providing stronger safeguards for individuals' personal data in a digital age.
- **Actions**: Enhance the capacity of governmental bodies responsible for data protection by increasing funding, providing staff with specialized training, and implementing advanced technologies to monitor compliance. Regular audits and inspections of companies handling personal data should be conducted to ensure compliance with national and international data protection laws (e.g., GDPR).
- **Example**: Create public awareness campaigns on data protection rights and obligations, targeting businesses, schools, and individual internet users. Develop a user-friendly platform where citizens can report violations of their data privacy rights and receive guidance on how to protect their personal information.
- **Outcome**: Stronger enforcement of data protection laws will help build public trust in digital services, reduce privacy violations, and ensure that businesses and institutions are held accountable for data security.

5. Engage Youth in Policy Development (for All Policies, Not Just Youth-Specific):

- **Objective**: Encourage youth participation in broader policy development processes, ensuring their voices are heard and integrated into decisions that affect society as a whole.
- **Actions**: Create structured channels for youth engagement in policymaking, such as youth advisory councils, online feedback platforms, and youth town halls. These channels should allow for continuous dialogue between young people, policymakers, and civil society organizations. Incorporate youth input into policies related to education, the environment, the economy, and digital rights, among others.
- **Example**: Establish a "Youth Policy Forum" where youth representatives from different regions and backgrounds can regularly meet with government officials to discuss their ideas and concerns. Utilize social media platforms to solicit feedback from young people on upcoming policies and legislative proposals.
- **Outcome**: Youth will feel more empowered and engaged in the political process, leading to more inclusive and forward-thinking policies that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the younger generation.

6. Set up Cybersecurity and Digital Rights Courses in Vocational Training Centers Across the Country:

- **Objective**: Make cybersecurity and digital rights education a key component of professional development for youth and adults in various sectors.
- **Actions**: Introduce specialized courses on cybersecurity and digital rights in professional development centers (Qendrat e Zhvillimit Professional) across the country. These courses should cover topics such as online privacy, digital responsibility, secure handling of data in professional environments, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The courses should be tailored for different sectors, such as education, healthcare, and finance, to ensure that professionals are equipped with sector-specific knowledge.
- **Example**: Offer a modular, flexible learning system that allows individuals to attend courses part-time or online. Provide certifications upon completion that enhance participants' employability and readiness to deal with digital security challenges in their respective fields.
- **Outcome**: Widespread access to cybersecurity education will help strengthen the digital resilience of the workforce, ensuring that individuals across sectors can protect themselves and their organizations from cyber threats.

7. National Digital Skills Programme: Reskilling and Upskilling Young People for a Brighter Tomorrow:

- **Objective**: Equip young people with advanced digital skills that meet the needs of the evolving job market, while also reskilling those in declining industries to prepare them for tech-related employment opportunities.
- **Actions**: Launch a national digital skills program that focuses on reskilling and upskilling young people in areas like coding, artificial intelligence, data analysis, cybersecurity, and digital marketing. The program should include both introductory and advanced-level courses, internships, and apprenticeship opportunities with tech companies. It should also focus on providing specific pathways for youth from marginalized or disadvantaged communities to access these opportunities.
- **Example**: Partner with tech companies, universities, and NGOs to design a dynamic and flexible curriculum that adapts to new technological trends and labor market demands. Create a mobile platform or app where young people can easily access training modules, track their progress, and apply for internships or job placements in the digital sector.
- **Outcome**: A digitally skilled workforce will be well-prepared for the future economy, reducing youth unemployment and fostering innovation. The program will also contribute to closing the digital skills gap and ensuring that youth can capitalize on the opportunities of the digital age.

Recomendations for political parties

1. Develop Youth-Centric Policy Platforms

- **Objective**: Attract younger voters by addressing issues that resonate with them, such as climate change, digital rights, job creation, education, and mental health.
- **Actions**: Include youth representatives in policy development committees to ensure that policies reflect the concerns and priorities of young people. Hold town hall meetings, online forums, and social media polls to gather youth input directly on party platforms.
- **Outcome**: Policies that resonate with youth, leading to increased political engagement and support among younger voters.

2. Strengthen Cybersecurity and Digital Campaign Practices

- **Objective**: Protect political party operations, campaign data, and supporters' information from cyberattacks or data breaches.
- **Actions**: Invest in cybersecurity infrastructure for digital campaigns, including the use of encryption, multi-factor authentication, and regular cybersecurity training for party staff.

Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with data protection laws. Work with cybersecurity experts to secure digital communications and prevent hacking.

- **Outcome**: Increased trust among supporters that their personal data is protected, reduced risk of cyberattacks, and improved security of online campaign operations.

3. Engage in Digital Literacy and Cybersecurity Education

- **Objective**: Promote digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness among the electorate, especially youth, ensuring they are well-informed about the digital risks in today's political landscape.
- **Actions**: Organize online and offline workshops, webinars, and information campaigns that educate voters on topics such as data privacy, safe internet use, and the identification of misinformation or phishing campaigns. Partner with educational institutions and tech organizations to reach a broader audience.
- **Outcome**: An informed electorate that can navigate digital threats and participate safely in political activities online.

4. Utilize Social Media and Digital Platforms to Engage Youth

- **Objective**: Increase youth engagement and voter turnout by leveraging platforms where youth are active, such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube.
- **Actions**: Develop interactive, visually engaging, and youth-friendly content that resonates with younger generations. Use social media influencers or micro-influencers to promote political messages and campaign initiatives. Organize live Q&A sessions and engage in discussions on topics that matter to young voters, ensuring open, two-way communication.
- **Outcome**: Higher youth participation in political campaigns, more effective communication with younger voters, and an increase in voter turnout among this demographic.

5. Promote Transparency and Open Communication Channels

- **Objective**: Build trust with the public by ensuring transparency in political operations and offering clear, accessible channels for public feedback.
- **Actions**: Use digital tools to increase transparency, such as publishing detailed policy proposals and progress reports on campaign promises. Establish communication channels such as chatbots, forums, or virtual town halls where voters can engage directly with party leaders, ask questions, and provide feedback on party policies.

- **Outcome**: Increased trust in political parties, improved public perception, and a stronger connection with voters, particularly the younger and more digitally savvy demographic.

6. Commit to Ethical Use of Data and Digital Tools

- **Objective**: Ensure ethical practices in data collection, analysis, and the use of digital tools for campaign purposes.
- **Actions**: Develop clear policies on how the party collects, stores, and uses data from voters and supporters, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations. Avoid manipulative practices, such as targeted misinformation or deceptive ads, and promote ethical campaign strategies. Provide transparency on how data is used to tailor messages and campaign efforts.
- **Outcome**: Stronger public confidence in the party's integrity, fewer risks of legal issues surrounding data misuse, and a more ethical approach to digital campaigning.

7. Create Inclusive Platforms for Youth Political Participation

- **Objective**: Ensure that political parties are inclusive, creating avenues for youth to participate not just as voters but also as policymakers and party representatives.
- **Actions**: Establish youth wings within political parties to give young people a voice in party decisions. Create mentorship programs that connect youth members with experienced party leaders, offering training on political leadership, public speaking, and policy development. Regularly consult youth groups on pressing issues and integrate their feedback into policy proposals.
- **Outcome**: A more engaged and politically active youth base that feels represented and empowered to participate in both party leadership and policymaking processes.

8. Champion Digital and Youth Rights in Policy Agendas

- **Objective**: Position the party as a leader in advocating for digital rights, data privacy, and the interests of young people.
- **Actions**: Prioritize legislation and policy proposals that protect digital rights, such as laws regulating data collection, preventing online harassment, and ensuring internet access for all. Focus on the digital economy, creating jobs in tech and innovation sectors, and supporting policies that provide youth with education and employment opportunities in emerging industries.
- **Outcome**: A political platform that is future-focused, tech-forward, and resonates with digital natives, leading to increased youth support.

9. Organize Policy Hackathons and Collaborative Events with Youth

- **Objective**: Engage youth in shaping policy by creating interactive, collaborative platforms for idea generation and problem-solving.
- **Actions**: Host policy hackathons or idea-generation competitions where young people can propose solutions to pressing issues, such as climate change, digital governance, or economic recovery. Partner with universities, NGOs, and tech companies to mentor participants and implement winning ideas.
- **Outcome**: Fresh, innovative policy ideas generated by youth, with a sense of ownership and engagement in the political process, leading to deeper youth involvement.

10. Address the Digital Divide Through Policy Advocacy

- **Objective**: Tackle digital inequality by promoting policies that ensure equitable access to technology and the internet.
- **Actions**: Advocate for government investment in digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Support initiatives that provide affordable internet access and digital devices for low-income families and students. Promote digital literacy programs to ensure that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background, can benefit from the digital economy.
- **Outcome**: Reduction in digital inequality, more inclusive digital participation, and broader engagement in political and civic activities across all demographics.

Recommendations for youth organisation/organisations for youth

1. Engage in awareness campaigns, both digital and in real life, for digital activism:

- **Objective**: Raise awareness among youth about the power and importance of digital activism in addressing societal issues.
- **Actions**: Develop and implement targeted digital campaigns through social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where youth spend much of their time. Complement this with on-the-ground awareness campaigns in schools, universities, and public spaces such as community centers and libraries.
- **Example**: Run challenges, hashtag campaigns, and user-generated content initiatives that encourage youth to share their views on pressing issues and their participation in digital activism. Collaborate with influencers or public figures to amplify the message.

2. Organize workshops, seminars, and webinars focused on promoting digital rights:

- **Objective**: Educate youth about their digital rights, including privacy, freedom of expression, and data protection, and equip them with the skills to protect these rights online.
- **Actions**: Host in-person and virtual events such as workshops, seminars, and webinars tailored to different knowledge levels. Topics should cover how to navigate digital platforms safely, understand digital laws, and exercise digital rights responsibly. Invite digital rights experts, lawyers, and activists to provide practical examples and real-life cases.
- **Example**: Develop interactive learning modules or games that simulate online privacy issues or fake news identification. Encourage youth to participate in Q&A sessions to clarify doubts about their online rights and how to protect their data.

3. Mainstream cybersecurity education across all areas of work:

- **Objective**: Make cybersecurity knowledge an integral part of digital literacy for youth, ensuring that they understand online risks and how to mitigate them.
- **Actions**: Incorporate cybersecurity education into all youth-focused programs and initiatives, whether it be in school curriculums, extracurricular activities, or online platforms. Focus on practical topics such as password management, phishing recognition, safe browsing, and understanding privacy policies.
- **Example**: Develop partnerships with cybersecurity experts to create educational content (videos, blogs, infographics) that can be distributed across different platforms. Schools and

youth centers should conduct regular cybersecurity awareness days to help students identify threats and maintain their digital safety.

4. Create safe online communities for sharing opinions and concerns:

- **Objective**: Provide a safe, moderated environment where youth can express themselves, share concerns, and engage in meaningful discussions without fear of harassment or backlash.
- **Actions**: Establish moderated forums, chat groups, or social media communities specifically designed for youth engagement. These communities should have clear guidelines for respectful interactions and be actively monitored to prevent hate speech, cyberbullying, or misinformation. Trained moderators can intervene when necessary and provide support to those who encounter negative experiences online.
- **Example**: Collaborate with social media platforms to create "safe spaces" for youth activists. Provide direct support, such as access to mental health resources or legal assistance, if members face online abuse.

5. Engage with each other to transfer knowledge on dealing with platforms:

- **Objective**: Promote peer-to-peer knowledge sharing to better understand how to navigate and utilize digital platforms effectively for activism and advocacy.
- **Actions**: Facilitate regular meetings, workshops, or online forums where youth can exchange experiences about the challenges and opportunities of using platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook for activism. CSOs can bring in social media strategists and digital platform specialists to teach best practices for campaign management, content creation, and audience engagement.
- **Example**: Create a mentorship program where experienced digital activists mentor younger or less-experienced individuals, teaching them how to maximize platform features for impactful advocacy.

6. Incorporate psychological elements in capacity building programs to empower youth to deal with cyberbullying:

- **Objective**: Equip youth with the emotional and psychological tools needed to cope with online abuse and harassment, especially cyberbullying.
- **Actions**: Integrate psychological support services into existing capacity-building programs by offering counseling sessions, workshops on mental resilience, and peer support groups. Collaborate with psychologists and mental health professionals to teach youth how to manage stress, anxiety, and the emotional toll of cyberbullying.

- **Example**: Run campaigns promoting mental health awareness that include workshops on how to build self-esteem, handle negative online interactions, and avoid internalizing online abuse. Provide access to professional counseling for those who need it, and educate youth about reporting abusive behavior.

7. Engage in joint campaigns towards the government in policy development and implementation:

- **Objective**: Advocate for stronger, youth-focused digital policies by creating unified campaigns that push for changes in government policies around digital rights, online safety, and cybersecurity.
- **Actions**: CSOs and youth groups should partner to create joint campaigns that demand legislative changes that protect youth online. These campaigns can include petitions, open letters, public awareness events, and lobbying efforts targeting policymakers. Emphasize the need for youth representation in policy discussions and decision-making processes.
- **Example**: Organize a national "Digital Rights Week" where youth activists and organizations come together to raise awareness and demand government action on specific issues like data protection, internet censorship, or online abuse laws.

8. Innovate their engagement with youth, building on the learnings from the findings of this report:

- **Objective**: Use data and insights from research (like this report) to refine and enhance how institutions and CSOs engage with youth, ensuring their efforts are aligned with youth needs and preferences.
- **Actions**: Review and analyze data from studies on youth engagement, such as feedback from surveys, focus groups, or interviews. Use this data to tailor engagement strategies—emphasize using the platforms and content formats that resonate most with youth (e.g., short videos, interactive posts, livestreams). Constantly update methods of engagement to stay relevant to youth interests.
- **Example**: If the report shows that youth are more likely to engage with social media activism through visual content, CSOs should invest in creating visually appealing campaigns with graphics, infographics, and short videos that explain complex issues in simple, engaging ways.

Recommendations for youth

1.Educate Yourself on Digital Rights and Cybersecurity

- **Objective**: Gain a clear understanding of your rights online, including data privacy, freedom of expression, and protections against cyber threats.
- **Actions**: Take advantage of free online resources, webinars, or courses on digital rights and cybersecurity. Learn about safe internet practices, how to protect personal data, and how to recognize online scams or phishing attempts.
- **Example**: Follow cybersecurity experts or organizations on social media, and participate in discussions or community forums focused on digital literacy. Use tools like two-factor authentication and password managers to protect your accounts.
- **Outcome**: You become a more informed and secure digital citizen, protecting both your personal information and those in your networks.

2. Engage in Digital Activism to Promote Causes You Care About

- **Objective**: Use digital platforms to advocate for social, political, or environmental causes that are important to you.
- **Actions**: Use social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok to raise awareness about issues such as climate change, human rights, or digital privacy. Share educational content, organize online petitions, or participate in campaigns run by youth-led movements.
- **Example**: Join or start online challenges that promote social causes, or create informative posts that explain why certain policies or actions matter to your community. Engage with others in respectful, constructive conversations to amplify important issues.
- **Outcome**: You contribute to positive change by raising awareness and mobilizing others through digital platforms.

3. Get Involved in Local and National Policy Discussions

- **Objective**: Make your voice heard by participating in policy discussions that shape the future of your community and country.
- **Actions**: Attend local council meetings, participate in online policy forums, or join youth advisory boards where you can influence decision-making. Engage with political

representatives by writing to them, commenting on their social media posts, or attending virtual town halls.

- **Example**: Join or establish a local youth group focused on key policy areas (e.g., education, employment, environment) and collaborate to propose policy ideas to local officials. Use platforms like Change.org or Avaaz to organize petitions that gather public support for these ideas.
- **Outcome**: You directly influence policies that affect your future and demonstrate that youth voices are essential in decision-making.

4. Enhance Your Digital Skills for Future Career Opportunities

- **Objective**: Develop digital skills that are increasingly essential in today's workforce, including coding, data analysis, and digital marketing.
- **Actions**: Enroll in online courses or workshops that teach key digital skills like web development, app design, digital marketing, and data science. Look for internships or volunteer opportunities in tech-based projects where you can apply these skills in a practical context.
- **Example**: Join online learning platforms like Coursera, Khan Academy, or Udemy, and explore digital skills courses related to your interests. Participate in hackathons, coding challenges, or tech meetups to sharpen your skills.
- **Outcome**: You become better prepared for jobs in the digital economy and stand out to employers by demonstrating proficiency in key digital competencies.

5. Join or Start Youth-Led Organizations Focused on Social Change

- **Objective**: Collaborate with other young people to create organizations or movements that advocate for the issues you care about.
- **Actions**: Join youth-led NGOs, student organizations, or advocacy groups that focus on topics like environmental sustainability, mental health awareness, or education reform. If such groups don’t exist, take the initiative to start your own by gathering like-minded peers and creating a strategic plan for advocacy.
- **Example**: Use social media to recruit members for your group and organize online or offline events like webinars, fundraisers, or awareness campaigns. Partner with other youth organizations for larger impact.

- **Outcome**: You contribute to meaningful change while building leadership and teamwork skills by working with others toward common goals.

6. Promote Mental Health and Online Safety Awareness

- **Objective**: Advocate for mental health support and online safety, recognizing the challenges youth face in the digital world.
- **Actions**: Raise awareness about cyberbullying, online harassment, and mental health issues that are exacerbated by social media usage. Share resources on how to cope with online stress, balance screen time, and practice self-care. Advocate for platforms and schools to take stronger measures in protecting mental health online.
- **Example**: Share your own experiences or create content (videos, blogs, or infographics) about the importance of mental health in the digital age. Participate in campaigns like "Mental Health Awareness Month" to support youth struggling with digital stress.
- **Outcome**: You help create a supportive and healthy online environment, reducing the stigma around mental health and empowering others to seek help when needed.

7. Leverage Social Media for Positive Dialogue and Change

- **Objective**: Use social media as a tool for positive discourse, learning, and advocacy rather than negativity or misinformation.
- **Actions**: Actively participate in discussions on social media, engaging in respectful debate on societal issues. Share factual information from reputable sources and avoid spreading misinformation or engaging in toxic debates. Encourage others to think critically about what they see and share online.
- **Example**: Create informative posts or videos explaining complex issues in simple terms, helping others to better understand topics like digital rights, climate change, or social justice. Use your platform to promote tolerance and inclusivity.
- **Outcome**: Social media becomes a platform for constructive dialogue, learning, and collective action toward positive societal change.

8. Advocate for Policies That Address the Digital Divide

- **Objective**: Ensure that all young people have access to technology and the internet, regardless of where they live or their economic background.

- **Actions**: Push for government policies that improve access to high-speed internet and digital resources in rural and underserved communities. Support initiatives that provide digital tools to low-income students and advocate for greater investment in digital infrastructure.
- **Example**: Use your voice through online petitions, social media campaigns, or youth organizations to advocate for more equitable access to technology in education. Collaborate with NGOs or companies working to reduce the digital divide.
- **Outcome**: You help ensure that every young person has the tools and opportunities to succeed in the digital world, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.

9. Mentor and Support Peers in Digital Literacy

- **Objective**: Share your digital skills and knowledge with peers, helping them become more proficient and responsible digital citizens.
- **Actions**: Organize or participate in peer-to-peer workshops or study groups that focus on digital skills, from using software to navigating online privacy settings. Be a mentor to those who are less experienced with digital tools, teaching them safe and effective online practices.
- **Example**: Create tutorial videos or how-to guides on digital safety, responsible social media use, or coding basics. Offer to teach younger students or peers how to stay safe online or how to leverage digital tools for learning and activism.
- **Outcome**: A more digitally literate and empowered youth community, with greater knowledge-sharing and peer support to navigate the digital landscape.

10. Stay Informed and Hold Political Leaders Accountable

- **Objective**: Keep up with political developments and hold leaders accountable for decisions that impact the digital space, the environment, or social justice.
- **Actions**: Follow reputable news sources, subscribe to newsletters, and participate in political discussions to stay informed about new policies, elections, and political events. Use your vote and voice to support leaders who prioritize digital rights, environmental sustainability, and youth issues.
- **Example**: Organize voting drives among your peers, encourage political engagement, and participate in town halls to ask leaders tough questions about their policies on digital rights, environmental protection, or youth employment.
- **Outcome**: You become a more active and informed citizen, playing a crucial role in shaping the future by holding political leaders accountable.

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ANNEX 1: Online survey for young people in Albania

Dear Young Person,

Our project "Youth Participation in Digital Democracy: From Digital Skills to Digital Rights of Youth with Fewer Opportunities in the Western Balkans" (EYDR) aims to create better conditions for the realisation of youth potential and provide each and every youth with equal opportunity for quality use of digital media to effect positive change in the community. This is why we designedthe survey before you. It will help us understand the links between digital rights and skills, digitalliteracy and youth participation/engagement/activism in the digital sphere.

The survey is anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all we are interested in. So please be frank. We would also be grateful if you would share the survey with your friends to help us get as many different perspectives as possible.

Please select (one or more) of the listed answers or write your own answer where appropriate. Although concepts such as social platforms, social media and social networks are often used as synonyms, there are nuances in their definitions, which is why we include a brief glossary to facilitate your completion of the survey. Feel free to understand these concepts in the context of activities when you are online and when you are participating and communicating with others on the networks and the Internet.

Glossary:

(definitions of concepts used the most often in the survey, adjusted to youth)

Digital sphere encompasses a broad scope of digital activities, communication and interactions using digital technologies, such as the Internet, social networks, mobile applications, e-mail, etc. It's like the entire digital landscape, covering everything from online shopping to social media interactions.

Digital environment - serves as the core of our online interactions. It's where all our digital tools converge, like websites, social media, and apps. Essentially, it's the serious foundation that underpins our entire online presence.

Social media include websites, social networks, video platforms, mobile applications, podcasts, blogs and digital books enabling access to information, entertainment and content via digital devices, such as smartphones and computers.

Digital platforms can be described as online places where you can network with others and sharethings with them. They include websites and applications where people can share information, ideas and other content with their friends and other users**.**

Digital or online activism in this survey denotes use of the Internet and social networks to promote ideas and launch actions for change in society. It may include sharing of information, organisation of protests and/or signing of online petitions to achieve a specific goal, such as environmental or human rights protection.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age

- Between 18 and 21
- Between 22 and 25
- Between 26 and 30

Sex

- Man/Boy
- Woman/Girl
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer

Completed Education Level

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD

(*please select only one answer - the one showing the highest level of education you have attained)

Type of area you live in:

- Urban
- Rural

(please select only one answer)

Status:

- Employed
- Unemployed
- University student
- Secondary school pupil

- Other (please specify): _____

(please select up to two answers, e.g. a university student can also hold a job)

Your monthly income:

- 0-500 EUR
- 500-1000 EUR
- More than 1000 EUR

Do you belong to any of the following groups:

- Youth with a disability
- LGBTQI+ youth
- Youth belonging to an ethnic minority
- Other (please specify if you belong to another group not listed here):
- I don't belong to any of the listed groups
- Prefer not to answer

(please select the answers that apply to you)

PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM

How often do you follow news and information about current social and political issues?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- Rarely (e.g. once a month, once every few months)
- Never

Are you involved in any of the following activities?

- Member of a formal organisation or association (such as a registered youth and student organisation)
- I am involved in an informal organisation or youth group (such as an informal group/youth initiative).
- I am actively engaged in a political party or movement
- I am not active in any of the listed ways
- I am active in other ways (Specify____)

(please select up to three answers)

Have you been taking part in any political or socially engaged activities in your digital sphere?

Description of the term in the text below:

***Digital sphere** encompasses a broad scope of digital activities, communication and interactions using digital technologies, such as the Internet, social networks, mobile applications, e-mail, etc. It's like the entire digital landscape, covering everything from online shopping to social media interactions.*

- Yes, I have been actively participating in social and political activities on the digital sphere
- No, I have not been participating in such activities in the digital sphere
- I sometimes take part in such activities, but not regularly.
- I used to, but less so nowadays.
- I don't know, maybe I have been participating inadvertently, without noticing

What form did your recent social/political engagement take?

- I shared political information on social networks
- I signed online petitions for social change
- I used hashtags to mark certain social/political issue
- I used a campaign picture as my profile picture as an expression of support
- I participated in digital debates on political topics
- I organised or supported digital campaigns for social goals
- I followed political situation on online media and portals
- Other (please specify): _____

- I have not been engaged in any kind of social/political activity

(please select all the relevant answers)

Please specify the topic or cause your engagement was associated with (E.g. participated in protests against injustice, fought against violence against women, encouraged youth to vote for change, et al):

—----------

Have YOU created and/or shared online content promoting social change or raising awareness of important social issues? (such as blogs, videos, infographics, et al)

- Yes
- No

Have you ever communicated with politicians on social media about socially and/or politically important topics?

- Yes, I have contacted politicians on social media (e.g. a social network);
- No, I have not yet contacted politicians on social media (e.g. a social network)
- Prefer not to answer

Have you used social media (e.g. social networks, websites) to contact institutions or organisations about socially important topics you care about?

Description of the term in the text below:

***Social media** include websites, social networks, video platforms, mobile applications, podcasts, blogs and digital books enabling access to information, entertainment and content via digital devices, such as smartphones and computers.*

- Yes
- No

DESCRIPTION OF POTENTIAL INSTITUTIONS OR ORGANISATIONS: (such as the local government, non-government organisations, human rights organisations)

Have you ever used e-service platforms? (such as e-Government, e-Health, e-Education, et al)

- Yes
- No

Do you take part in discussions on socially relevant topics on social media? (e.g. comments and discussions on forums, groups on social networks or other platforms)

- Yes
- No

In your opinion, is digital activism an efficient way to express one's opinion?

Description of the term in the text below:

Digital or online activism *in this survey denotes use of the Internet and social networks to promote ideas and launch actions for change in society. It may include sharing of information, organisation of protests and/or signing of online petitions to achieve a specific goal, such as environmental or human rights protection.*

- Yes, because it facilitates rapid information sharing and organisation of actions
- To an extent, depends on the situation
- No, it's not engaging enough and may be superficial
- Other (please specify): _____

To what extent has information you found in the digital sphere led to a change of your views/opinions on important social topics?

- Very much
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

What motivates you to actively engage in social and/or political activities in the digital sphere?

- I want to contribute to effecting change in society and the community
- I'm interested in social and/or political issues
- I want to express my views and opinions
- I'm inspired by other activists, influencers and organisations
- I'm not interested in such activities
- Other (please specify): _____

(Please select up to three answers)

In your opinion, can digital civic and/or political activism and participation actually change society?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

What are the main reasons you have not engaged more in digital activism?

- I am sufficiently engaged
- Too busy, lack of time
- I'm concerned about my Internet privacy and safety
- Lack of information or of the requisite skills for active participation
- I'm afraid of the consequences or revenge on the part of the government authorities or other groups
- I doubt my engagement can affect real change
- Lack of motivation to engage
- Technical obstacles (bad Internet connection/lack of access to adequate technology)

Other (please specify): _____

(Please select up to three answers)

Have you had any problems because of your engagement, or your social and/or political activism in the digital sphere?

- Yes, I have been the target of negative comments/hate speech in the digital sphere (e.g. social networks) because of my engagement
- Yes, I have been receiving explicit content I had not asked for
- Yes, I have been the subject of misinformation, and false rumors about me were disseminated
- Yes, I felt insecure/worried because of the potential effects on my privacy or safety
- Yes, I was a victim of physical threats or violence
- Yes, a lawsuit has been filed against me because of my engagement
- Yes, I was imprisoned because of my engagement
- Prefer not to answer
- No, I've had no problems because of my engagement.
- Other (please specify): _____

(please select all the relevant answers)

Do you plan on engaging in digital activism to a greater extent in the future?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges to youth's digital engagement?

- Lack of access to the Internet or technologies
- Lack of information about available digital activism tools
- Lack of information about initiatives, engaged communities, and their activities
- Information overload and fake news
- Lack of interest
- Fear of peers' negative reactions
- Doubts about the possibility of actually effecting social change
- Other (please specify): _____

(please select up to three answers)

How can youth be encouraged/motivated to be socially active in the digital sphere? What's your suggestion? ☺

—----------

FAMILIARITY WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, TOOLS AND RIGHTS

How often do you use digital platforms in your everyday life?

Description of the term in the text below:

Digital platforms *can be described as online places where you can network with others and share things with them. They include websites and applications where people can share information, ideas and other content with their friends and other users.*[47]

- Very often: every day or almost every day
- Often: several times a week
- Sometimes: once or several times a month
- Rarely: several times a year

_____

- Never: hardly ever or never

Which digital platforms do you use the most often?

- Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, Snapchat
- Online forums
- Google Drive, Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive and iCloud
- YouTube, Netflix, HBO
- Slack, Microsoft Teams, Trello, Zoom
- Other (please specify)

(please select all the relevant answers)

Which digital tools do you use the most often in everyday life?

- E-mail
- Messaging applications
- Social networks
- Video calls
- Productivity tools: Microsoft Office
- Time management tools (Google Calendar, Microsoft Outlook)
- Online courses and digital libraries
- Online banking
- Design tools
- Exercise/health monitoring applications
- Travel booking applications (Booking.com, Airbnb), maps and navigation tools (Google Maps, Waze)

(please select all the relevant answers)

Please rate your digital skills listed below on a scale from 1 to 5

Description of the term in the text below:

Digital skills *denote abilities to use computers, the Internet and mobile phones in a smart way. They encompass everything, from sending an e-mail and searching the Internet to using social networks and learning basic programming.*

Use of computer/laptop **1 2 3 4 5**
Use of smartphone/tablet **1 2 3 4 5**

Use of web browsers **1 2 3 4 5**
Use of social networks **1 2 3 4 5**
Basic understanding of cybersecurity principles
(e.g. safety protocols, password management) **1 2 3 4 5**

How do you rate your ability/skills to assess the veracity of information you find online from 1 to 5?

1 2 3 4 5

How have you acquired digital skills?

- Formal education (e.g. school, college)
- Informal education (various courses, training, workshops)
- Self-taught
- At work
- Other (please specify)

Do you know what digital rights are?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If YES, can you list at least two digital rights? ……

Are your rights in the digital world as important as those in the physical world?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you think more education on digital rights and Internet safety is needed?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you feel safe and secure online?

- Yes
- No

Which organizations and institutions protecting digital rights can you turn to for help if your digital rights are jeopardized?

- I would contact…….
- I don't know, I haven't thought about that
- Frankly, I never looked into that
- I have no idea, it never mattered to me
- Maybe I'd ask someone older if I had a problem
- Not sure, I'd probably Google them if I needed them

How would you react if someone shared on TIKTOK your video prompting laughter and malicious comments among other users?

- I'd ask the person who shared it to remove it, and explain how it can harm me
- I'd report the content as inappropriate to TikTok and request to remove it
- I'd consult friends and family, seek their advice and support
- I'd consult an institution or organization focusing on the protection of digital rights
- I'd seek support on forums and platforms dealing with similar situations

(please select up to two answers)

Do you believe that your personal data are sufficiently protected on the Internet?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

In your opinion, who uses your online data and why?

- Corporations, for their advertisements, to "flood" us with ads every step of the way.
- Governments or intelligence agencies, perhaps to listen in on our conversations or follow our movements.
- Social networks, to get an idea of what we like and what we're doing and to "flood" us with ads.
- Online shops, to send us non-stop messages about products we don't need.
- Some suspicious websites, to sell our information or put it to use for sinister ends.

How often do you check privacy settings on your online accounts (e.g. social network profiles)?

- Regularly: every week or several times of month
- Occasionally: every other month or several times a year.
- Rarely: once a year or less frequently.
- Never: hardly ever or never.

Who can see your Instagram profile and photos?

- My profile is open to everyone
- My profile is open, but I sometimes think twice about sharing stuff on it.
- My profile is private, but I accept requests from others when they interest me.
- My Instagram is only for my friends; it's closed
- I change the profile settings, depending on how I feel that day.
- I don't have an Instagram profile.

Thank you for your time and invaluable contribution! Please feel free to add any additional comments here.

ANNEX 2: Semi-Structured Focus Groups

TOPIC: DIGITAL RIGHTS AND SKILLS

- Please list some digital rights that first come to mind… How do you rate your knowledge of these rights, such as privacy protection and freedom of expression?
- Which digital skills are crucial for successful use of digital technologies? Do youth from vulnerable groups need to put in additional effort and possess specific digital skills in order to engage in the digital environment on an equal footing?
- Please describe your experience of using digital technologies as a youth from a vulnerable group?
- Which resources and information on digital rights and skills tailored to your needs as a youth from a vulnerable group are available to you?
- Please describe any personal experiences of discrimination and unequal treatment in the digital sphere.
- Please rate your ability to recognize and respond to potential threats to the privacy and safety of youth from vulnerable groups and your peers on the Internet. Which steps would you take to improve your digital skills and knowledge? Who can you ask for help?
- How would you react if …(list some illustrative examples...)

TOPIC: PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM

- Which activities important for society and the community do you usually take part in? How do they reflect on and differ from your activities in the digital sphere? In which ways do youth from vulnerable groups usually take part in activities important for society and the community? How do they reflect on and differ from their activities in the digital sphere?
- What opportunities and obstacles did you face when you were joining the digital community? Which are the typical forms of engagement of youth from vulnerablegroups?
- Which risks do youth face during their participation in the digital sphere? From your point of view, which role do institutions, organizations and the community play in the youth's engagement in the digital sphere?
- What are your experiences of participating in civic and/or political activism in the digital sphere?
- How does membership of a specific vulnerable group affect the level of participation in the digital sphere (please share your own experience or the experience of someone in

your environment). Which obstacles have you faced? Which are your advantages?

- Do you feel safe expressing your political or socially engaged views in the digital sphere?
- Which kinds of content on social change do you usually support, like or share on social media? Please give us a couple of examples of socially engaged content you recently shared, created or joined?
- Please describe your experience of signing online petitions, supporting charity campaigns or joining online campaigns for social change.
- Please describe any experience you have had in contacting institutions or organizations via social media on socially relevant topics (e.g. you wrote them in DM, commented on theirposts on Instagram). What feedback did you get from them? What's your experience, if any, of communicating with political representatives in the digital sphere?
- Can the digital sphere be harnessed to effect change?
- To what extent and in which way is the digital environment (un)friendly to vulnerable groups of youth compared to the offline environment, that is, do the digital sphere and environment encourage your participation or do they pose additional challenges before you?
- What are the main obstacles to increasing the level of youth engagement – how can youthbe motivated to recognize the advantages of the digital sphere for effecting socialchange? Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to share with us?

ANNEX 3: Expert Interviews

- Which are the most frequent forms of youth digital activism you have noticed?
- How do youth organize and implement political participation and social activism activities in the digital sphere?
- Do you know of any successful initiatives initiated in the digital sphere? What was the key reason these initiatives succeeded? Do you know of any successful youth initiatives in the digital sphere that contributed to social change? Can you list any of them?
- Do we even have the requisite and youth friendly infrastructure and developed participation tools that could motivate youth to engage in digital activism?
- What obstacles to engaging in digital activism do youth face the most often?
- Why do youth engage in the digital sphere? Which youth engages? What are their main motives?
- What responsibilities do institutions have towards youth when it comes to supporting their activism and participation in social processes in the digital sphere?
- How do youth understand their digital rights in the online environment?
- What are typical situations in which youth are unaware of their digital rights?
- Are there initiatives or support, formal and informal education programmes helping youth understand and exercise their digital rights better?
- How do institutions support the protection of youth's digital rights?
- Which key obstacles do youth face in exercising their digital rights and how do they deal with violations of their digital rights?
- Where is our country vis-à-vis other countries in the region and the EU when it comes to supporting youth in exercising their digital rights and their digital activism?
- What are your key recommendations for more active digital participation of youth, for protecting their digital rights better? For improving their digital skills? What can youth do? What about organisations and institutions?

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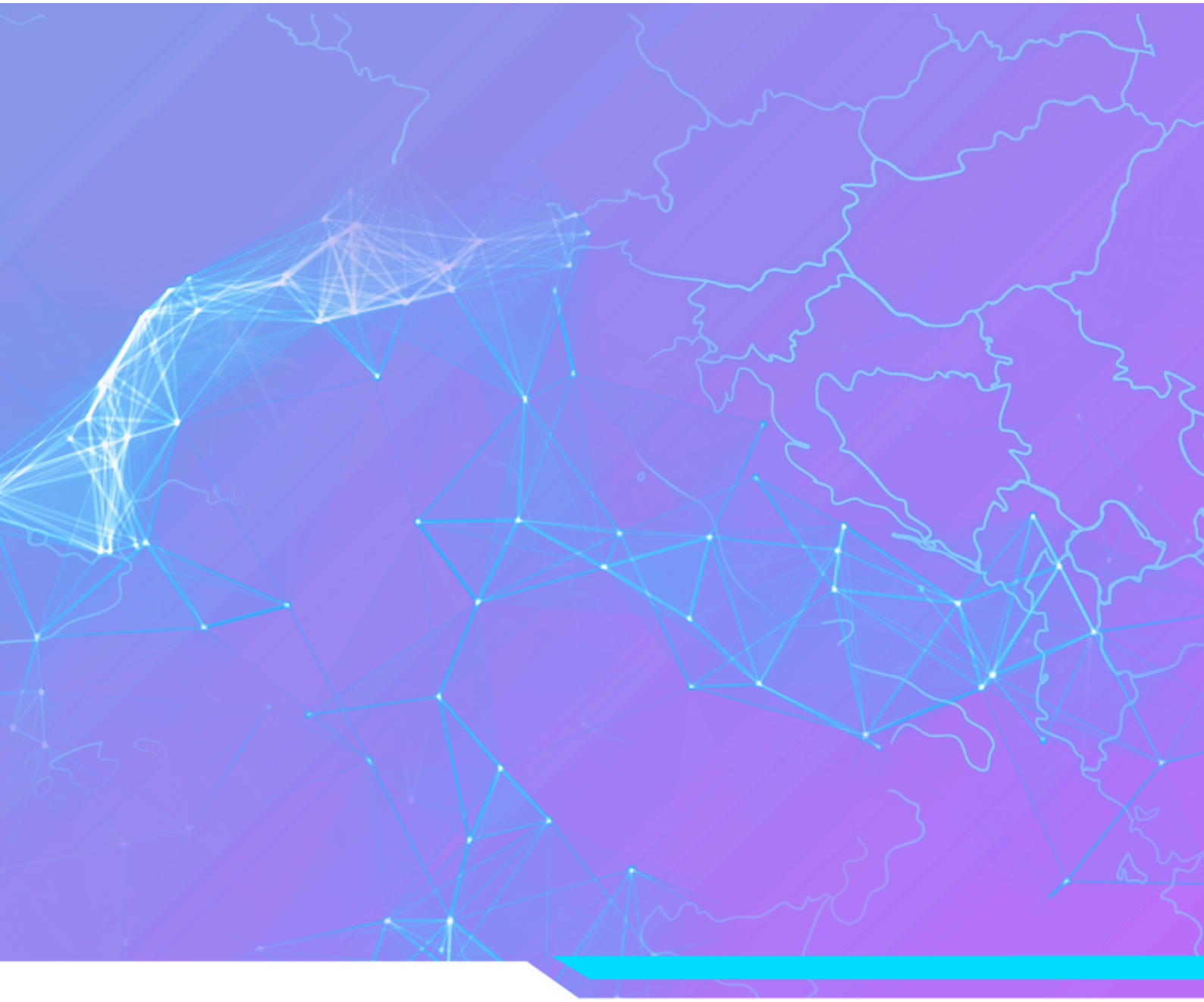

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