



# Understanding Young Creatives: Survey and Focus Group Findings

Surveys and focus group discussions  
with young people in the creative industries  
in local communities

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## Consortium

The DigiCreate consortium is a dynamic partnership of eight organisations spanning both EU member states and the Western Balkans, united by a shared commitment to fostering youth empowerment and driving innovation within the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector.

- Youth Power Germany e.V. - Germany
- Nevladina Organizacija GLAS (NVO GLAS) - Montenegro
- Udruzenje Okret (SPIN) - Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Univerzitet Union Nikola Tesla (UniTesla) - Serbia
- Javna Ustanova Univerzite Crne Gore Podgorica (UoM) - Montenegro
- Cooperativa Para o desenvolvimento e coesão social, CRL (Contextos) - Portugal
- Evolutionary Archetypes Consulting SL (EAC) - Spain
- Fakultet Za Poslovnu Ekonomiju I Pravo Bar (FPEP Bar) - Montenegro

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# INTRODUCTION



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) stand at the forefront of Europe's innovation, embodying cultural diversity, entrepreneurship, and civic participation. As Europe advances through a period of rapid digital transformation, these sectors are evolving in unprecedented ways — requiring professionals to merge creativity with technological fluency and adaptability.

For young people entering or aspiring to enter the CCI, this transformation presents both opportunity and challenge. On one hand, new digital tools enable wider creative expression and global collaboration; on the other, many young creatives lack access to structured learning pathways, advanced digital competencies, and soft-skill development opportunities essential for professional growth. Fragmented learning ecosystems, unequal access to training, and the absence of targeted support for emerging artists and cultural professionals often result in a **mismatch between talent and opportunity**.

The **DigiCreate project** directly addresses these gaps by promoting **digital empowerment, creative innovation, and inclusive participation** among young people in the CCI. It recognizes that creativity and technology are now inseparable dimensions of cultural production, and that fostering digital confidence is key to ensuring full participation in Europe's creative future.

Within this broader framework, the **Work Package 3 Needs Assessment** — Deliverable 3.1 (D3.1) — constitutes the project's analytical foundation. It explores how young creatives currently use digital tools, what competencies they feel they lack, and how they wish to learn. The rationale is clear: by grounding the design of future tools and learning resources (particularly **D3.2, the DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox**) in real evidence from young people, DigiCreate ensures that its outputs respond directly to current realities, reducing skill disparities and empowering youth to shape the ongoing digital and creative transition.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Needs Assessment

The purpose of this deliverable is to provide a comprehensive, comparative analysis of the **digital and soft skill development needs** of young people active in, or aspiring to work within, the Cultural and Creative Industries. The findings will form the evidence base for the next project phase — the creation of the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox**.

The specific objectives of the **Needs Assessment (D3.1)** are to:

1. **Map the current digital skill levels** of young creatives and identify priority areas for upskilling.

2. **Assess the relevance and perceived importance of soft skills** — such as collaboration, adaptability, and communication — in creative and professional contexts.
3. **Explore learning preferences and motivations**, identifying which methods (e.g., experiential, online, hybrid, or peer-based) are most effective for young creatives.
4. **Analyze barriers and inequalities** affecting access to digital learning and professional development, particularly among young people in rural, peripheral, or low-resource areas.
5. **Produce evidence-based recommendations** to guide the design of the DigiCreate Toolbox (D3.2) and to inform broader training, youth work, and cultural policy practices.

By fulfilling these objectives, WP3 ensures that DigiCreate’s subsequent activities are **data-driven, inclusive, and strategically aligned** with both youth realities and the European Union’s priorities for digital transition and creative innovation.

## 1.3 Relation to DigiCreate Work Package 3

This report (Deliverable 3.1) is part of **Work Package 3: Understanding Digital and Creative Needs**, which serves as the project’s **research and evidence-gathering phase**. WP3 investigates how young people in different European contexts engage with digital technologies, develop creative skills, and approach collaboration and entrepreneurship within the CCI.

The work package employs a **mixed-methods approach**, combining a cross-country online survey and in-depth focus group discussions to capture both quantitative indicators and qualitative insights. The analysis not only maps competencies but also contextualizes them within social, economic, and cultural realities — revealing how digital and creative ecosystems differ across Europe.

The findings of this report directly inform **Deliverable 3.2, the DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox**, ensuring that its learning resources, methodologies, and structure are rooted in the actual experiences and aspirations of young creatives. Thus, WP3 functions as a **strategic bridge** between research and practice — connecting evidence with action, and translating youth voices into tangible, innovative learning tools that strengthen digital readiness and creativity across Europe.

## 1.4 Structure of the Report

The report is organized into seven interconnected chapters that follow a logical progression from context and methodology to findings, analysis, and recommendations:

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction** outlines the background, rationale, and objectives of the Needs Assessment, situating it within WP3 and the broader DigiCreate framework.
- **Chapter 2 – Methodology** describes the research design, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures that guided the study.



- **Chapter 3 – Online Survey Findings** presents the quantitative insights derived from the cross-national survey of young people in the creative industries.
- **Chapter 4 – Focus Group Discussions and Insights** synthesizes the qualitative findings, highlighting lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations.
- **Chapter 5 – Comparative Analysis** integrates survey and focus group results into a cross-country synthesis, identifying shared patterns and key divergences.
- **Chapter 6 – Recommendations** translates the findings into actionable guidance for training, policy, and the design of the DigiCreate Toolbox (D3.2).
- **Chapter 7 – Conclusion** summarizes the key takeaways, reflects on implications for future project work, and situates DigiCreate’s contribution within broader European strategies for digital education and creative innovation.

Together, these chapters provide a coherent, evidence-based foundation for the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive**, ensuring that all outputs are **responsive to youth realities, methodologically robust, and aligned with European digital and cultural transformation goals**.







# METHODOLOGY



## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design and Approach

The methodology adopted for the **DigiCreate Needs Assessment (Deliverable 3.1)** was designed to provide a **comprehensive understanding** of how young people in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) acquire and apply digital and soft skills. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study ensured both **statistical robustness** and **contextual depth**, offering a holistic picture of the realities faced by young creatives across Europe.

A **mixed-methods approach** was chosen to integrate measurable data with lived experiences. This approach enabled the project team to analyze not only what skills young people possess, but also how they develop, perceive, and apply them in practice. The study was guided by three overarching principles:

1. **Participation** – Engaging young people as active contributors rather than passive respondents, ensuring that their voices and ideas shaped the research outcomes.
2. **Comparability** – Using harmonized tools and indicators across all partner countries to allow meaningful cross-national comparison.
3. **Practical Relevance** – Generating actionable findings directly applicable to the design of the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox (D3.2)**.

The data collection process was conducted between **April and July 2025**, coordinated by **Contextos (Portugal)** as WP3 leader, with active contributions from all partner organizations. Each partner was responsible for implementing the research locally, adapting dissemination strategies to reach young people from diverse creative fields and socio-economic backgrounds.

This collaborative process ensured the inclusion of a wide spectrum of youth voices — from those based in urban creative hubs to emerging talents in rural or low-resource settings.

### 2.2 Data Collection Instruments

Two complementary instruments were developed collaboratively within the consortium to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights: an **online survey** and a series of **focus group discussions**. Together, they provided a balanced perspective on digital competence, learning needs, and creative aspirations among young people in the CCI sector.

#### Online Survey

The online survey collected quantitative data on participants' digital skills, soft skills, learning habits, and professional ambitions. Hosted on a shared online platform, it was translated into each partner's national language when necessary to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

The survey included five main thematic sections:

1. **Demographics and Background** – covering age, gender, education, employment, and creative field;
2. **Digital Skills and Tools Used** – assessing self-reported proficiency and frequency of use;
3. **Perceived Digital Skill Gaps and Training Needs** – identifying areas requiring further development;
4. **Soft Skills and Transversal Competences** – focusing on communication, teamwork, adaptability, creativity, and entrepreneurship;
5. **Learning Preferences and Barriers** – exploring formats, motivations, and perceived challenges to accessing training.

Each section combined multiple-choice items, Likert-scale ratings, and optional open-ended questions to encourage reflection.

In total, **90 valid survey responses** were collected across the six participating countries – **Portugal, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina** – providing a robust comparative dataset that reflects both geographic and cultural diversity within the European CCI landscape.

## Focus Group Discussions

To complement the survey and add qualitative depth, **six focus group discussions** were conducted – one in each partner country. Each session brought together approximately **15 participants** from diverse creative disciplines, educational levels, and professional experiences. The focus groups explored topics such as:

- Experiences with digital tools and technologies in creative work.
- The perceived importance of digital and soft skills for professional success.
- Barriers to accessing learning and employment opportunities.
- Aspirations for future training, mentorship, and collaboration models.

A **shared focus group guide**, co-developed by the consortium, ensured methodological consistency while allowing partners to tailor discussions to their local contexts. Sessions were facilitated by trained moderators, recorded with consent, and transcribed for thematic analysis. This participatory process enabled young creatives to articulate their perspectives in their own words, yielding rich qualitative evidence to complement the quantitative findings.

## 2.3 Target Group and Sampling

The target group for the DigiCreate Needs Assessment consisted of **young people aged 18–30** who were:

- Actively working in, or studying toward, a career in the cultural and creative industries; or
- Aspiring to pursue creative professions and digital innovation within their local communities.



A **purposive sampling strategy** was applied to ensure diversity in gender, age, education, and socio-economic background. Participants represented a wide range of creative sectors – including **visual arts, design, music, film, performing arts, digital media, and cultural entrepreneurship** – reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the CCI.

Recruitment was carried out through partner networks, youth organizations, art schools, social media channels, and community spaces. This approach ensured inclusion of both **formally trained creatives** and **self-taught practitioners**, capturing the varied pathways through which young Europeans engage in creative work.

Particular attention was paid to reaching underrepresented groups, such as youth from rural areas, migrants, or those without formal education in the arts – aligning with DigiCreate’s commitment to inclusion and equal access.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Protection

All research activities complied with the **ethical principles of Erasmus+** and the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**. Participants were informed of the study’s objectives, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection began. Personal data were anonymized and securely stored by each partner organization according to national and EU data protection frameworks. Quotes and qualitative insights were reported in **aggregated or pseudonymized form** to preserve confidentiality. The consortium committed to ensuring that all findings would be used exclusively for educational and research purposes, contributing to the creation of ethical, transparent, and inclusive learning resources through the **DigiCreate project**.

## 2.5 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process followed a **two-stage approach**, aligning with the project’s mixed-methods design to ensure coherence between quantitative and qualitative results.

### 1. Quantitative Analysis (Survey Data)

- Data from the online survey were processed using descriptive statistics to identify key trends, averages, and cross-country differences.
- Comparative analysis examined how digital competences, learning preferences, and access barriers varied among the six countries.
- Findings were grouped into four major thematic clusters: **digital skills, soft skills, learning behaviors, and training needs**.
- Quantitative insights were then used as a reference point for interpreting and validating the qualitative evidence from the focus groups.

### 2. Qualitative Analysis (Focus Group Data)

- Focus group transcripts were coded using **thematic analysis**, identifying recurring ideas, priorities, and challenges.

- Codes were organized into overarching themes that reflected the lived realities of young creatives — such as learning pathways, collaboration, innovation, and access barriers.
- Cross-country comparisons allowed the research team to recognize both common European trends and local specificities.
- Representative quotes were selected to illustrate participants' voices authentically, providing depth and nuance to the findings.

This combined analysis ensured a **triangulated understanding** of young people's digital and creative learning landscapes - blending measurable evidence with narrative insight to produce a well-rounded, evidence-based foundation for **Deliverable D3.2: The DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox**.





A stylized, abstract illustration in a mid-century modern style. The background is a solid light blue. In the center, a large, dark green suit jacket is shown from the side, with a bright red tie. A hand is visible holding the tie. To the left, a person's head and shoulders are visible, wearing a red and white patterned garment. To the right, another person's head and shoulders are visible, wearing a dark green garment. At the bottom, a person's head and shoulders are visible, wearing a dark green garment. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

# ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

## 3. Online Survey Findings

### 3.1 Introduction and Methodology

The DigiCreate online survey was developed as part of **Work Package 3 (WP3)** to map the digital and soft-skill landscape among young people in the **Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)** across Europe. Its purpose was to identify skill levels, training needs, and learning preferences among young creatives in six participating countries - **Portugal, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina**.

A total of **90 valid responses** were collected between **April and July 2025**. Respondents represented a wide range of creative fields, including **visual arts, design, music, film, performance, digital media, and cultural entrepreneurship**.

The demographic profile reflects the diversity and inclusivity of the CCI ecosystem:

- **Age:** The majority (approx. **70%**) were aged between **20 and 30**, placing them in the early stages of their professional or educational journey.
- **Gender:** Women represented around **60%** of respondents, men approximately **35%**, and a small proportion identified as non-binary or preferred not to disclose.
- **Education:** Over **80%** had completed or were pursuing **higher education**, primarily in arts, communication, design, or related fields.
- **Employment status:** Around **45%** identified as students, **35%** as freelancers or self-employed professionals, and **20%** as employed in creative organizations or collectives.

This distribution highlights a **young, educated, and highly motivated cohort**, already active or aspiring to be active in the creative sector, yet navigating challenges linked to unstable employment, limited access to digital tools, and the need for continuous learning.

### 3.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Overall, the findings reveal that **young creatives possess a solid foundation in digital literacy**, particularly in tools supporting communication, content creation, and visual production. Across countries, respondents reported high levels of proficiency in everyday tools such as **Canva, Adobe Creative Suite (especially Photoshop and Illustrator), social media management platforms**, and **video editing software** such as **CapCut, Premiere Pro, or DaVinci Resolve**.

However, the data also show that most young people operate at a **basic to intermediate level**, often self-taught through experimentation and online tutorials. Only a minority - around **20%** - described their digital proficiency as “advanced,” with this group concentrated mainly in design, media production, and marketing fields.



Several respondents emphasized that digital fluency had become essential for creative success, yet **formal training opportunities** were often outdated or inaccessible. As one participant noted,

“Everything I know about digital tools I learned online or from friends — not from school.”

Country differences were modest but informative:

- **Western European respondents (Portugal, Spain, Germany)** tended to use a broader variety of professional tools and showed higher confidence in digital design and editing platforms.
- **Southeastern European respondents (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina)** reported similar enthusiasm but lower access to advanced software, citing financial barriers and weaker infrastructure.

A recurring theme was the **strategic use of free or open-source tools** to overcome such limitations. Many young creatives relied on platforms like **Canva, CapCut, and Audacity**, balancing creativity with resource constraints.

### 3.3 Digital Skills Landscape

Despite their motivation and basic literacy, young creatives consistently reported **significant skill gaps** in advanced and emerging digital domains. The most frequently mentioned areas for improvement were:

1. **Artificial Intelligence and Creative Automation** – A strong interest was expressed in understanding how AI tools could be used for artistic creation, marketing, and workflow optimization. However, less than **15%** felt confident using AI applications.
2. **Digital Marketing and Audience Engagement** – Respondents recognized the importance of social media analytics, digital branding, and online visibility, but lacked structured learning in these areas.
3. **Web and App Development** – Only a small minority had experience with coding, web design, or interactive media, although many expressed a desire to learn these skills.
4. **Project and Time Management Software** – Tools such as Trello, Notion, or Asana were less commonly used, particularly among younger students and early-career artists.

These findings underline a widespread demand for **applied digital upskilling** that connects creative production with strategic, technological, and managerial capacities. As one Spanish participant observed:

“I can edit videos and design, but I don’t know how to make my work visible online or reach clients effectively.”

The survey results also revealed **gendered differences** in confidence levels: while men tended to rate their technical proficiency slightly higher, women were more likely to express interest in further digital training — suggesting both awareness and a proactive attitude toward improvement.

## 3.4 Soft Skills and Transversal Competences

Soft skills emerged as **equally vital** as technical proficiency across all participating countries. Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of **communication, teamwork, adaptability, and creativity** as enablers of success in collaborative and rapidly changing environments.

When asked to rate the importance of different competences:

- **Creativity and innovation** ranked highest (rated “very important” by **92%** of respondents);
- Followed by **communication and collaboration (87%)**;
- And **adaptability and problem-solving (80%)**.

However, self-assessment of proficiency was slightly lower than perceived importance — suggesting a **skills confidence gap**. Many participants expressed difficulties managing teamwork in hybrid (online/offline) settings or communicating effectively in multicultural, multilingual contexts.

Notably, participants associated soft skills not only with employability but also with **artistic identity and sustainability**. As one respondent from Montenegro put it:

“To work creatively today, you need to know how to connect with others — not just how to use tools.”

Across regions, **collaboration and empathy** were described as particularly important for community-based creative work, whereas **entrepreneurial mindset and self-organization** were highlighted by freelancers and independent artists seeking stability in uncertain markets.

## 3.5 Learning Preferences and Motivations

The survey results clearly demonstrate that **young creatives are highly motivated learners**, but they seek approaches that are **interactive, flexible, and directly applicable** to their creative practice.

Across countries, there was a strong preference for **non-formal and experiential learning** methods, where participants can “learn by doing” and immediately apply new skills in personal or professional projects.

When asked about preferred learning formats:

- **Workshops and hands-on training** were rated highest (over **70%** preference rate);
- Followed by **online tutorials and self-paced modules (62%)**;
- And **mentorship or peer learning (58%)**.

Traditional academic courses or long theoretical programs were viewed as less effective for creative development. Participants valued autonomy and flexibility — especially the ability to explore **multimedia tools, collaborate with peers, and receive direct feedback** on their work.

Several participants noted that existing training often fails to reflect the **interdisciplinary nature of creative work**, which blends artistic, technical, and entrepreneurial dimensions. As one Portuguese participant explained:

“I learn best when I can mix skills — design, storytelling, and digital strategy — instead of separating them.”

Motivation was driven primarily by two factors: **professional growth** (better employability, visibility, and project success) and **creative curiosity** (the joy of experimentation and innovation). This dual motivation highlights the need for learning resources — like the upcoming DigiCreate Toolbox (D3.2) - that connect **personal expression** with **practical outcomes**.

## 3.6 Barriers and Inequalities in Access

Despite their enthusiasm, many young people reported significant **barriers to accessing digital training and professional opportunities**. These challenges varied across regions but shared several common dimensions:

### 1. Economic and Infrastructure Barriers

Respondents from **Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina** cited the high cost of digital tools, limited access to paid software, and unstable internet connections as key obstacles.

One Bosnian participant remarked:

“It’s not that we don’t want to learn — it’s that we can’t afford the same tools that others use.”

### 2. Geographical and Social Inequalities

Participants from smaller towns and rural areas felt disconnected from urban creative hubs where training and networking opportunities are concentrated. In contrast, respondents in countries like **Germany and Spain** reported stronger institutional support but noted disparities between regions and socio-economic groups.

### 3. Lack of Structured Guidance

Many respondents described a sense of fragmentation in their learning paths — an overload of online resources but little direction on what to prioritize or how to connect skills to real opportunities.

As one German respondent summarized:

“You can find tutorials everywhere, but it’s hard to know what really matters for your career.”

### 4. Language and Accessibility Barriers

Participants across several countries pointed to the dominance of English-language content as a limitation for local learners.

They also emphasized the need for **inclusive formats** — captioned videos, mobile-friendly content, and open-access resources.



These findings underline the importance of **equity and accessibility** in designing the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox (D3.2)**. Training tools must not only be free and multilingual but also structured in a way that guides young people through a coherent learning journey regardless of their starting point.

### 3.7 Summary of Key Insights and Implications for D3.2

The survey findings paint a comprehensive picture of a **generation of young creatives who are digitally aware, motivated, and eager to grow — yet underserved by existing learning systems**.

They possess basic digital fluency and strong soft-skill potential but require accessible, practice-oriented opportunities to transform these into employable competencies.

The key takeaways can be summarized as follows:

- **Digital Competences:** Young creatives are comfortable with basic content creation and design tools but lack confidence in advanced or emerging technologies, especially AI, digital marketing, and coding.
- **Soft Skills:** Communication, teamwork, adaptability, and creativity are universally valued but underdeveloped due to limited collaboration and mentorship opportunities.
- **Learning Preferences:** Experiential, short-format, and collaborative learning models are most effective — emphasizing practice, peer exchange, and flexibility.
- **Barriers:** Socio-economic inequality, regional disparities, and lack of guidance remain critical challenges that prevent equal access to digital learning and professional pathways.
- **Motivations:** Learning is driven by both professional ambition and creative curiosity, showing strong potential for self-directed engagement when opportunities are relevant and accessible.

Taken together, these insights confirm that the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox (D3.2)** must serve as more than a repository of tools — it should be a **living, participatory learning environment** where young creatives can build digital confidence, connect with peers, and co-create solutions that reflect Europe’s cultural and technological diversity.

This chapter therefore, provides the empirical foundation for the qualitative analysis that follows in **Chapter 4**, where focus group discussions deepen the understanding of these trends through participants’ lived experiences.

# FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INSIGHTS



## 4. Focus Group Discussions and Insights

### Executive Abstract

The focus group discussions carried out across six partner countries—**Portugal, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina**—offered deep and personal perspectives on how young creatives experience digital transformation in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI). These sessions built upon the survey results and helped partners better understand how skills, motivation, and opportunity intersect in young people’s creative lives.

In total, **90 young participants** (around 15 per country) aged between **20 and 32** took part. The discussions revealed a generation that is **digitally curious, self-taught, and socially engaged**, but often without the structured opportunities needed to grow their skills sustainably.

Participants highlighted similar challenges across countries: limited access to professional networks, unaffordable software, and unequal access to digital tools and infrastructure. While enthusiasm for **AI and creative technologies** is high, many expressed a desire for **ethical guidance and responsible innovation**.

Soft skills—such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork—were repeatedly described as essential for creative success. At the same time, participants linked learning with community and belonging, favoring **hands-on, collaborative, and socially meaningful experiences** over formal instruction.

These shared findings informed both the **comparative European analysis (Chapter 5)** and the design logic of the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Toolbox (D3.2)**, emphasizing inclusivity, accessibility, and co-creation as key principles for the next project phase.

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative results from the **focus group discussions** conducted by all six project partners as part of the DigiCreate Work Package 3 (WP3) needs assessment. While the online survey offered quantitative data on skills and preferences, the focus groups provided the **human dimension**—personal stories, emotional perspectives, and real examples of how young people learn, collaborate, and create in today’s digital world.

The purpose of these focus groups was twofold:

1. To **validate** and expand on the survey findings through direct dialogue with young creatives.
2. To **identify patterns and nuances** that statistical data alone could not capture, especially regarding attitudes toward digital transformation, learning habits, and creative collaboration.



Across all partner countries, participants spoke with passion and honesty about their experiences in the creative field. Their voices reflected not only individual journeys but also wider cultural and structural realities—ranging from access to resources and training to perceptions of creativity, work, and digital ethics.

The analysis that follows integrates their insights into a **coherent European narrative**, highlighting both shared trends and local distinctions. In doing so, it aims to deepen the understanding of how young creatives develop, share, and apply their skills across different national contexts.

## 4.2 Methodology and Participants

Each partner organization organized one **national focus group**, following a shared methodological framework developed by **Contextos**, the WP3 coordinator. This approach ensured comparability across contexts while allowing for flexibility to reflect local conditions.

### Format and Structure

The focus groups took place between **April and July 2024**, each lasting between **90 and 120 minutes**. They were either conducted **in person** (Portugal, Spain, and Germany) or **online** (Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina), depending on national circumstances and participant availability.

Each session included:

- A brief introduction to the **DigiCreate project and objectives**.
- Guided discussion following a semi-structured **questionnaire** exploring digital and soft skills, learning experiences, and perceptions of technology.
- Reflection and wrap-up activities, encouraging participants to share takeaways or recommendations.

Facilitators followed a **common discussion guide** focusing on the following themes:

1. **Digital skills and tools currently used**.
2. **Perceived skill gaps** and barriers to learning.
3. **Soft skills** (teamwork, communication, adaptability, etc.) and their relevance.
4. **Learning preferences** and favored training formats.
5. **Attitudes toward AI and emerging technologies** in creative work.

### Participants

In total, **around 90 young people** participated—approximately **15 per partner country**. The majority were aged **20–32**, representing diverse creative fields: visual arts, media production, design, performance, and digital communication. Roughly **65% identified as women**, and the overall gender balance reflected the composition of each national partner's local networks.

While most participants were already involved in creative activities (freelance, volunteering, or early-career roles), several were still in **education or transition phases**, seeking to professionalize their skills.

This mix provided valuable insights into both the **entry points** and **barriers** within the creative industries.

### **Ethics and Consent**

All participants joined voluntarily and provided **informed consent**. Discussions were recorded only for internal analysis, and all data were anonymized before inclusion in the report. The conversations were conducted in a safe, inclusive, and open environment, encouraging free expression and mutual respect.

## **4.3 Main Themes and Insights**

The discussions held across the six partner countries revealed a generation of young creatives who are **deeply motivated, digitally active, and socially conscious**. While their backgrounds and access to resources varied, their reflections shared striking commonalities, especially in the way they link creativity with identity, community, and technology.

### **1. Digital Skills and Learning Pathways**

Participants across all focus groups demonstrated confidence with **everyday creative tools**, such as Adobe Creative Suite, Canva, and mobile editing apps, but they also pointed to clear **gaps in advanced and emerging digital skills**.

Young people in Portugal and Spain described a strong need to develop competencies in **digital marketing, content distribution, and AI-assisted creation**, while participants from Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina emphasized the **lack of infrastructure and access** that limits their learning options. A young designer from Montenegro shared:

“We have creativity and ideas, but no access to proper equipment or software. We learn what we can with what we have.”

In Germany, participants described a different situation—widespread access to technology but an **overwhelming pressure to constantly upgrade skills**. One participant explained:

“There are so many new tools every month that you feel you’re always behind.”

Across the board, participants expressed a desire for **training that is accessible, practical, and directly relevant** to their creative goals.

### **2. Soft Skills and Collaboration**

In all countries, **soft skills were perceived as equally important as technical ones**. Communication, teamwork, and adaptability were frequently mentioned as critical to managing creative projects, especially when working in diverse or remote teams.

In Spain and Portugal, young creatives emphasized the role of **collaborative thinking** and emotional intelligence in maintaining good client relationships. In the Western Balkans, soft skills were associated with **mutual support and community resilience** in low-resource environments. A Serbian participant reflected:

“You can’t survive alone in this field. Collaboration is our safety net.”

Several women in the focus groups highlighted that empathy, mediation, and coordination—skills they often provide informally—are **undervalued yet essential** in creative collaboration. These gendered dynamics were echoed in Portugal and Spain, where participants noted that emotional and organizational tasks often fall disproportionately on women within teams.

### 3. Learning Culture: Informal, Experimental, and Peer-Based

A common theme across all focus groups was the **informal nature of learning** among young creatives.

Most participants said they learned their craft through **YouTube tutorials, online forums, or peer exchange**, rather than through formal education. As one Spanish participant explained:

“We’re all self-taught to some degree. You learn what you need when you need it.”

In Germany, participants noted that although creative courses are available, **formal programs often lag behind the pace of technology**. In the Western Balkans, where structured opportunities are fewer, the **sense of collective learning** was stronger. A participant from Bosnia & Herzegovina put it simply:

“When someone learns something new, they share it. That’s how we grow.”

This culture of **peer-driven learning** was not only practical but also empowering. It built solidarity and a sense of belonging that many participants felt was missing from formal systems.

### 4. Attitudes Toward AI and Emerging Technologies

Across Europe, participants expressed **curiosity and cautious optimism** about AI and other emerging tools.

In Spain and Germany, many had already experimented with AI-based software such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and Runway ML, using them to accelerate idea generation or automate repetitive tasks.

However, participants in Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina voiced concerns about **authorship, bias, and creative authenticity**.

A Portuguese participant summed it up well:

“AI can help you, but it shouldn’t replace your creativity. It’s a partner, not the artist.”

Several participants across countries, particularly women, raised **ethical questions** about representation and bias in AI systems. This reflects a growing call for **responsible AI literacy**—training that helps creatives use these tools critically, rather than unthinkingly.

The overall consensus was that AI has enormous potential for innovation, but it must be integrated **thoughtfully and ethically**, with clear awareness of its limitations.

### 5. Barriers to Access and Participation

While participants’ creative drive was consistent, their access to tools, networks, and opportunities was not.

Young people in rural or economically disadvantaged areas—especially in the Western



Balkans—described **poor internet connections, outdated devices, and limited funding** as major barriers.

In contrast, participants in Spain and Portugal identified **precarious employment and lack of recognition** for creative work as their main challenges.

One participant from Bosnia & Herzegovina said:

“We have the ideas and the energy, but no support or visibility.”

In Germany, discussions focused more on **mental health and burnout**, suggesting that access to resources does not necessarily equate to sustainable creative wellbeing. Overall, the findings reveal that **inequality in access to digital and social capital** continues to shape the trajectory of young creatives across Europe.

## 6. Learning Preferences and Future Aspirations

When asked about ideal learning environments, participants consistently favored **hands-on, participatory formats** such as workshops, creative residencies, and mentorship programs. They valued settings where they could **collaborate, create, and reflect** rather than passively consume information.

A participant from Portugal noted:

“We learn best when we do something together—when we can experiment, make mistakes, and discuss them.”

Across all countries, there was a clear appetite for **hybrid learning models**—online for accessibility, but with real human interaction to maintain creativity and emotional connection. This preference strongly supports the project’s goal of creating the **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive**, envisioned as an open, collaborative space for learning and co-creation.

## 4.4 Summary and Implications

The focus groups revealed a strong, unified message: young creatives across Europe are **highly motivated, adaptable, and eager to learn**, but they face uneven access to opportunities and insufficient support for long-term growth.

Despite differences in resources and context, their perspectives converge on key points:

- The **need for accessible and practice-oriented training** that links technical and soft skills.
- The **importance of peer learning and collaboration** as a preferred mode of skill development.
- The **urgency of ethical guidance** in the use of AI and digital technologies.
- The **value of inclusive networks** that connect creatives across geographical and social boundaries.

For the DigiCreate project, these insights reaffirm the importance of developing tools and resources that are **modular, inclusive, and co-created with young people themselves**.

They also highlight a broader European challenge: ensuring that creativity in the digital age remains **ethical, equitable, and human-centered**.

As the next phase unfolds, these findings will directly inform the design of the **Online Creative Hive Toolbox**, grounding it in real experiences and ensuring that it meets young creatives where they are—curious, connected, and ready to shape the future of Europe’s cultural and creative landscape.



# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS





## 5. Comparative Analysis

### Introduction

Building on the previous chapters, this section brings together the main findings from both the **online survey** and the **focus group discussions** carried out across six partner countries: **Portugal, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina**.

By combining quantitative and qualitative insights, the chapter offers a clearer understanding of the **digital and soft skill realities** faced by young people in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI).

While numbers from the survey helped identify overall trends, the focus group dialogues gave life to those statistics, revealing how young creatives perceive, learn, and adapt to the evolving digital world.

### 5.1 Synthesis of Survey and Focus Group Findings

The data collected across all countries paints a consistent picture. Young creatives are **digitally engaged, curious, and self-motivated**, yet they face common limitations in access, guidance, and structure.

Most possess **basic to intermediate competencies** in widely used tools such as Adobe Photoshop, Canva, or CapCut. However, when it comes to **advanced digital skills**, AI-assisted creation, digital marketing analytics, data management, or 3D design, confidence drops sharply.

Across the board, participants demonstrated strong enthusiasm for learning but expressed frustration about **fragmented opportunities**, lack of mentorship, and limited institutional support.

This pattern was observed in every partner country, suggesting that Europe's young creatives share a **collective motivation to learn and create**, but often do so in **isolated or informal ways**.

### 5.2 Common Patterns Across Partner Countries

#### Digital Skills Gaps and Adaptation

All partners found that young creatives are familiar with everyday digital tools but have limited exposure to **emerging and complex technologies**. Participants from Portugal and Spain highlighted the need to strengthen **digital communication and promotion skills**, while those from Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro pointed to **equipment and connectivity** as key barriers. As one participant from Germany put it: *"We have the tools, but not the time or the right people to teach us."*

### Soft Skills as a Core Asset

Soft skills emerged as a **shared priority** across all countries. Communication, teamwork, empathy, and adaptability were mentioned repeatedly as vital to success in the creative sector. Spanish and Portuguese groups connected these abilities to professional collaboration and project delivery, while participants from Serbia and Montenegro stressed their role in **collective problem-solving and resilience**. Women in several groups described how emotional intelligence and mediation often fall on their shoulders, noting that such “**invisible skills**” are rarely acknowledged or rewarded.

### Informal Learning as the Norm

In all contexts, learning was described as **self-directed, community-based, and resourceful**. YouTube tutorials, peer networks, and trial-and-error practices dominate. In Germany, participants often combine self-learning with institutional courses; in the Western Balkans, informal peer support often replaces any formal training. As one young participant from Bosnia & Herzegovina said: *“If we can’t find a teacher, we teach each other.”*

### AI and New Technologies: Curiosity Meets Caution

Participants in every country expressed **interest in exploring AI tools** but also **concern about their ethical and creative implications**. Young creatives in Spain and Germany are already experimenting with AI-generated visuals and storytelling, while participants in Serbia and Montenegro raised questions about **authorship and fairness**. Female participants were especially vocal about **bias and representation**, calling for training that ensures **ethical and inclusive use of AI**.

### Shared Barriers to Access and Equality

Across the six countries, three barriers were mentioned most often:

1. **Cost** - of software, hardware, and professional training;
2. **Infrastructure** - unreliable internet, especially in rural or low-income areas;
3. **Visibility** - limited access to networks, markets, and funding.

Participants in the Western Balkans described these challenges as part of daily life, while in Spain and Portugal, instability in creative employment was a greater concern. Despite these differences, there is a common **need for equal access and mentorship opportunities** across Europe.

## 5.3 Country-Specific Insights

Although the findings reveal strong similarities, some local variations stand out:

- **Portugal and Spain:** Participants emphasized the precarity of creative work and the importance of learning **entrepreneurial and self-management skills**. Interest in AI and social media tools was high, but so was the demand for ethical frameworks to use them responsibly.

- **Germany:** Young people enjoy access to advanced tools and structured programs, but they also mentioned **pressure, competition, and burnout**, suggesting the need to integrate wellbeing and creativity.
- **Serbia and Montenegro:** Despite limited infrastructure, participants demonstrated strong **peer-led innovation** and resilience, often turning constraints into creative opportunities.
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina:** Participants reported **digital inequality** as a persistent challenge but showed high motivation to learn using free or open-source tools. Their creativity often compensated for the lack of material resources.

These insights show that while local contexts differ, the **overall direction of need** is common: accessible, ethical, and practical digital learning opportunities.

## 5.4 Implications for Skills Development in the CCI Sector

Across all partner countries, young people called for learning environments that bring **technology and creativity together**, not as separate dimensions but as parts of one ecosystem. The data suggest five key priorities for DigiCreate and future initiatives in the CCI sector:

1. **Combine digital and human competences** – link technical learning with creativity, ethics, and teamwork.
2. **Support experiential and collaborative learning** – use mentorship, co-creation, and community projects as main formats.
3. **Guarantee accessibility and inclusion** – address barriers linked to geography, gender, and income.
4. **Promote responsible innovation** – equip young people with an ethical understanding of AI and emerging technologies.
5. **Foster sustainability** – build learning communities that continue sharing knowledge beyond the project's life.

These directions provide a **solid foundation** for the design of the upcoming **DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Toolbox**, ensuring it responds directly to young creatives' realities across Europe.



An abstract geometric illustration featuring a stylized figure with a grey face and a black tie, holding a black object. The figure is set against a background of green and white diagonal stripes. To the left, there are grey and black geometric shapes, possibly representing buildings or structures. Below the figure, there are white and grey geometric shapes, including a large white rectangle. In the bottom left corner, there are black and white geometric shapes, possibly representing a chair or a table. The overall style is minimalist and geometric, using a limited color palette of blue, grey, black, white, and green.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6. Recommendations

### Introduction

Based on the findings above, this chapter presents practical recommendations for future training initiatives, the development of the **DigiCreate Toolbox**, and wider cultural and educational policies in Europe. The suggestions build on what young people said, what partners observed, and what the data confirmed across six countries.

### 6.1 Training and Learning Recommendations

1. **Integrate Digital and Soft Skills:** Training activities should blend digital and interpersonal competences within the same learning process. For example, a module on AI design can also train teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.
2. **Prioritize Experiential and Project-Based Learning:** Participants clearly prefer learning through action. Workshops, creative challenges, and mentorship programs allow them to apply new tools and see real results.
3. **Encourage Collaborative and Peer Learning:** Peer-to-peer exchange is already a natural habit among young creatives. Formalizing it through online platforms and community events can multiply its impact.
4. **Ensure Flexible and Inclusive Learning Formats:** Training resources should be modular, multilingual, and available both online and offline to accommodate diverse learners and regions.
5. **Promote Responsible Innovation:** Introduce clear, youth-friendly guidance on ethical and sustainable digital practices, including AI transparency, authorship, and environmental awareness.

### 6.2 Recommendations for the DigiCreate Toolbox

1. **Develop Modular, Scalable Learning Pathways:** Structure content around independent modules - such as *Digital Storytelling*, *AI for Creativity*, or *Soft Skills for Collaboration* - so users can personalize their learning.
2. **Co-create with Young People:** Engage participants in co-design, pilot testing, and content validation to ensure the Toolbox feels authentic and grounded in real experience.
3. **Focus on Practical Application:** Include hands-on exercises, tool maps, and templates that simulate creative processes, showing immediate use of new competences.
4. **Make It Accessible and Sustainable:** Keep the platform open-access, lightweight, and multilingual; integrate green digital principles.
5. **Build Community and Connection:** Encourage interaction and mentorship through online hubs or shared creative challenges, promoting cooperation across Europe.

## 6.3 Policy and Practice Recommendations

1. **Support Lifelong Learning in the CCI**  
Recognize that digital skills evolve quickly and require continuous updating across all education levels.
2. **Strengthen Partnerships Between Youth, Education, and Industry**  
Build bridges between creative enterprises, educational institutions, and youth organizations to ensure learning stays relevant to the job market.
3. **Address Inequality in Access**  
Invest in digital infrastructure and targeted funding for young people in rural or disadvantaged contexts.
4. **Value Informal and Non-Formal Learning**  
Use systems such as Youthpass and micro-credentials to formally recognize the competences gained through self-learning and practice.
5. **Encourage Ethical and Inclusive Innovation**  
Promote digital creativity that respects human rights, inclusion, and sustainability in line with EU frameworks.

## 6.4 Summary of Key Recommendations

Area	Key Recommendations
<b>Training Design</b>	Integrate digital and soft skills through hands-on, collaborative learning.
<b>Learning Formats</b>	Offer flexible, inclusive, and multilingual access.
<b>Toolbox (D3.2)</b>	Co-created, modular, and community-driven platform promoting ethical innovation.
<b>Policy &amp; Practice</b>	Foster lifelong learning, partnerships, and digital equity across Europe.



# CONCLUSION



## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Summary of Key Findings

The **DigiCreate needs assessment** has provided a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the digital and soft-skill landscape among young people engaged in, or aspiring to join, Europe's **Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**. Through a mixed-method approach, combining **quantitative survey data** and **qualitative focus group discussions**, the study captured not only measurable skill levels but also the lived experiences, motivations, and barriers shaping young creatives' learning journeys. The results portray a generation of **motivated, digitally engaged, and socially conscious young people**, eager to contribute to Europe's creative transformation but still facing persistent structural challenges. Key conclusions include:

- Young creatives possess **basic to intermediate digital competences**, yet experience clear gaps in advanced areas such as **AI, data-driven design, digital marketing, and project management**.
- **Soft skills**, particularly collaboration, adaptability, communication, and entrepreneurship, are universally acknowledged as essential for employability and creative success.
- Most participants rely on **informal and self-directed learning** to compensate for the lack of structured, affordable, and relevant training opportunities.
- There is a strong preference for **practical, experiential, and peer-based learning** approaches that connect creative exploration with real-world application.
- Interest in **emerging technologies** (AI, VR, AR) is growing, but it is accompanied by uncertainty about ethical and responsible use, underscoring the need for **digital ethics education**.
- Persistent **geographical and economic inequalities** limit access to digital resources, professional networks, and learning infrastructures — particularly in rural and peripheral regions.

Together, these insights reaffirm the importance of **integrated, inclusive, and ethically grounded learning ecosystems** that combine digital innovation with human creativity and responsibility.

### 7.2 Next Steps within WP3 and Link to D3.2

The findings from this assessment form the **empirical foundation for the next phase** of the DigiCreate project, the development of **Deliverable 3.2 (D3.2): the DigiCreate Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox**. This interactive platform will transform the identified needs and priorities into **practical, user-centered learning modules**, empowering young creatives to strengthen both digital and soft skills through accessible, engaging, and relevant resources. The Toolbox will:

- Deliver **modular and scalable content** reflecting the core competence areas highlighted in this report.
- Provide **hands-on tools, creative challenges, and tutorials** grounded in real industry contexts and youth-driven interests.
- Function as an **open, multilingual, and inclusive platform**, bridging gaps between countries, sectors, and learning opportunities.
- Foster **cross-border collaboration and peer learning**, creating a sustainable community of practice that endures beyond the project's lifetime.
- Embody DigiCreate's guiding values of **sustainability, accessibility, and co-creation**, ensuring that users are active contributors to its ongoing development.

The validation and piloting phase of **D3.2** will build directly upon the insights gathered through this report, guaranteeing that the Toolbox reflects the **diverse realities, learning preferences, and creative pathways** of young people across all partner countries.

## 7.3 Reflections and Future Perspectives

Beyond its immediate contribution to DigiCreate, this assessment highlights broader opportunities for **policy development, educational innovation, and research** within Europe's creative and digital ecosystem. As emerging technologies continue to redefine how culture and communication are produced and shared, the creation of **inclusive, ethical, and future-oriented learning systems** becomes not only desirable but necessary. Future initiatives should therefore aim to:

- **Monitor the long-term impact** of digital and soft-skill training on youth employability, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion.
- Explore how **AI, immersive technologies, and data-driven creativity** can enhance both artistic expression and civic engagement.
- Promote **interdisciplinary collaboration** between artists, educators, technologists, and policymakers to co-create sustainable learning frameworks.
- Support the development of **community-based digital hubs and creative incubators** that merge education, experimentation, and professional development.
- Encourage **participatory and co-designed research**, ensuring that youth voices remain central to the evolution of digital education and creative policy.

By connecting **digital literacy** with **creativity, collaboration, and ethics**, DigiCreate represents a new model of European innovation — one that positions young people not as passive recipients of the digital transition, but as **active creators shaping it**. Through its participatory approach and commitment to inclusion, DigiCreate contributes meaningfully to the goals of the **European Digital Education Action Plan**, the **New European Bauhaus**, and the **Creative Europe Framework**. Together, these efforts help build a more **inclusive, sustainable, and culturally vibrant Europe**, where creativity, technology, and social responsibility reinforce one another in shaping the continent's shared future.



## References

All illustrations/images in this document are by João Fazenda. A Portuguese illustrator known for editorial and commercial artwork. For more of his work, see <https://www.joaofazenda.com>.

